

## Homeless LGBTQ Youth in Canada

HINAKO YOSHINO

Homelessness is a serious problem worldwide. The number of homeless has been increasing around the world since each country has developed in terms of economy. It is estimated that no less than 150 million people are homeless, that is equal to 2% of the world population (Kuo). In Canada, homelessness has been a national problem since the 1980s. According to Reck, homelessness became a national problem because the government ended the construction of social housing. Also, the responsibility of housing for low income families was moved from the federal government to provinces. For these reasons, the number of homeless in Canada has been rising since the 1990s. Rech states that 230,000 Canadians have experiences of homelessness.

Since the 1980s, several youth shelters have been founded in major cities in Canada. However, these do not have specialized support for LGBTQ, and problems of LGBTQ youth homeless have been complicated. LGBTQ youth homelessness consists of 40% of the population of Canadian homeless. Among the youth population, about 19% of them experience homelessness. 25 to 40% of LGBTQ youth have experiences of homelessness. Surpris-

ingly, many were under 16 years old when they experienced homelessness for the first time. LGBTQ homeless youth are facing specific difficulties due to their youth. The Canadian Observatory of Homelessness reported that LGBTQ youth have less access to social support services, less stable income and residence than adult homeless. Moreover, LGBTQ youth homeless are exposed to much higher risks of infection, substance use, and mental health problems than the general youth population.

The proportion of LGBTQ youth homeless has been increasing. However, there are countless issues that only LGBTQ youth homeless are facing and a lot of people might not know these issues. This essay will examine both the issues for LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada, and solutions to the problems.

LGBTQ youth are exposed to high risks of discrimination in terms of sexual identity. They are 10 times more likely to have experiences of discrimination than straight people. 40% of homeless youth are identified as LGBTQ and the primary cause is rejection by family. They receive emotional damage by rejection and rejection often begins at home. According to Friedman, 50% of LGBTQ youth have experiences of negative reactions when coming out. 30% of them are physically abused and 26% of them are kicked out of home (Friedman). Moreover, bullying against LGBTQ youth is a regular occurrence at schools. 58% of LGBTQ youth have experiences where they are bullied (Friedman). Bullying leads to violence. Friedman describes that 40% of LGBTQ youth are bullied physically, 19% of them are attacked physically due to sexual identity, and 30% of them miss schools

because of bullying. Risk of depression and suicide are increasing because of bullying.

LGBTQ youth also tend to have health issues. Especially, LGBTQ youth who live on the streets are exposed to high risk of health issues. The risk of any infection is higher than the general youth population. The prevalence of sexually transmitted infection and blood-borne infection is 10 to 12 times higher than general (Rech). LGBTQ youth who live on the streets longer are more likely to engage in street cultures, for example, prostitution, sex work, and drugs. Engaging in sex work might be causes of high risk of STI. Rech describes that 12 to 32% of them experienced sex work. Also, the rate of unprotected sex is higher among LGBTQ homeless youth than the heterosexual youth (Abramovich).

Substance use is connected to health issues of LGBTQ youth. For them, substance use is a way to forget and escape the pain, sadness, and stresses of daily life. In particular, street youth have higher risks of substance use. There are fewer specialised shelters for LGBTQ youth, thus they tend to sleep on the street and are exposed to the risks of substance use (Abramovich). Most street youth use marijuana, and cocaine, heroin, morphine and speedball are common drugs among street homeless youth in Canada. Abramovich reports that LGBTQ youth do not have appropriate knowledge about substance use, thus it is essential for them to receive access to educational sources and safe injection sites.

Along with physical health problems, LGBTQ youth suffer

from mental health issues. Abramovich states that the living environment, such as social stigma, discrimination, and daily stresses becomes serious emotional, psychological damages on street youth. The main cause of LGBTQ struggles and mental health issues is less access to appropriate health care services (Abramovich). Street youth are forced to find places to sleep day in and day out. Social support services are not accessible and responsible to the needs of LGBTQ youth. Even if LGBTQ youth could use social support services, there is social stigma or unfair treatment against sexual and gender minorities. LGBTQ youth suffer from those environment, and those prevent mental health development and connect to high rates of depression, suicide, and suicide thought.

LGBTQ youth have difficulties to access social support for several reasons. There are some differences between LGBTQ youth homeless and adult homeless. For example, it is difficult for young homeless to have a consistent residence and income. Most of them leave homes to escape from difficult social, family, economic situations. Therefore, they are forced to live in hostels, stay at friends' houses, rent cheap rooms, or live on the streets. Teenagers are still developing socially and emotionally, and thus they are more likely to have problems with parents. This results in some leaving home. It is especially difficult for LGBTQ youth homeless to access the shelter system.

