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Homeless-Youth Education and Its Hidden Capitalism: a Composite Case Study in North America

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand why after establishing educational programs intended for youth at-risk of being homeless in inner-city urban contexts, youth still turn to homelessness in North America. This article describes a composite case study of three cities in North America to ensure the anonymity of all stakeholders, key informants, and practitioners providing qualitative data. The results show that the internal management of education programs-specifically, youth's potential behavior in three categories: violence, substance use, and intimate relationships are challenges that prevent organizations from successfully retaining youth engagement in education. More importantly, capitalism related to the street-trades is discussed as the key cause of persistent youth homelessness. Protecting youth from homelessness and ensuring access to compulsory public education must seek to identify mechanisms through which homeless youth can be exploited for profit. Addressing hidden structures of capitalism within homelessness in North America supports the prevention of chronic homelessness and disempowered life trajectories.

INTRODUCTION

Youth homelessness has been the subject of significant study, including a systematic review being conducted around its causes (Embleton et al., 2016); its prevention (Schwan et al., 2018); its interventions (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, and Wolf 2010); the effectiveness of interventions (Morton et al., 2020); factors leading to youth resilience (Cronley & Evans, 2017); and its connections to additional layers of traumatic abuse (Davies & Allen, 2017; Heerde et al., 2015). The intersection between homelessness and economic development is apparent, with noted differences between its manifestation in developing countries versus developed countries (Embleton et al., 2016). In the context of North America, homelessness can present as a “wicked problem” (Blackman et al., 2006) which persists regardless of the quantity of time and funding dedicated to its resolution.

The societal transition towards sustainable solutions can be challenging. Notably, in the field of sustainability, the research discourse has moved towards acknowledging and investigating capitalism

as a hidden barrier (Feola, 2020). Discussions around capitalism and its impacts on continued inequalities in communities can be silenced; whether it is deemed out-of-scope or politically incorrect, researchers may find a positionality in which they need to seek “permission to say capitalism” (Hall & Davis, 2021). This study applies the theoretical framework posed by Wilson (2019), which challenges this silence by exploring how homeless individuals are commodified by the police, the legal system, psychiatrists, and social workers in the North American context.

The issue of youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness due to its additional layers of legal implications. Youth homelessness may be the result of intentional runaways, but research suggests a significant violation of choice via contexts of parental neglect or abuse leading to such decisions (Tyler, 2006). The presence of youth among the homeless population can signal abuse that warrants the intervention of legal stakeholders (Edwards, 2019; Willis & Wells, 1988), social workers (Turner et al., 2017), and the foster care

system (Biehal, 2014). In other words, youth may need to fall through many layers of protective measures before ending up as a victim of chronic homelessness. Additionally, compulsory education (Cabus & De Witte, 2011) also provides youth with a support network of teachers and counselors who can act toward the prevention of youth homelessness. Allowing youth to continually experience homelessness signals existing factors that contribute to the breakdown of multiple safety nets.

Education presents an opportunity for successful intervention against chronic youth homelessness: the school ground itself can serve in place of the home to provide key support to youth in this formative stage of their lives (Moore et al., 2018). Homeless youth may be conceptualized or represented as school dropouts by choice, but research shows how youth intending to stay in school can face tremendous barriers to education even with legislative support (Ausikaitis et al., 2015). Rahman et al. (Rahman et al., 2015) review several national mandates specific to intervening against youth homelessness, yet note that “youth homelessness is a growing concern”. Youth who intentionally choose homelessness over other life paths (if available to them) are out-of-scope for this study. For youth who have exhibited repeated help-seeking behaviors across different social systems of support, their state of chronic homelessness can be seen as an indicator of flaws in social systems requiring attention (Jones et al., 2018).

METHODS

The research design focused on key-informant interviews with practitioners in youth homelessness (n=6) across three different North American cities. Sampling was conducted by convenience sampling. The operational definition of “homeless youth” for the purpose of this study is youth experiencing homelessness without their intentional choice. This study focuses on the qualitative representation of perspectives on chronic youth homelessness, emphasizing the engagement of key informants (Marshall, 1996) and practitioners (Shaw & Lunt, 2018). Youth, particularly youth under the legal, should be recognized for their vulnerability in the research process (Allen, 2002).

