

The Security of Homeless Shelters In NYC

Jordan Liz
Eagle Academy for Young Men
NYU School of Medicine
Carlos Restrepo
Dr. Sat
Harlem Children Society

Table of Contents

Abstract ...	Page 1
Introduction ...	Page 2-3
Methods and Materials ...	Page 4
Results ...	Page 5
Conclusion ...	Page 6
Proposal ...	Page 7
Appendix ...	Page 9-10
References ...	Page 11
Acknowledgements ...	Page 12

Abstract

Many of the New York City homeless shelters are not fit to house a homeless person because of the high level of crime. The cause of the high crime in homeless shelters is due to their poor security. Although a large amount of crime occurs at the shelters, it is not the fault of the shelter employees because of the number of homeless people in a shelter is often too great compared to the number of workers in that same shelter. According to a report entitled "*NYPD To Assign Cops To City Homeless Shelters*", which aired on February 4, 2002 on channel seven Eyewitness News, in some shelters there are about a dozen security guards while there are approximately three hundred and fifty homeless people that are using that shelter as their temporary home. In other words, there are about thirty homeless people for every security officer. In order for security guards to provide adequate protection to the homeless, we believe this ratio has to change by adding more security guards to shelters.

We propose to create a program at shelters that increase the amount of security in shelters by adding more security guards as well as other devices, such as metal detectors, in order to make shelters safe to live in.

Introduction

Everyday, more and more people are living in the streets because they have nowhere to go. According to the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) survey carried out by the New York City Department of Homeless Services in 2005, there are 32,744 unsheltered individuals currently living on the streets, in parks, in encampments, under highways, in airports, and in the subway stations and trains in New York City (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml>). Shelters were developed to provide the means necessary in order for a homeless individual to sustain life.

While conditions in shelters seem to be worsening everyday according to our research, the number of homeless people in search for a place to stay is constantly rising. In 1999 approximately 48% of homeless people sought shelter (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml>). By 2005, that percentage increased to 56% according to the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (H.O.P.E.) survey (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml>). Homeless individuals and families are faced with the challenge of having to support themselves with little money. The only reasonable option would be to go to the shelters regardless of their condition. However many of these individuals prefer not to stay at a shelter as indicated by research, we believe this is due to poor security.

A large amount of crime occurs at shelters, although not to the fault of the shelter employees. For example, in some cases when a security guard attempts to stop a crime in progress, they are either badly injured or are killed in the process. According to Eyewitness News Channel report, which dealt with the security issue in shelters, in a local shelter in New York City they found “350 homeless men being supervised by fewer

than a dozen private, unarmed security guards, in what can be an intimidating environment”(http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/news/WABC_020402_shelterfolo.html).

According to this report, the homeless to security guard it about three hundred and fifty to twelve, this means that there are about thirty homeless people for every security guard in the shelter. The security guards are at too much of a disadvantage when dealing with a ratio such as that one.

The report entitled “*NYPD To Assign Cops To City Homeless Shelters*” by Eyewitness News exposes the terrible condition of shelters by placing two undercover cops to spend two nights at a local homeless shelter. Although they used two beds that could have been used by the homeless, they were able “to expose millions of New Yorkers to the reality of the shelters, which has the potential to actually transform the shelter system and bring thousands of people in off the streets and get them the help that they need”

(http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/news/WABC_020402_shelterfolo.html).

Another crime that this article talks about is the story of “a homeless woman named Terana Street was brutally murdered, first beaten with a blunt object and then thrown off a roof. Cops believe her killer is Clifton Goring, a 320-pound homeless man. The New York Daily News reported that the coroner could not determine if she died from the blows to her head before being thrown, or if smashing into the pavement killed her. Police say Ms. Street and Mr. Goring were arguing over a place to sleep”

(<http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=105001962>). If shelter would be a place where the homeless felt that they were safe, then this may not have occurred.

