

# Educating Homeless Children in Afghanistan

Hashmatullah Tareen

Assistant Professor, English Department, Kandahar University, Kandahar, Afghanistan

Email – hashmatt2@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *This study examines the effect of frequent school and home mobility on the academic achievement of homeless children and the possible responses of society, governments, and schools to ensure long-term success and achievement of homeless children. Furthermore, it examines the problem of homeless children in the classroom and describes research-based solutions to address barriers and improve the chances for academic success. In a developmental series, collaborative teams from provinces and tribally administered child safety agencies come together to conduct small changes that are rapidly tested and that can lead improvements. This report brings the experiences made in different communities to discover how we can improve the lives of homeless children. Specific strategies and efforts have been considered and recommended. Encouraging practices to improve the educational outcomes of homeless children are also provided. This paper, an introduction to issues engaged in educating homeless children offers approaches for building awareness, increasing and supporting public engagement and their key role and coordinating services for poor homeless children.*

**Key Words:** Homeless, Afghanistan, Children, Educating.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Suffering homelessness does not refer to those people who belong to a fixed group. However, it is a situation which occurs continually. According to WomenAid international, 100 million homeless children living in the streets around the world. The estimation has shown that during the year, 2.3 and 3.5 million people are going to face homelessness only in the US. Among these numbers, one point four million are going to be children. When there is the word homeless, it does not only create the picture of children. However, the truth is that there are a lot of homeless whose ages are under eighteen. Among these homeless people, some of them are living alone with themselves and some others are facing homelessness even they have their own families.

For many people, the meaning of homelessness would be different and the meaning of homelessness for the people who have not become homeless will never imply that homelessness refers to the one who is living on the streets, the one who has nowhere to live except a tent or a container. There are many people who do not understand that there will be many homeless people. The people cannot be counted as homeless people who enjoy with friends here and there or some families and the people who live in motels are also not counted in the number of homeless people. The people and the families which they are having children, single parents, seniors and the ones who are single and living in places where the living standard is considered low, these people will also consider themselves as homeless (James, Smith & Mann, 1991) <sup>(1)</sup>.

## 1.2 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS:

There are several definitions provided for homelessness and several groups have various descriptions as to what institutes a homeless person. According to Thompson (1994, cited in Shankar, 2008) <sup>(2)</sup> stated that homelessness refers to unavailability of a regular place for living. According to McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2004) <sup>(3)</sup>, the term homeless children, and youth refers to anyone who does not have any fixed, regular and enough night time living place. This includes those children that they have lost their homes, suffering financial difficulties or some other reasons. Considering those reasons, these homeless children are now living with other people, in motels, hotels, in parks or some other places where they do not have any other option for a regular residence (Strack, 2015) <sup>(4)</sup>. The primary place where these children and youth live is not usable for ordinary human beings.

Basically, the McKinney-Vento Act does not consider those individuals as homeless who committed crimes and because of those crimes, they are jailed. As cited in Shankar (2008) <sup>(2)</sup>, homelessness has got

public attention during 1980. Since then, the issue of homelessness is much debated. It is very challenging to measure because of the homeless populations' flexible movements as well as the unpredictable time which these people move in and out of homelessness. The definition provided for homelessness is general in some other cases. Though, there are some other cases as well which the definition for homelessness is provided with full details. The National Institute of Mental Health, for example, has defined the homelessness as the person who is suffering from the shortage of suitable housing, incomes, and public relations.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the United States has made classification of homelessness. This classification implies that homeless children live in uncontrolled constructions, hotels, cars, community emergency shelters, or places where these places are truly not made for humans to live. Such places are under the bridges, subways, and parks. In spite of the distinct definitions of homelessness, Redburn & Terry (1986, as cited in Shankar, 2008) <sup>(2)</sup> mentioned that homelessness refers to a dispossession that defers in strength, in relation to the time and the extent to which the setting is unbalanced.