This study follows the key principle of anonymity to minimize potential harm to research

participation (Magolda & Weems, 2002). Data were collected following narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), and was analyzed using Nvivo with open-coding, axial-coding, and synthesized member checking towards data validity (Birt et al., 2016). Data is presented below as an anonymized composite case study (Duffy, 2010), recognizing that practitioners can live with similar vulnerability as homeless youth, particularly due to the fact that practitioners working in youth homelessness may come from an identical background.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are divided into two key sections. First, barriers related to the internal management of educational programs intended to serve homeless youth are presented below. These are factors that are relevant to the dimension of education with no apparent link to capitalism, yet exist nonetheless as challenges that contribute to youth homelessness. These barriers serve to demonstrate the inseparable capitalism in educating homeless youth. For educational programs positioned with holistic services to meet the diverse needs of homeless youth, excluding youth from these programs either temporary or longer-term may be the result of the following three factors uncovered in the qualitative data analysis.

Barriers to Youth Homelessness Programs

Violence. Youth who turn to violence may do so for diverse reasons. Violence may be a way for youth to reclaim a sense of power in their lives. For abused and oppressed youth, violence may be an act of seeking some sense of justice in their world that often has placed them as the victim. Beyond these factors, violence can be an indication of social isolation. Behaviors of violence often garner attention - positive or negative - and for some youth, this may be a form of attention-seeking that started with family-based conditioning from a young age. Additionally, violence can be the result of an internal fear of close relationships, with some youth having to “push away” people around them who become too close to them emotionally. In direct contrast, certain youth from specific home environments may find that violence is the only way they know how to connect with others. Through violence, these youth are actually inviting and seeking connection.

The underlying factors behind violent behavior illustrate that past trauma can play a critical role in a youth's decision to turn to violence in their lives. Youth who exhibit violent behavior are discussed by practitioners to be easily manageable. Management by educators is noted as essential to prevent intervention outside of the educational sphere, which may initiate youth into a trajectory of becoming justice-involved. Consistent, chronic offenders who pose a significant risk to other youth however, may be removed from educational programs long-term either via incarceration that is not initiated by the educators (ie. by other youth who are victims of the abuse; guardians) or by a persistent interpersonal rift that cannot be overcome within the program. There exists a significant interplay that may be overlooked in current research as noted by participants: homeless youth who exhibit continued, uncontrolled violence may be living with developmental or neurological disabilities.

These are easily overlooked and undiagnosed either due to parental neglect, lack of health education of the parents, or simply the massive cost of health care. Participant perspectives on the interplay between disability, violence, and incarceration are also present in the research. As a specific example, (Manduca & Sampson, 2021) describes heavy metal exposure as a cause of neurological developmental delay and behavioral issues, significant enough to predict years of incarceration over an individual's life course. In addition to disability, participation in gangs (Yoder et al., 2003) is a significant factor that complicates and intensifies concerns regarding violence. Preventing a trajectory into street involvement is thus ever more important if educational programs intended to ensure the retainment of youth in a support system.

Substance use. Youth who use substances may do so as a form of experimentation or recreation. Yet undeniably, past trauma and a need to forget current circumstances of marginalization can strongly keep youth in the habit of substance use. On the other hand, substance use can lead to opportunities for increased social networking. Even for non-marginalized, well-adjusted adults in society, smoke breaks, and drinking are commonly accepted forms of socializing, as noted by participants. Requiring youth who long for social

connection to stay away from all substances offered to them is thus an unfair expectation that is not placed on privileged members of society. Long-term substance use among marginalized youth should be assessed not as deviant behavior, but rather as help-seeking behavior in overcoming trauma or social isolation. Regardless, youth who enter educational programs currently under the influence of substances can create significant disruptions - including potential violence - to other homeless youth. Peer influence to use substances is suggested by participants to not be a significant risk factor that warrants disengagement from educational programs, as many youths have been already exposed to influences. Substance use is described as an "exaggerated" risk to education by a participant: homeless youth with limited financial resources even for basic needs usually face similar barriers in gaining access to substances. Most importantly, the pressure is not to engage in substance use, but rather in the dealing and trade of substances to access substances. Peer influence with regard to the dealing and trade of substances can severely disrupt the educational environment as a cause for intentional disengagement. Disability as a compounding factor in violence is likewise present in the theme of substance abuse. Participant responses highlight the existence of notable research amounting to a number of systematic reviews that link substance use as a form of "self-medication" for both intellectual and physical disabilities (Didden et al., 2020; D. Moore & Polsgrove, 1991; Smedema & Ebener, 2010; van Duijvenbode & VanDerNagel, 2019).

