Improving the Living Conditions of the Homeless Population

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Abstract: With the rapid development of China’s economy and the acceleration of urbanization, more and more people are moving into cities. Objectively, the number of vagrants and beggars has increased dramatically; this problem has become more and more prominent. Society has launched a series of assistance programs to support the homeless, but due to the persistence of homelessness with its associated problems, urban vagrants are still prevalent throughout the country. Moreover, this number is still increasing, leading some vagrants to rely on assistance programs which treat the symptoms rather than the root causes. To make an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the current social assistance system, we propose a set of solutions. First, we will contact homeless people aged between 18 and 30 through local welfare institutions and aid stations and establish target job that can satisfy the needs of the research target. If necessary, we will contact relevant training providers. Finally, we will design a series of criteria to measure the effectiveness of our plan.

Keywords: Homeless Population; Young Adults; Employment.

1. Introduction

The existence of urban vagrants and beggars is not an uncommon phenomenon, nor is it limited to China. Rather, homelessness is a common problem all over the world. Due to China’s rapidly developing economy, the population has dramatically increased. This has been observed in many cities across the country, ultimately leading to an increase in homelessness, which puts a strain on our society in many ways. Some people can become homeless for several reasons, such as unemployment, disease, destitution, uneven development between urban and rural areas, or the ramshackle social assistance system in China that is not really helping anybody.

The Chinese government has previously encouraged a series of social assistance movements. In 2003, the China State Council issued “The Salvage and Manage Way for The Vagrants and Beggardom in Cities”, in which the definition of homeless assistance changed from compulsory to voluntary. Prior to this document, local governments were required to help the homeless population but often did not do so for fear of legal recourse. This updated document protected the legal rights and interests of individuals and organizations that provided “free assistance” to vagrants and beggars. A section of the document called “The Detailed Rules for Implementation” had detailed provisions for the content of assistance and, more importantly, defined the supervision and management work of civil affairs departments. This has played an important role in helping vagrants and beggars. However, it is undeniable that urban vagrants and beggars are still numerous and widespread throughout the country due to the lack of strong awareness of social assistance, unclear powers and responsibilities within social assistance departments, underdeveloped methods for managing assistance, inability to follow through on plans, inability for social assistance systems to cover all of the country, etc. Even when social assistance departments follow the plan, they often cannot cure the root cause of homelessness, and even unexpectedly make many homeless people rely on the assistance that they are receiving; they are reluctant to find a job, and only rely on social assistance to make a living.

Teaching a man how to fish is better than giving him a fish directly. This paper analyzes the employment phenomenon of the homeless population in China, and is committed to improving the living environment and providing employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed among the homeless population. In this way, the homeless population can have a chance to be self-reliant, which can lead them to normal lives. The more the homeless problem can be solved, the brighter the future our country can attain.

2. Essential Research

2.1. Demographic Characteristics of Urban Vagrants

As a world phenomenon, urban vagrancy accompanies the development of human society. In every corner of a large city, homeless people have no place to call home. They are unable or unwilling to work, preferring to hide in the cracks of the city and gradually forming a survival culture within their own community.

2.1.1. Source of Vagrants

The source of vagrants is clear; vagrants mostly flow from economically underdeveloped regions to developed regions. The more developed the city, the more vagrants there are [1]. According to the statistics jointly provided by the Social Affairs Office of the Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau and the aid station, the number of beggars in Guangzhou increased.
from 1,000 in 2005 to 4,000 in 2008. As an open coastal city, Guangzhou’s economic development has been at the forefront of the country. Consequently, the influx of the homeless population from economically backward areas is increasing year by year.

2.1.2. Gender Distribution
There are significantly more homeless men than homeless women [2]; the survey data given by Xiong Chen and others show that the male to female ratio is 4:1. The 2018 survey conducted by Fang Xie found that 68.5% of homeless people were men, while 31.5% were women [3]. Why is it out of proportion? It could be due to the fact that it is riskier for female vagrants to live on the street. Therefore, people often use the phrase “male vagrants” in Chinese to represent the whole population of the homeless community.

2.1.3. Age Composition
In terms of age composition, young and middle-aged people are the majority. In 2003, Baoqing Wang investigated and analyzed vagrants and beggars in five provinces and cities. He found that the proportion of vagrants under 30 was 59.2%, and those between 16 and 60 accounted for 79.2%. This shows that many beggars are very young [4]. Fang Xie investigated 276 urban vagrants and obtained similar data. 16–35-year-olds accounted for 22.5%, and 35–60-year-olds accounted for 49.3%, still mostly young and middle-aged people [3].