### 1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

Being homeless is a major challenge for children. Homelessness will affect children's physical and mental health. Homeless children's physical and mental health is affected by being homeless. Homeless children's rate of sickness is at a high increase (Pelser, 1999; cited in Ojo, 2015) <sup>(5)</sup>. The families who have children are by most reasons between the rapid rising parts of the homeless people. There are some upsetting effects of homelessness on the children and youth's educational prospects. There are some factors which halt homeless children from joining schools. These factors are housing needs, protection needs or responsibility needs, no transportation facilities, and no immunization. With regards to homelessness, Adams (2008) <sup>(6)</sup> stated that the children who are on the streets at this time have not yet appreciated their perspectives in life while they hold the nation's future responsibility.

In Afghanistan, a more than thirty-year war has significantly increased the number of homeless families. In addition, some other factors like natural disasters have also left families homeless. The capital, Kabul is the home to thousands of children with no home. Survival in the capital for these homeless children means that getting trapped into the hands of gangs and convincing these children for drugs, robberies, and other criminal activities. The major reason for being homelessness is poverty. Moreover, homeless families and particularly homeless children can be found in every part of the country. In a relation to the importance of education, these homeless children need to be equipped with primary education and trained with some basic skills so that they could be able to survive in the future (Barton, 1998) <sup>(7)</sup>. For these children, homelessness is phenomena which may last for some days or it may last a lifetime.

### 2. METHODOLOGY:

The researcher employed a qualitative research approach in this study. The researcher used other previously carried out researches with regards to the homelessness and the researcher utilized the information for deeper understanding of the subject matter in Afghanistan.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

A study conducted by Berman, Mulcahy, Forchuk, Edmunds, Haldenby and Lopez (2009) <sup>(8)</sup> which mentioned about many obstacles which hinder the success and education of homeless children. The findings of the study identified that lack of transportation, lack of residence and lack of school record were the obstacles to school registration. The result of the study also highlighted that regular mobility and no parental engagement were the biggest challenges towards the school success. Mobility is a big challenge and has a very disruptive impact on the child's education. In relation to child's education, National Coalition for the Homeless has made some estimates that every time when a child changes his or her school, 3-6 months of education is disrupted with every move they make in the United States.

In addition, Masten, Labella and Fiat (2015) <sup>(9)</sup> at the University of Minnesota conducted a research about the risks and resilience of homeless children. The researchers mentioned that they made a great progress in understanding the needs and strong points of the homeless learners over the years. Among these homeless students, this study has its practical effects for identifying their academic success. They have come

up with that particularly the personnel and psychologists have a key role in transforming to educational success affected by homelessness.

### **3.1 EFFECTS OF HOMELESSNESS:**

Building the world around us is very necessary to our emotional, physical and mental growth. Unfortunately, it is not always possible for the ones who suffer homelessness. Homeless children, according to Woolley (2015)<sup>(10)</sup>, may possibly suffer some destructive situations. For example, behavior problems, health problems, poor nutrition and academic problems. Woolley further elaborated homeless children's health issues. First, homeless children probably receive rare health care, and mobility and poverty have caused them no appropriate access to private medical care and that has affected their development. Every month, homeless children suffer two or more ailments (Woolley, 2015)<sup>(10)</sup>. Second, lack of financial support has caused the homeless children a challenge in getting the food and homeless children have sometimes gone hungry for four days (Raferty & Shinn, 1991; cited in Yamaguchi, Higgins & Strawser, 1997)<sup>(11)</sup>. Lastly, by their poor cognitive situation and homelessness, the academic performance of homeless children is hindered. Accordingly, their academic performance in different subjects is poorly evaluated (Woolley, 2015)<sup>(10)</sup>.

### **3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL TO HOMELESS CHILDREN:**

When students face insecurity because of homelessness, then the school is the right place for them to feel comfortable and much secured as mentioned in National Center for Homeless Education (2006)<sup>(12)</sup>. Based on a research conducted by Moore (2013)<sup>(13)</sup> who said that there are not any fixed characteristics which define a usual homeless learner. However, all the learners do require a reliable and loving environment, sense of feeling right, and the safety of managed and expectable classroom and a schedule for school in order to flourish. The schools are also able to accommodate some necessities that the homeless learners do not have where they live.