Inequitable access to healthcare and medication in the North American context persists to intensify the need for substances among youth living with disabilities, who already face barriers in transitioning from homelessness to integrating with mainstream society. Essentially, youth living with disabilities are more likely to be disengaged from educational programs serving homeless youth; lack of special education expertise is not the problem. The lack of access to health care results in violence and substance use.

Advances for Intimate Relationships. All youth, marginalized or not, maybe seeking intimate connections at this stage in their lives. For youth who cannot establish stable friendships, or for youth who are in stable friendships which fail to fill their

true emotional needs, the draw for sexual relationships can become stronger. Sexual relationships can be viewed by youth as an alternative solution to overcoming their internal struggles to participate in long-term, stable friendships. Truly fitting in a community can burden youth with the task of overcoming their inner fears and trauma from the past; sexual relationships can be an easy way out of the pain and isolation.

Furthermore, sexual relationships can create the illusion that an individual is being accepted by another. Youth who have found limited acceptance in their home environment, or throughout their childhood trajectory may turn to sexual relationships for personal acceptance. For youth whose trauma includes past sexual abuse, seeking further sexual relationships - either healthy or emulating the same pattern of past abuse - can become a part of their adult behavior. In short, although not all youth who seek intimate relationships are suffering from social isolation, social isolation can lead youth to long for intimacy in settings designed for other forms of stable social connection. Like substance use, sexual behavior should also be assessed as potentially a surface-level sign of a deeper emotional need. All in all, through considering a sampling of three upstream factors: violence, substance use, and sexual behavior, a cyclical relationship emerges. Youth who experience homelessness may turn to violence, substance use, or sexual relationships to cope with trauma and marginalization - all of which can formally isolate them from educational programs that aim to prevent their chronic homelessness.

These three factors illustrate challenges falling under the category of internal management, which can forcefully trap homeless youth in chronic homelessness even when provided access to educational programs. The following section illustrates hidden layers of capitalism which further heightens the risk of chronic homelessness. Of particular note, violence, substance use, and intimate relationships continue to surface throughout participant discussions.

Homeless Youth as a Commodity in Capitalism

Indigenous and Rural-Urban Migration.

Discussions on inner-city homelessness cannot be easily separated from recognizing the presence of individuals from indigenous (Brown et al., 2007)

and rural communities (Christensen, 2012). Macro-scale barriers to providing essential health services (Syed et al., 2013), social services, and adequate employment opportunities across vast remote geographies in North America can force migration to urban centers as the only viable option. This creates a form of displacement that can force indigenous and rural youth to become newcomers in an urban center that is focused on welcoming capital - not additional community members who require service. Housing insecurity is already a concern for established individuals with access to income (Desmond et al., 2015). For newcomers with no connections for economic security - and possibly even entering the city as patients in search of health care (Blackstock, 2012), the risk of homelessness becomes even more severe.

Rural families and indigenous families new to the inner city can easily be overlooked in chronic homelessness investigations. Without a local urban address, and with ties to their previous remote communities, they can often form a back-and-forth, transient population (Letkemann, 2004) that is hard to capture by research - and hard to engage for educational programs. The displacement and potential cyclical-displacement in search of economic viability position them as more or less an invisible population.

Residential school history, largely related to the capitalistic venture of the colonizers of North America also serves as an important context influencing chronic homelessness. The forced displacement of entire generations of indigenous people of North America into school grounds of student abuse and student torture (Barlow, 2003; Burrage et al., 2022; Jack, 2000; Wilk et al., 2017) forms critical context into trauma, substance-use behavior, self-medicating behavior, and barriers in economic development for indigenous communities. Other indigenous communities in North America experienced direct genocide (Ostler, 2015).

The influence of capitalism on indigenous and rural communities are at a macro-scale which can defy localized intervention. Participants noted the importance of ensuring survivability, with universal basic income as a potential solution (Van Parijs, 2004). Establishing welcome centers in the inner city which specifically cater to newcomers before the exhaustion of their assets may help decrease the

risk of entering into homelessness trajectories. Participants also noted the massive barrier presented by personal identification. Rural and indigenous individuals, particularly youth, may have different forms of ID or be unaware of the existence of ID. Shelters and any form of homelessness intervention services that demand ID as a prerequisite to accessing services exacerbate inequalities in determining who can benefit from funded services and who can not.

