An Initial Reflection on Perceptions and Assumptions on Homelessness Families

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Abstract

The writer will conduct an extensive reflection analysis on her initial perceptions and assumptions regarding homelessness families. The reflection will first offer the reader a clear and concise definition of the term ‘homeless’ and provide statistics pertaining to homeless people. The writer will reflect and record her initial preconceived perceptions, assumptions, views, fears, and concerns regarding homeless men, women, and children. In addition, the author will discuss specific reading material and how it affects her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about homeless people. Furthermore, a conclusion will be comprised and drawn from the writer’s initial perceptions and the reading materials from the text.

An Initial Reflection on Perceptions and Assumptions on Homelessness Families

Each year, 3.5 million Americans experience homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless). Homelessness is defined as lacking permanent housing or having nowhere to live (Dictionary.org). Homeless families is a growing problem and results from various factors. Poverty is the most common reason so many men, women, and children live in the streets (National Coalition for the Homeless). Every homeless family has a life story or life experience. Every homeless family is different; however, the common folk believe these preconceived perceptions and assumptions about homeless men, women, and children. These biased thoughts include the homeless are lazy, the homeless are dirty, and the homeless are not educated. These prejudices are not true for all homeless families. The writer of this initial reflection, before interacting, meeting, or communicating with any homeless person, reflects, illustrates, and analyzes her preconceived perceptions and assumptions of homeless families. In addition, after reading specific text inserts, the author discusses how these readings have affected her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to homeless people. Lastly, the writer will conclude and remark about homeless families regarding the specific reading materials.

**Results**

An overarching theme in the original tape recording of my perceptions and assumptions of homelessness families is one of helplessness or laziness. I cannot help but feel ashamed and embarrassed by my initial perceptions, assumptions, fears, and concerns of interacting with homelessness families. I perceive homeless men, women and children as dirty, helpless, and lazy. My perceptions of homeless families also include mentally ill, insane, and non-educated. I also have preconceived assumptions about homeless men, women, and children. Based upon my original tape recording, I assume homeless families do not want to work and will not work. I assume the homeless are alcoholics, drug addicts, and felons. My assumptions include believing homeless families are not educated and do not appreciate help given to them. They do not want to be handed food or other necessities, but instead, money for alcohol and drugs. In addition to all of the above preconceived assumptions, I also assume homeless children will fall into the same cycle as their parents and remain homeless. Unfortunately and regrettably, I do not view homeless families as victims or survivors of this wretched life they are conquering, but instead, I view them as perpetrators and deserving of this lifestyle. I love the idea of giving others the benefit of the doubt and believing the homeless are trying their hardest to live a ‘normal’ life. However, after listening back to my preconceived perceptions and assumptions of the homeless on the video tape, I view homeless people not as heroic or honorable, but weak and slothful. My concerns and fears regarding interacting with homeless men, women, and children vary from not knowing what to communicate about with them and not having anything in common with them. I realize these predetermined and biased assumptions negatively impact my ability to build supportive relationships with the different men, women, and children at the shelter. I wish I could somehow relate to them, but I feel distant from the homeless people, because our lifestyles are completely opposite. I am aware these preconceived perceptions of the homeless families will not allow me to fully connect with the men, women, and children at the shelter on a personal basis, because these false assumptions will cloud the reality of them.

**Discussion**

After reading the specific text material from class and listening to class discussions, I am beginning to see homeless families in a new light. The underlying theme of ‘resilience,’ the ability to recover from illness or adversity, threads through various text readings and class discussions (Boss 2002). The homeless are not portrayed as perpetrators, but survivors and heroes of the life they live. Author Reuben Hill illustrates how the different sources of stress can impact families in either positive or negative aspects. Hill explains if the stressor is external of the family then this may, in fact, unify the family as a whole (Hill 1958). According to Reuben Hill (1958), “Crises that arise as a result of economic depression or of war, both of which are beyond the individual family’s control, present quite different problems from the crises arising out of the interpersonal relations within the family such as infidelity, non-support, or alcoholism (p. 180).” Due to an external stressor, the family joins together and works for the common good of the family, surviving life’s hardships. The scholarly text also expounds upon the false idea of a ‘normal’ American family. According to author Pauline Boss (2002), “Television’s Beaver Cleaver family, with a working father and stay-at-home mother and two children, illustrated the isolated nuclear family but is now outnumbered by other kinds of family structures – single-parent families, step-families, divorced families, foster families, families of choice, and fictive kin networks (p. 2).” This provides factual basis supporting homeless families, regardless of their family structure, as normal American families.

**Conclusion**

After thoroughly reflecting on my initial thoughts and feelings pertaining to homeless families and reading the specific text material, I have drawn new and improved conclusions about homeless men, women, and children. Society and my own family socialized me into believing these preconceived perceptions and assumptions. I have always believed homeless people are ‘dirty,’ ‘lazy,’ and ‘alcoholics.’ However, I do not have basis or academic support for these predetermined beliefs. The media portrays homeless families in this manner through TV shows, movies, books, and the news. Rather than taking the initiative to learn about and meet the homeless people, I jump to conclusions and fall back on the false ideas I have always believed. As I work toward a Master’s in Social Work and dream to someday assist the underprivileged and less fortunate, I realize I must rid my thoughts of these preconceived perceptions and adopt a new frame of mind. As Boss (2002) explains in the text, “Our common experience today is that we often work with families unlike the one in which we grew up. This diversity makes our work more challenging (p. 1).” As I assist families-in-need that are different from me, I must learn to be open minded and accepting of their diversities in order to fully help them. I can only imagine volunteering at Saint Vincent de Paul will begin the journey of opening my mind up to new people and new life experiences.

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