Moreover, education can lead the homeless children to a more and more perfect path out of homelessness as the schools have promoted their focus supplying career-ready graduates. The homeless students usually state their desire for a bright future even there are a lot of difficulties caused by homelessness and these difficulties cause the process of education difficult. As a result, this may be the only factor which these homeless children keep to work for their graduation (Moore, 2013)<sup>(13)</sup>. The children who are undergoing homelessness, usually reveal weird behaviors in traditional teaching based classrooms and cannot change their behaviors. However, class based on student-center methods have been successful for homeless students (Berliner, 2002)<sup>(14)</sup>.

The first thing most of the children need prior to anything else is home and the children much need to remain in school when they are suffering from homelessness (Moore, 2013)<sup>(13)</sup>. He further added that school is the only place where the homeless children feel safe and protected and it is a stable place for their lives. Also, a school is a place where they can be equipped with certain skills they require in the future so that they can escape the poverty (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007; cited in Vendemark, 2007)<sup>(15)</sup>. Andre LeTendre, the scholar and a teacher and previously a homeless student who had stated that "the only thing which kept me successfully, it was undoubtedly only the school. I realize that when I step on those doors, I can only focus on what is most significant and it makes me stop thinking about my own problems and difficulties for the next few hours. I would not have been the one who I am today unless there was a backup of my school system. The school makes me encouraged to go further and inspires me in order to look for a better life for myself."

## **4. EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN:**

In the United States of American, homelessness is on the rise and there are many organizations which do not belong to the government. These organizations are non-profitable. These organizations provide shelter, food, and education for the homeless children. Homelessness has a very bad influence on children and their educational opportunities (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007; Vendemark, 2007)<sup>(15)</sup>.

There are two other such programs in Afghanistan and as well as in England which provide support to homeless children.

#### **4.1 A CHILD'S PLACE:**

One example of these effective programs is A Child's Place which is a community organization in Charlotte, downtown. This organization is non-governmental and does not gain any profit. This program started in 1998 by a group of women. These women found that the children were playing while it was a school hour and asked them why they are not at school. These women found that these children were homeless. For the first time, they provided education for twenty-seven homeless children in a room which later it expanded into a school. During the 2014-2015, A Child's Place has significantly extended its service facilities and since its opening, the organization has provided assistance to 2,075 homeless children. The homeless children who utilize the A Child's Place achieve a great accomplishment (Sanders, 1990) <sup>(16)</sup>.

#### **4.2 THE YELLOW SCHOOL BUS PROJECT:**

The purpose of The Yellow School Bus Project (YSBP) was to offer materials and clothes to homeless children so that they will flourish in school and the homeless children will feel good about themselves receiving these supplies. After receiving these things, the children exposed a clear message that they are valuable. These children realized that there are some people around them who want to help them and want their success. According to Vissing (2003) <sup>(17)</sup>, The Yellow School Bus Project which is a non-governmental agency offers the children who are homeless with foods and clothes in order to help these children to make accomplishments.

#### **4.3 McKINNEY-VENTO ACT:**

To homelessness, McKinney- Vento Act is the only governmental assistance. It was originated for the first time in 1987 when the phenomena of homelessness were significantly increasing in the United States of American. It provided the educational system to the homeless people. At first, its purpose was to meet the needs of homeless people, but later it extended to provide educational facilities as well to the homeless children (States, 2011) <sup>(18)</sup>. With regards to homelessness, Yon (2006) <sup>(19)</sup> stated that one of the major challenges homeless children experience is a rejection of the education. In terms of offering education to homeless children, the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is very effective.

The McKinney-Vento Act offers national financial support to states in order to provide assistance which helps homeless students (States, 2011) <sup>(18)</sup>. Also, the McKinney-Vento Act program has helped substantially homeless people in particular homeless children in order to retain their permanent accommodation. The motto of McKinney-Vento Act was that no child should leave behind. To be more precise, they wanted to make that every child has an access to school. The McKinney Homeless Act was officially approved by the Congress to keep the rights of homeless students and to confirm that these homeless students receive the same quality and proper education as other students do (Act, 2001) <sup>(3)</sup>.