Foster Care. The choice to foster cannot be separated from the economic and financial considerations (Smithgall et al., 2008). “Reduction in reimbursement rates” is specifically listed as a factor that would lead foster families to discontinue care (Geiger et al., 2013). Research has shown that children and youth in foster care, after leaving their previous situations, can experience more abuse in their new situation (Biehal, 2014). This is complicated by the fact that some youth do not enter the foster system due to past family situations, but due to their health status or disability. Simultaneously, children and youth living with disability are already at higher risk of being abused (Legano et al., 2021).

Capitalistic considerations are noted by participants to be strong influencers leading to youth homelessness. Homeless youth who run away from foster care families will use up a lower amount of the reimbursement associated with fostering. Strategies devised by foster providers to keep youth away, specifically, designing situations that would lead youth to self-initiate the run-away process and maximizes financial benefits. These financial concerns inform the context which can lead youth to *appear* willing in choosing homelessness. Defiance or resistance against guardians, according to participants, can be the result of being forced into a home with consistent discrimination, stigma, and microaggressions.

Previous Teachers and Counselors. Current formal education rewards academic performance, not consistent engagement. Youth experiencing homelessness can complicate the education process for educators. There is a limited financial incentive to keep complicated students within one’s work setting. A similar strategy of devising situations to encourage youth to self-initiate the disengagement can be present.

Counselors are noted by participants to not be dedicated to psychological well-being. Academic advising and entry into postsecondary institutions are job duties that produce more distinguished outcomes. Participants also note the general lack of interest in counselors to engage with complex cases, as many regularly receive student-parent private reimbursement for recommendation letters and percentile placements in the graduating class. Prevention of homelessness, or dedicated time towards troubled youth, do not contribute to this capitalism. Within these financial concerns, youth at risk of becoming homeless are not welcome in the second place where they will spend most of their everyday lives. When school has become equally as unwelcome as home, the streets may be the only option left. Teachers and counselors who present similar attitudes as the parents and guardians of the youth can reinforce the belief that the youth have been abandoned by all adults in their lives. The same triad of discrimination, stigma, and microaggressions is all that is needed to force youth out of regular school systems. Upon their removal from the school system, the school may be rewarded for improved academic performance.

Substance-Use Rehabilitation (French et al., 1997; French & McGeary, 1997). Access to clean needles and devices to use drugs is free; access to help quit substance use is not. As noted by participants, rehabilitation can cost nearly one year’s worth of salary under basic income in North America. Youth, homeless or not, would be challenged by this sum. Paying to access rehabilitation does not guarantee successful rehabilitation. Multiple courses of engagement may be required, multiplying the cost by more years of annual salary. Paradoxically, access to hormone-replacement therapies for gender transitions is paid. Youths exhibiting will and intent to move away from the substance use trajectory are financially incapable of accessing support. Substance use already presents itself as a strong distraction in youth’s journey towards empowerment and reintegration into mainstream society, particularly when youth live with limited support for overcoming past trauma or means of self-medicating untreated health problems. Once a youth makes a positive decision for their health and well-being, the current system does not support such a decision; instead, a financial barrier is posed.

Substance-trade (Hepburn et al., 2016; Werb et al., 2008). While parents, teachers, and counselors may not know the exact whereabouts of a specific youth, street-involved individuals may be the ones who keep a close eye on homeless youth. There is direct financial profit to be gained in recruiting vulnerable youth into the substance trade. In other words, there is no capital to be gained by attending to vulnerable youth for parents, teachers, and counselors, and the reality of youth falling through multiple safety nets reflects that lack of capital. Contrarily, engaging vulnerable youth in the substance trade can bring direct profit. Participants note that youth can be groomed, primed, or forced into the substance trade with or without experiencing financial hardships. Society allowing youth to remain in financial hardship, however, corroborates the process substance traders intend to initiate upon youth.

