

research snapshot

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“Management” Policies Are Hurting the Nutrition of Homeless Youth in Toronto

What is this research about?

Canadian policy on homelessness has emphasized ‘managing’ the problem through local emergency services and in some cases through criminalizing homelessness through outlawing sleeping rough, panhandling and squeegeeing. As a result, the feeding of the homeless has largely been left to community groups that can only provide limited emergency food assistance. Researchers set out to see what kind of an impact these policies have had on the nutrition of the homeless, especially homeless youth in cities like Toronto.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers asked 261 homeless youth in Toronto about their experiences under the new policies and laws. They used surveys and interviews.

What you need to know:

Recent policies that claim to help homeless people are having a negative effect on their nutrition. Instead of helping homeless youth become independent and find their own income, the policies force youth to rely on limited emergency food aid. This will not help them break out of the chains of homelessness. Rather, it will make them more dependent in the long-run.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found most Toronto homeless youth to be malnourished. These youth had poor diets because of their homelessness, regardless of whether they obtained all their meals at soup kitchens, or through purchasing their own food. The new policies on homelessness have changed the lives of homeless youth in Toronto for the worse. The youth who previously relied on panhandling and squeegeeing now have little chances to make money. Homeless youth prefer buying their own food on their own time instead of relying on overstretched soup kitchens and other community food services.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers and community organizations will find this research useful. It shows the negative impact of 'management' homelessness simply through emergency services and charitable food programs. If we want to address the hunger of the homeless, we need to focus on preventing homelessness and poverty, and support transitions out of homelessness, rather than rely on emergency services only. Charitable food programs are not enough. Like most Canadians, the homeless prefer to buy their own food. By controlling policies for panhandling and squeegeeing the police cut income for many homeless youth who then go hungry.

About the Researcher

Dr. Stephen Gaetz is Associate Dean, Research and Field Development in the Faculty of Education, York University.

sgaetz@edu.yorku.ca

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kmbunit@yorku.ca

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