2.1.4. Education
In terms of education, many researchers have found that a large number of vagrants did not complete primary school. Baoqing Wang [4] found that 34.1% of the homeless population completed primary school, 41% middle school, and only 11.2% were illiterate. This is basically consistent with the data of Guoxian Lu et al. [5]. They found that 41.3% of vagrants had attained primary school education, 23% of vagrants attained middle school education, and the average education level was primary school.

It can be seen from the above that male vagrants account for the vast majority of the entire urban vagrant population, their education level is typically primary or middle school level, and they come from poor, economically less developed areas in the middle and west of China.

2.2. Causes of Vagrancy and Begging
There are many causes for vagrancy, including social, economic, historical, cultural and institutional causes, as well as individual family problems.

2.2.1. Poverty: The Main Cause of Vagrancy and Begging
Here are some possible reasons why people become vagrants:
Some people may suffer as a result of natural or man-made disasters;
Migrant workers may “have no money to return home”; Their family members may have no money for medical treatment of sudden illness;
They may have no money to afford the tuition fees for their children’s schools or be unable to solve the family’s poverty;
Their money and property are stolen;
They fail to find jobs and fall into economic difficulties.

2.2.2. Personal and Family Factors: Important Reasons for Vagrancy and Begging
Domestic violence and improper family education lead to running away from home, wandering and begging.
In other cases, individuals are physically ill, mentally disturbed, or incapacitated.

Many migrant workers that come to the city are unable to adapt to modern society due to their poor working skills and low education level. However, most of them refuse to go back and work in the countryside, so they wander in the city, busking and scavenging while looking for employment opportunities.

2.2.3. The Formation of Vagrant and Begging Culture
The formation of a vagrant and begging culture also promotes the increase of the urban vagrant population. This has a great influence on people's thoughts and behaviors [4]. 6.1% of vagrants and beggars answer that “begging is happy.”

2.2.4. Lack of an Effective System: A Main Social Cause of Widespread Begging
In China’s rural areas, which occupy a vast territory and a large population of the country, the social assistance system is inadequate. This leads to old people being unable to receive support from their children, and ill people being unable to receive treatment. As a result, once people fall on hard times, they are very likely to become a part of the vagrant population [6] [7]. After being sent back to the aid stations, some urban vagrants will return to the cities to beg because the fundamental problems in the countryside have not been solved.

2.3. How Vagrants in the City Live
2.3.1. Means of Living for Homeless People in the City
Urban vagrants live in unfixed places - some of them lose their ability to work, some of them are not willing to work - so the most common solution to the problem of survival is to resort to scavenging, begging, selling something at stands, working as scalpers, doing odd jobs, etc. Of these, scavenging is the most common and costless solution. Of course, not all homeless people are "lazy" and unwilling to work. Nearly two-thirds of homeless do odd jobs, such as washing dishes in restaurants, handing out flyers and business cards, handling and unloading packages, etc. However, they often do not seek out new opportunities to work. While there are a few honest homeless people, the vast majority have been involved in petty theft, shoplifting, and even home invasion. This has huge implications for social security.

2.4. Management Strategies of Urban Vagrants
2.4.1. Methodology
Homeless people wander in the city streets and alleys. They can be seen on park benches and under bridges. They live around the garbage, which obviously affects the beauty of the city. Some of them even become criminals. Robbery and theft are common among vagrants, which can negatively affect public order. So, the management of the homeless is very important. At present, the management of vagrants and beggars mainly involves cleaning up and sending them to aid stations. The characteristics of their methodology is as follows: the first focus is on stability; the second is temporary assistance; the third is that their practices are substandard.

When the assistance plan was re-enacted in 2003, it changed the rigid asylum and repatriation system into a more flexible form of assistance. However, Shiqing Wang et al. believed that there were still problems, such as lack of understanding of the vagrants, weak assistance effectiveness, and lack of professional staff [8]. Cuiping Bao believes that the current assistance measures only solve the immediate plight and status of the homeless without follow-up measures, resulting in poor assistance effects [9].
As discussed above, the vagrancy population is complex, with various developments and different needs. Every vagrant has reached this situation for different reasons, so they have to be supported in different ways. With the improvement of social civilization, the management of the urban homeless population needs to be updated, and approached in a more humanistic way, along with governance that puts the people’s needs first. It is necessary to highlight the importance of social assistance, evaluate practices in order to improve them, utilize volunteers’ strengths and weaknesses in order to create powerful team dynamics, and adopt precise assistance plans according to different needs to help people get out of difficulties [10].