Especially, transgender youth homeless and LGBTQ Indigenous homeless youth have more difficulties to access to supporting shelters. One of the reasons for difficulties in providing

services for transgender youth is that health care needs of transgender youth is different from LGBTQ youth. For example, transgender youth need hormones, and silicone injections. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 1 in 3 transgender are rejected from shelters in terms of gender identities. In coeducational shelters, sleeping areas are separated into male and female. Sleeping areas are decided based on perceived gender identities, and this rule could be stressful for them. Moreover, Indigenous LGBTQ youth homeless have been struggling to receive social support. Abramovich argues that there are less support services for youth homeless who are Indigenous than others. Even though the proportion of Indigenous youth is high among the LGBTQ youth population, there are lack of specialized services, culturally relevant services, and LGBTQ related services. Services that Indigenous LGBTQ youth can receive is limited because there is discrimination. Gaetz mentions that experience of discrimination prevent opportunities of LGBTQ youth, lack of chances for independent living, which leads to refusing to go to schools, drug use, and mental health issues.

There are several solutions to improve the environment for LGBTQ youth to live comfortably. First, it is important to allow LGBTQ youth to identify gender and sexual identities by themselves (Abramovich). The reason is to avoid misunderstanding information about gender and sexual identities. The 519, which is a supporting community for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, set Toronto Shelter Standards. Staff in the shelter ask LGBTQ

youth clients about gender identities, rather than assuming. For transgender clients, they are able to access sleeping rooms that connect to how clients self-identified (Abramovich).

An important means to help LGBTQ youth homeless is family and community support. Family conflict is a major cause of becoming homeless. According to Rempel, it is significant for families of LGBTQ youth to accept and support them as much as possible. Rempel argues that "Social belonging is an important factor to success in transitioning into adulthood." Offering appropriate services and training is helpful for LGBTQ youth community. LGBTQ youth have high rates of mental health concerns, for example, depression, suicide, and trauma which is related to their gender identity (Rempel). To support their mental health, it is essential for service providers to understand intersectionality, "which is a framework for understanding how aspects of social identities combine to create different modes of abuse."

Support in shelters which are focused in helping only LGBTQ youth homeless is a way to end LGBTQ youth homelessness. In Toronto, there is official support housing for LGBTQ youth. YMCA Sprott House is Toronto's first, and the largest housing program for LGBTQ youth in Canada. LGBTQ youth aged 16 to 24 can access this housing. There are 25 LGBTQ youth and 54 new beds for LGBTQ youth in 2016. According to Miller, LGBTQ youth have experience of violence in the city's shelter systems. Therefore, Alex Abramovich, who is a transgender man and researching mental health, has made a significant effort to found

housing programs in Toronto. LGBTQ youth have been in unsafe environments for a long time. However, the Toronto city council approved creating two LGBTQ shelter programs (Vella).

Education is important to the issue of LGBTQ homelessness. The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives provides a new approach to public education curriculum about LGBTQ history. The CLGA, which is a non-profit organization run by volunteers, preserves materials from LGBTQ community and provides appropriate information to the public. The CLGA tried to introduce "anti-homophobia education programs" into the public school curriculum in Ontario. Even though there are several kinds of help for LGBTQ youth can access, educational curriculum to provide basic information about LGBTQ is not enough. Zieman mentions that educational curriculum's such as sexual identity, homophobia, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment are introduced in Grade 6, and developed from Grade 7 to 9. The CLGA provides support for schools to give appropriate information about LGBTQ youth homelessness. For example, the CLGA gives lectures to high school students about overview of LGBTQ history in Canada. Moreover, funding focused on supporting the unique needs and vulnerabilities of LGBTQ youth is significant and results in a very positive outcome (Rempel). Funding can expand to help support youth and prevent experiences of homelessness. Legislation is a way to expand support by the government. For example, Bill 10 is a legislation that schools in Alberta allow a gay-straight alliance for any students (Rempel). It is an important development to increase the

acceptance of LGBTQ youth in the education system.

To reduce the number of homeless youth, prevention is important. Raising the Roof, which is an organization to support LGBTQ youth in Toronto, established "Long-Term Solutions for Homelessness." It consists of prevention, systems responses, and early intervention. First, prevention is able to reduce entry to be homeless and the amount of time when spending individually. According to Raising the Roof, there are three types of prevention, primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention is to focus on youth who have higher risk of being homeless. The factors of being homeless are discrimination, addiction and unemployment. Primary prevention is offered to provide the awareness of campaign and support for LGBTQ youth. Secondary prevention is for LGBTQ youth to provide support after they are experiencing homelessness. It finds and secures accommodations. Tertiary prevention is to avoid recurring homelessness by offering support since housing has been established. Next, system responses are essential to rationalize services and to provide access to all support services. All support services are employment, mental health, addiction care and housing support. Raising the Roof states that to work can allow other organizations to share information, offer stable care, and reduce overlap of services. This organization also provides a new approach, which is called "No Wrong Door." It enables all services for LGBTQ youth individuals and their families, and its approach connects to the increase of stability and many opportunities to



take part in communities, training and education. Supportive services by Raising the Roof might offer substantial benefits for LGBTQ youth by providing stable care support and helping them to develop self-worth.