Reducing, or eliminating the potential of youth to bring profit to the substance trade is critical to protecting youth. This is a leverage point that can be actionable via multiple pathways in the North American context. As one example noted by participants, the government's vending of marijuana reduces the need for youth to be engaged in its trade. Another example is to keep youth with stable sources of income, such as internships. Substance traders understand the concept of opportunity cost and may be less likely to recruit individuals who have to give up existing employment for alternate employment. Once youth are involved in substance trade, their life trajectory drastically changes. Substance trading on school grounds would also be sufficient reason to disengage youth from an educational program intended to serve them. Substance trade presents a tremendous risk towards entrenched homelessness interspersed with incarceration. Attempting to address homelessness without acknowledging the presence and pressure of substance trade, created by a multitude of street-involved individuals seeking to recruit, will likely result in unsustainable solutions as noted by a participant.

Sex-trade (Walls & Bell, 2011). Capitalism on the streets funnels males into the substance trade and females into the sex trade. The key difference between the substance trade and the sex trade is that females are more likely to be groomed and intentionally targeted. Street-involved individuals

understand how to exploit the emotional vulnerabilities of already-traumatized youth. Tactics used to recruit can involve a gamut of techniques, including “pretense of love, threats of indebtedness, drug addiction, manipulation, and violence” (Kennedy et al., 2007). Unfortunately, educational programs which strongly prohibit intimate relationships between students can compound this risk. In other words, society can corroborate the process in which female students are commodified by preventing healthy relationships that could prevent relationships initiated by recruiters for the sex trade. “Survival sex work” should not intersect with the lived experience of youth when multiple safety nets exist to ensure the survival of youth.

Recruiting youth into sex work can become an organized process with “a range of trade rules” (Horning et al., 2022) involving multiple individuals. Control and violence are noted to be interlinked once a vulnerable individual has entered the sex trade, which highlights the profit potential of retaining or trapping youth in this industry. Youth are described to be continually disempowered and seen as disempowered by their recruiters to facilitate control and management by Horning et al. In other words, there is specific intent to ensure youth cannot live apart from their recruiter.

Of particular concern is the rise of formalized or consensual sex work. North American movements towards sexual liberation have led to sex work being re-conceptualized as a female choice. Regardless of political views, participants agree that this conceptualization serves one purpose: silencing the voices of youth who are forced into nonconsensual sex work. Growing media portrayal of females who choose to engage in sex work as a form of self-expression diverts much-needed attention from the vulnerable. Public discourse on protecting individuals forced into selling sex ceases in many contexts. One participant notes this is a form of female-on-female sexism, in which the privileged use their platform to launch an assault on the oppressed.

Glamorization. Capitalism reinforces the commodification of youth by glamorizing street-involved industries such as the substance trade and sex trade. Social media plays a prominent role in the grooming process of youth. Male substance-dealers and female sex-workers alike who portray their

wellness inadvertently glamorize the industries and prime youth for successful recruitment. This wellness draws the attention of the youth because society withholds this wellness from them. When basic survival needs are not met, any semblance of security can give youth a lot of hope - something which is often absent in their lives. Progressing through the education system rewards one with a diploma, not necessarily employment. Society does not keep rightful promises of a better life after being educated to all students. Particularly, students from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds face further employment discrimination even after the completion of schooling. The value of school can be rightfully questioned. Escaping the teenage phase and quickly entering adult life may be the focus of some youth; unfortunately, this entry into adult life is not always what they have imagined, particularly when they did not have the privilege to grow up with adult role models who taught them what it means to be an adult.

Multi-level Fraud (Cross, 2019). Financial literacy should be prioritized over mathematics, and financial literacy should go beyond taxes and mortgages. Youth, with no promise of employment in sight, should not be burdened with tax and mortgage calculations prematurely. Participants note that youth lack financial literacy in terms of protecting themselves from fraud. Fraud can happen on the streets, or, happen over cyber or digital connections. Youth who fall prey to giving up the limited financial resources they have may be further threatened with the risk of debt. This threat can form part of the recruitment process to position youth in the substance trade or sex trade. Alternatively, it can coerce youth into working for fraudulent schemes to pay off their debts. Fraud, like substance trade and sex trade, can also launch youth into disempowering life trajectories that trap them in cycles of homelessness and incarceration.