The majority of the vagrant population are young adults who have basic literacy skills. Many of them have experience doing odd jobs. If the government can create conditions that will improve the ability of vagrants to work, then the vagrants will be able to help themselves more easily. This can be done through psychological aid, helping them to build a strong work ethic, helping them master skills through job training, providing employment platforms through multimedia, and by providing opportunities for them to work in the city or return to work in their area of origin. This kind of assistance method can solve the problem fundamentally.

3. Innovation Design

Based on our research and understanding of homelessness, we propose this solution to the problem of youth homelessness.

3.1. Contact with Target Groups

We will collect information on the living conditions, mentality, and employment intentions of adults aged 18-30 through local welfare agencies and homeless shelters. In consideration of safety and other factors, we will communicate with welfare agencies to obtain information indirectly.

3.2. Contacting Enterprises

After determining the employment intention of homeless groups, we will screen and contact enterprises and vocational training institutions by telephone, internet, and other means to show them our plan and eventually help homeless people find jobs and provide them with relevant job training.

3.3. Finding Target Population

We will first find the most suitable candidates for our program among the homeless people we have communicated with. Then, we will help them based on their personal wishes and needs across a wide variety of categories. This can include but is not limited to helping them find job information, offering them a job or contacting institutions that provide vocational skills training, helping them to participate in employment training, and helping them to better invest in future work. At a later stage, we will conduct a follow-up visit after the training to ensure improvement of our program.

3.4. Following up Methods

3.4.1. Following up on Individual Cases

After a homeless individual receives a job or vocational training for, they should be regularly interviewed about their personal feelings and attitude. We will then get feedback directly from their job trainers.

3.4.2. Interviewing the Feelings of Individuals

We will interview the recipients of our program to find out whether they think the training is effective, whether their attitude towards life has changed, and whether they are more self-sufficient.

4. Verification of Results

For vagrants who are between the ages of 18 and 30 and who do not want to be sent home, we will help them find a simple job to live on, get vocational training, and make sure they are willing to keep the job they have. We need to make sure that at least one adult homeless person is able to get a job, become self-sufficient, and earn enough money to get off the street and improve their living conditions. In order to better measure whether the homeless can enter a job through job training and earn money to escape from the homeless life, we will measure their success based on the following criteria:

4.1. Following up the Progress and Situation of Vocational Training

The first thing we will evaluate is how the trained homeless people feel about their training. We will then collect feedback from the trainers regarding each homeless person’s improvement to ensure that the vocational training was effective. With this data, we can determine whether the training was carried out effectively.

4.2. Determining whether There is a Mindset Change

We need to follow up to find out how the trained homeless people feel about the training: for example, whether the training was useful, whether they feel more motivated after the training, or whether they feel their attitude towards life has changed. Moreover, most of the homeless people we are looking for are young homeless people aged between 18 and 30. We need to ensure their satisfaction with their job and that they can truly accept it and have a change in their attitude towards life, so as to help them mentally get free from the vagabond life.

4.3. Criteria of Success

If the interviewed homeless people express their hope to start working or give positive feedback after job training, it proves that they could have the opportunity to work and escape from their homelessness. This will show that our group’s innovative action plan was successful [5].

Follow-up actions: if the follow-up shows that one or more homeless people can get a job, stick with the job long enough to support themselves financially, and finally escape the homeless status and return to society, we will consider promoting this approach or building a platform to help homeless people find jobs they are interested in more easily and ultimately return to society.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Nowadays, due to the uneven distribution of education and other resources, many young people have entered society but have not adapted to it, and some of them have started to go astray. However, the current measures for homeless groups are not perfect, and there are still many drawbacks: for example, there is no specific response to individuals; some of the homeless people feeling disheartened and become dependent on the assistance of the government and the charity.
of everyday citizens. So, we put forward this plan hoping to solve the vagrancy problem by tackling its root causes. We will provide training opportunities for people who lack a good quality of life, education, and work experience. This will allow them to gain the opportunity to work, to help them move from their current pattern of life, and escape from the margins of society to become more productive members of it.

This is not an easy job, but we have measures to deal with it. A potential problem that is likely to arise is that many vagrants are unable to access technology, which will prevent them from finding job opportunities. In order to solve this problem, we will put up posters to promote job opportunities in order to raise awareness and promote job opportunities through word of mouth. We hope that, with the help of caring people from all walks of life, we can deal with potential problems in the social assistance program.

Acknowledgments

The six authors work together and contribute equally in this paper.

References