#### **4.4 DR. SARMAST'S MUSIC SCHOOL:**

Ahmad Naser Sarmast, the director Afghan National Institute of Music who returned from Australia and wanted to build a National Institute of music. He built a music school and he planned to recruit some talented children in order to teach them music. Interestingly, he came up with the idea to bring those children who are homeless, underprivileged and the ones who are orphans. Most of these children he brought into the school were homeless children and a few orphan girls as well. These children were facilitated to acquire their education and they were given thirty US\$ each month so that they can fully concentrate on their school. Perhaps, this has offered some hopes to the ones who were deprived and living with no hope on the streets. These children considered this as their only way to change their lives for betterment. These students made their first trip to the United States of America in 2013 and conducted their first musical concert.

#### **4.5 SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES:**

The SOS Youth Homes program which is supported by the United Kingdom also provide the facilities to the homeless children and youths. The SOS functions in different countries and it facilitates education and training. They provide training of some key skills required in life and help the young children gain experience in order to become equipped to some extent in the future. These basic skills help the young children to live independently (Children & Homelessness, 2012) <sup>(20)</sup>. They teach these children how to cook, how to manage finance and how to maintain a family.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

Homelessness is a phenomenon which several countries are experiencing for years. Homeless people do not belong to a particular group. Some people will never realize that what homelessness actually means. There are homeless children who do not have a particular residence, however, they live in places where they are not appropriate for a living. Among the homeless, children with no homes is a major challenge. Tragically, these are the children who experience homelessness living difficult lives as this was also highlighted in (Into and Brief, 2012) <sup>(21)</sup>. Educating these homeless children is very necessary. Otherwise, it will have bad effects on the community. There must be educational facilities for these children. At school, the homeless children should receive the same care as other children do. Fortunately, there are some non-governmental and non-profitable organizations who have provided educational facilities for these children. These children have considered those school as their only place where they feel secure and comfortable. Educating the homeless will affect their future. Through education, they will become skilled and they will move on to a better path so that they can look after themselves in the future.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

As far as the homelessness is concerned as a major challenge, solving the problems of homelessness need a lot of financial support and a continuous support from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. These recommendations may take time, we can begin with taking only small steps in order to achieve our goal and save the lives of homeless children. We understand that the steps which the American government and its people have taken saved the lives of thousand children and provided education to them.

A country like Afghanistan where more than thirty-year war has left millions of families and children homeless. For such a country, it is very unbelievable to take similar actions as the American government did. Certainly, it is commonly understood that the Afghan government is out-sourced. However, the nation can play a key role in making efforts in order to facilitate education to homeless children. The nation can begin by taking very small steps and the Afghan nation can do it in several ways. They can begin paying the government a very small amount of tax. The amount of paying the tax may be very small, but it can at least provide education for thirty homeless children.

Similarly, the nation can also develop a fund for a community which will take care of at least ten of these homeless children. People of the respective province or a particular area or region will pay for this community. The success will be made stronger with fundraising if a resolution can be made about the numbers and quality of gifts that must be produced to ensure that a goal is reached. The payment for this community will not be considered as compulsory. For example, in America, A Child's Place was founded by a few women. It was a great attempt and facilitated education to more than two thousand homeless children so far. If the Afghan people make such an attempt, it can ensure a better life of in general hundreds of homeless and in particular homeless children. Additionally, there are very rich people in Afghanistan and the government can convince them to take responsibility for these children in terms of both shelter and their education.

In addition, the Afghan people can also have the assistance from an international community. A clear example is Dr. Sarmast's Musical school who founded this school with the help of international community and made the lives of tens of street children, homeless children and as well as orphans. It was considered a great attempt. Likewise, these children can be registered in schools where they are provided education and at the same time train these children with some skills required in a daily life. For example, these skills are carpentry, plumbing, tailoring, and mechanics. Even these recommendations take time, but if beginning with small attempts, it will achieve a big goal in the future.

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