Research has also shown that fraud can even mask itself as formal institutions, specifically, colleges which promise financial security for homeless youth. This is shown to be linked to the North American societal preoccupation with credentials. A host of “predatory colleges” exploit the youth’s desire to escape financial instability, but further entrench them towards poverty through student debt and interest (Murray, 2021). A recurring theme emerges in which youth who wish

to make positive life choices, such as entering postsecondary education and refraining from substance use, are not rewarded but penalized financially. While educators and service professionals can assure youth of the importance of making positive choices, the reality is that these positive choices can punish youth. The hopelessness in positive choices can drive youth towards self-destructive behavior. Chronic homelessness does not seem like a dreadful result when attempts to escape it are met with even more disappointment, frustration, and pain.

Youth-on-youth exploitation. Relevant to engagement in multi-level fraud is the risk of youth-on-youth exploitation. Adults can play important role models, influencing the behavior of youth. Youth may in turn become the perpetrators of financial exploitation of other youth. This creates the disintegration of any sense of community formed by educational programs aimed at keeping youth out of chronic homelessness. The allure of participating in their capitalistic ventures is one that needs to be addressed to eliminate the risk of youth being exploited or commodified.

Participants also noted that the situations facing homeless youth can be so grim that they resort to lesser tragedies that are tragedies nonetheless. A notable example is youth controlling other youth towards the sex trade. As coercion into the sex trade can be accompanied by significant violence, any less-violent coercion can be seen as “mercy” in the words of one participant. Research also echoes this complex interplay between the victims and the victimizers (Roe-Sepowitz et al., 2015).

When youth-on-youth exploitation is uncovered, the youth in question can seem beyond repair and deserving of their disempowered position in society. Participants note the importance of recognizing that privileged youth also engage in the exploitation of one another; the seemingly less-threatening nature of youth-on-youth exploitation in the class of the privileged is not due to better behavior, but the fact that this exploitation is not performed to ensure survival. Withholding means for basic survival from homeless youth will coerce them into decisions that can further victimize or marginalize other youth. This is not a failure of the educational programs, but rather a failure of a

capitalist society that withholds means for basic survival.

Capitalism as Underlying Cause of Persistent Youth Homelessness

Overall, capitalism is a determinant of health, well-being, and equality (Flynn, 2021). Hall and Davis (2021) argue that “that critical social science should be able to name the global economy as capitalism”. Under a capitalist society, the homeless can be viewed as useless to the economy (Belcher & DeForge, 2012). This in itself marginalizes the homeless to a position exploitable by individuals who see their value in “the street economy” (Gwadz et al., 2009). The process of growing up can be a beautiful life phase; it should not intersect with capitalism and the inequalities it imposes upon the vulnerable in society. To remove capitalism’s influence from the lives of homeless youth, researchers should acknowledge said influence; this, in itself, can form a basis of new research methodology (Karkov & Valiavicharska, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The existence of homelessness of individuals under the age of eighteen illustrates a collective failure of housing policy, schools, and child welfare systems. Despite the multiple actors involved in assisting youth towards completion of basic education, youth homelessness persists. Aside from hidden, invisible, and/or diagnosed disabilities, capitalism is a significant underlying cause that often is not politically correct to mention in youth-homelessness research. Within the existing education system, youth experiencing homelessness do not bring about the academic performance necessary for capitalistic evaluation and ranking of schools, teachers, and counselors. Academic dismissal of homeless youth can be a preferred solution as a result. Homeless youth who manage to successfully complete academic programs despite their lack of housing can further be targeted by predatory colleges whose main aim is to position homeless youth in debt. For homeless youth who further survive the financial costs of a higher degree, no guarantee or promise of employment is sufficient to revert to their homelessness status. All in all, the existing education system does not hand youth with any guaranteed self-help tools toward housing security even after years of investment on the youth's behalf.

With the education system unwilling to provide a guaranteed alternative to homelessness, youth are left open to being groomed by adults involved in the street-based economy. Recruiting and commodifying homeless youth becomes a game of maximizing profit, which has complex interplays with amassing youth from rural and indigenous communities towards urban migration. Substance trade and sex trade are rarely the first-choice careers of youth. Yet with an education system and capitalist financial system that is not willing to promise income for survival, homeless youth often face no other choice than to become commodities in the street economy. Once addicted to substances, youth are further commodified as substances may be provided for free but rehabilitation and assistance in quitting can cost as much as a year's salary. Without permission to discuss capitalism in research, these issues will persist to undermine the well-being of one of the most vulnerable populations in modern society.

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