Developmental Implications of Homelessness for Adolescents and Emerging Adults

[Name of the Writer]

[Name of the Institution]

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**Question 1**

**Q1a**

Homelessness is a serious and emerging problem in many countries including the United States of America (Mason G. Haber & Toro, 2004). Defining homelessness involves many difficulties. One difficulty is addressing the question that how long should one remain outside the home to qualify as being homeless. Homelessness has enormous developmental implications on mental and physical health, education and family relations of the sufferer.

**Developmental implications on mental health.** Adolescents who are homeless are at a higher risk of mental disorders than those who are not homeless. For instance, Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is markedly high in homeless adolescents (Mason G. Haber & Toro, 2004). Mood disorders and suicide attempts are also prevalent among them. There is a risk of behavior disorders, sexual abnormal behavior, and illegal behavior. Studies have shown that homeless are more prone to substance use disorder because of greater exposure.

**Developmental implications on physical health.** Homeless children are more exposed to catching a contagious disease. Due to financial instability and lack of support, they might not be able to timely treat a disease. Moreover, they might not be aware of the precautionary measurements to avoid diseases

**Developmental implications for education.** Homeless adolescents have difficult school histories with problems such as dropouts or interruptions. In a study of Detroit, out of 251 adolescents, 88% were found suspended and/or dropped out (Mason G. Haber & Toro, 2004). They suffer from learning difficulties. A high percentage of such students suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD) (Mason, 1994). Some suffer from diseases. Residential instability adversely impacts education.

**Developmental implications on family relations.** One of the foremost causes of running away from home is disturbed family relations (Arnett, 2017). The relations become worse after running away. There is a lack of contact as well. Parental authority is undermined which may result in misbehavior. A child's running away might impact the mental and physical health of the mother in grief too. Relations in families that are homeless are also strained (Mason G. Haber & Toro, 2004).

**Q1b**

Haber & Toro have discussed several perspectives in their article: Poverty and Child Development, Homelessness as Trauma, Social Learning Theories, Risk Amplification Model, Intergenerational Perspectives, the COR Model and Ecological Perspectives on Homelessness. The Ecological-Developmental Perspective seems the most comprehensive, It explains the causes of homelessness, the developmental implications and also the suggests policies steps to address the issue in both adolescents and families. All the ideas discussed in this perspective are testable. By providing an ecological perspective, it regards poverty as one of the foremost causes of homelessness. Homelessness also deteriorates parents-child bond in cases of a runaway.

The ecological-developmental perspective puts into account early developmental stages i.e. infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and also look at the bigger picture i.e. social systems. Most of the other developmental approaches fail to consider the interplay between family and larger social systems. Ecological perspective explains the developmental impact at different stages of development. It is useful in the case of runaways as well. It makes a distinction between those who are thrown away and those who run away on their own. It also discusses families that are homeless with implications on adolescents. As it combines ecological considerations with developmental theories, it provides suggestions for remedies as well. It also takes into account the person-environment fit approach and the deficit-based approach and advocates against stigmatization.

**Question 2**

**Q2a**

The pressing issue of homelessness demands serious interventions on the part of the society, institutions and the government. For homeless adolescents who are students, school, as well as entities outside schools, can provide finance to support them. However, only 55% of liaisons of schools are doing good to help homeless students connect with supports and services (Ingram E. S., Bridgeland, Reed, & Atwell). The students should be encouraged to stay in schools. They should be connected with outside entities for assistance. In order to prevent student homelessness, early warnings systems such as attendance, etc. can be employed. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that homeless students be supported to continue studies (Ingram B. E., Bridgeland, Reed, & Atwell). Therefore ESSA should be fully implemented. To promote their education, a national graduation rate should be set.

Homeless people should be identified. Efforts should be made to make them aware of their rights. Homeless children or families should be connected with public or private welfare homes for the homeless. Moreover, they should be made aware of hospitals where they are treated for diseases.

The community should also play its part in financially supporting homeless people including adolescents and families. Schools liaison should connect with outside donors. Homeless families should be connected with donors.

Awareness in the community and the nation as a whole should be raised so that people become sensitive towards the child homelessness issue

Affordable housing should be provided by connecting homeless people with houses supported by public funds. To address the homelessness issue, host home programs can also be initiated.

**Q2b**

Homelessness is a national issue and therefore it demands intervention by the three tiers of the government and the community as a whole. It is a shared responsibility. The government alone can never identify all the homeless people. Nor can it finance all of them from public funds.

The community can help identify homeless persons and connect them with donors. If the relations between adolescents and family are tense in any neighborhood, the community should encourage good family relations between them. Big businesses should include helping the homeless in their corporate social responsibility agendas.

The United States Interagency Council embarked upon a federal goal to end youth homelessness in 2010, which is a welcoming step. The four key goals include ending homelessness by 2020. The federal government should strive to implement this program in letter and spirit.

State governments should specifically allocate funds for homeless people. These funds should be smoothly transferred to the local governments since local governments are more connected with people. Local governments should strive to raise the level of awareness of the community. Funding raising campaigns may be started by the local government.

Media can also play a role in raising the awareness of the people. International organizations such as UN agencies for education and eradication of poverty should include combating homelessness in their agenda. The enormity of this grave issue demands national and global cooperation.

**References**

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