There are other programs for LGBTQ youth homeless in other provinces besides Ontario. RainCity Housing, which is a support community for LGBTQ youth in Vancouver, started a "Housing First outreach program." This is a supportive program for youth who have experiences of homelessness, and who identify themselves as LGBTQ. The purpose of this program is to provide housing and an appropriate community for LGBTQ youth, and to support them in developing communities. Briscall says that the program could help youth to break out of street life, create supportive networks, and find secure housing and employment for LGBTQ youth. The program holds weekly dinners to meet new members through the community. LGBTQ youth can reconnect and share experiences with other members who are allies. LGBTQ youth can build new relationships with members and support each other. For LGBTQ youth, having an ally and receiving support is essential to creating new networks. Housing can provide opportunities to get out of street life, focus on what is important to LGBTQ youth, and have strong connections.

Nova Scotia and Edmonton also provide services for LGBTQ homeless youth. In Nova Scotia, SHYFT Youth Services provides housing and services to LGBTQ youth. It offers temporary housing, outreach and support programs for homeless youth

(Burke). Burke states that 15 to 20 youth have come to SHYFT in a year, and 150 to 200 youth have come so far. In Edmonton, the CHEW, the Community Health Empowerment and Wellness, opened "the OUTpost." The purpose of CHEW is to offer appropriate education about sexual health to LGBTQ youth. According to Homeward Trust Edmonton, the OUTpost is a new drop-in center, and enables LGBTQ youth to sleep, eat, take a shower, and hang out in a warm and safe environment. Before founding this center, there were less available resources and support which is specialized for them, especially in terms of mental health. However, "the OUTpost provides comprehensive and stable access to sexual health supplies, such as STI testing, harm reduction supplies, and counselling services."

Solutions for homelessness in Canada have been progressing, in order to solve the problem, however, it is important to look at how other countries have succeeded in reducing the number of homeless. In Finland, "Housing First" program has been running since 2018. Before starting this program, homelessness was one of the national issues in Finland. Since the 1980s, shelters for short term users had been built, however, it did not succeed for several reasons. For example, there were less shelters available for emergency use, the homeless could not find jobs because they did not have an address. They could not find a flat without jobs, and apply social support. According to the Pressenza International Press Agency, to solve these situations, the Housing First has a concept, which is 'Nobody should have to live on the

streets.' and providers of housing are the NGOs. They construct housing by themselves, buy flats, and renovate ordinary flats. Housing for the homeless has 1 or 2 rooms, and existing emergency shelters change into apartments to provide housing for long-term residents. Homeless have to pay rent and apartment costs with financial support from social workers. To offer support for the homeless, the states provide discounted loans to the NGOs for purchasing of housing. Also, social workers who care for the homeless are paid by the states.

The NGOs repay loans by using rental incomes. The "Housing First" has worked as conventional aid for the homeless. The Pressenza International Press Agency reported that the homeless are able to look for jobs, be released from mental issues, and find suitable accommodation. These are other merits for the homeless and social workers. Homeless can receive flats without precondition, and social workers are available for counselling. Thanks to this program, 4 out of 5 homeless are able to have flats for a long time with "Housing First", and live more stably (The Pressenza International Press Agency). Since this program has been introduced, approximately, 4,600 homes are offered and the number of homeless on the streets has been reducing from 1,900 in 2017 to less than 1,000 by 2019.

In conclusion, homelessness is a significant issue all over the world and especially LGBTQ youth make up a high proportion of the homeless population in Canada. LGBTQ youth are forced to be out of home for several reasons, but the biggest cause of

being homeless is family conflict. Once youth come out as LGBTQ, most families experience considerable strife. It is difficult for families of youth to accept their children as LGBTQ and the relationships break down. LGBTQ youth struggle from serious problems due to living on the streets, for example, high risk of infection, less social support, and both mental and physical health issues. There is not enough social support available for LGBTQ youth because support for youth homeless is different from adult homeless. It is extremely difficult for support communities to focus on LGBTQ youth and to understand that living with heterosexual people might be stressful for LGBTQ youth. Even though they need social support, social support which focuses on LGBTQ is lacking in Canada. Moreover, supportive shelters might be an unsafe environment for them because of bullying and unfair treatment by shelter's staff.

There are several solutions for the homeless and solutions which target LGBTQ youth homeless are increasing. One of the most important ways to solve LGBTQ youth homeless is education. As Ontario introduced new educational curriculums to teach sensitive topics about sex, educational curriculums are changing and elementary school students have opportunities to think about sexual identities problems. The improvement of education about sex would be increasing the acceptance of LGBTQ youth. Also, support communities provide opportunities for LGBTQ youth to identify themselves, and LGBTQ homeless youth are enabled to accept their identities as LGBTQ. They tend to evaluate themselves negatively because they suffer from

unaccepting environment, and experience abuse, such as bullying, discrimination, and family rejection. However, LGBTQ youth might realize what is important for them and find strong connections with members of support communities by being able to accept themselves.

The homelessness issue of LGBTQ youth might be difficult to solve. However, the acceptance of LGBTQ has been increasing gradually worldwide, and many supportive organizations are starting to provide support for LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ homeless youth have the right to have a healthy life, and receive adequate education. As stated in this essay, family connection and education are important keys to solving the issue of LGBTQ youth homeless. I hope there will be more support to create a strong connection between LGBTQ youth and their families, and the acceptance of LGBTQ homeless youth will rise thanks to appropriate broader LGBTQ education.

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