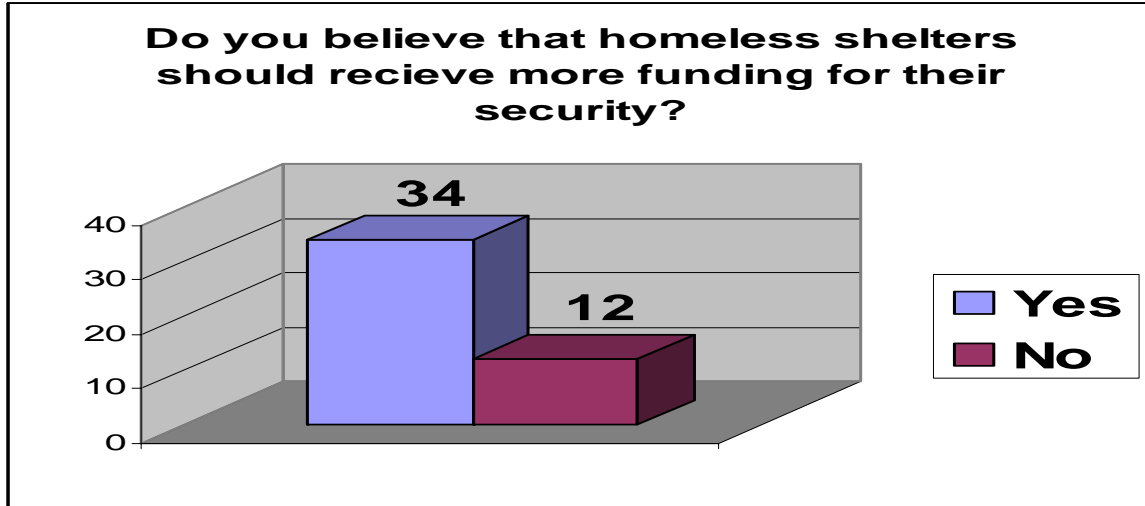
Methods and Materials

We decided to investigate shelters in NYC to learn more about the security of homeless shelters. We hypothesized that security in shelters are deficient and therefore make the shelter unsafe to live in making the homeless not want to stay in shelters. We created a survey that would help us test out our hypothesis. We distributed and collected forty-six surveys it to the Willow Shelter, located in the South Bronx.

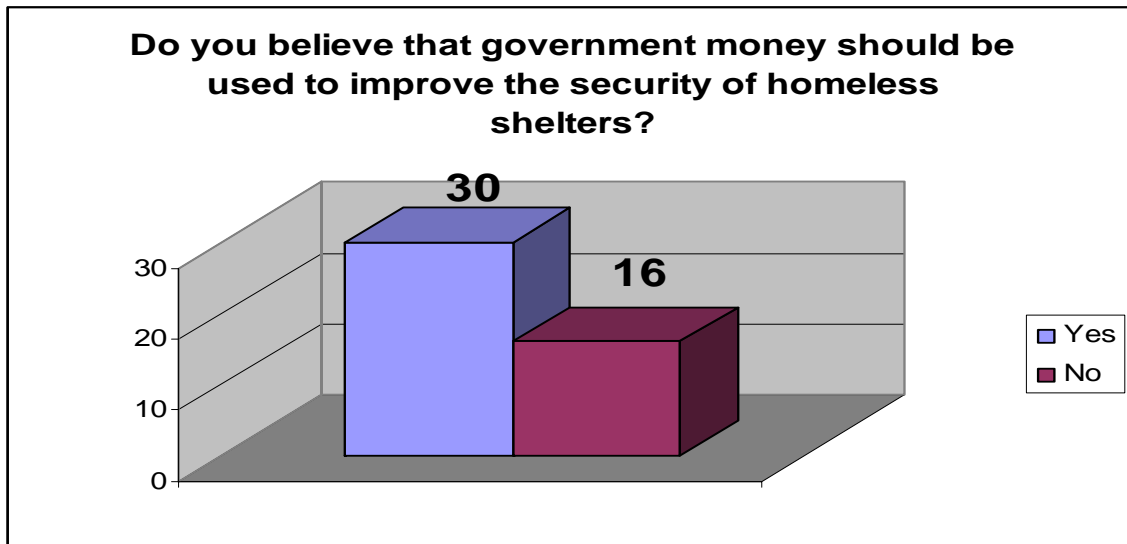
Another survey was developed to help compare the Willow Shelter with another shelter named Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council located in the South Bronx. Ten of these surveys were given out and collected.

Results

From the information gathered in our first survey, we concluded that our hypothesis was, in fact, correct.



Workers of the Willow Shelter have significantly indicated that they feel that shelters should be given more money from the government to increase security. They feel that the government should realize the magnitude of the security issue in shelters.



This graph shows that the workers of the shelter feel that more money should be given to shelters in order to improve security.

Conclusion

Our survey provided us with some information that support our hypothesis, which is that homeless shelters are lacking in security, but the data found was not enough to fully support our claim. We surveyed Willow Shelter and found a lack of proper security. Most of the surveys provided us with identical information because we only surveyed one shelter. We found that this shelter did not have metal detectors or an age limit for security guards

My partner and I created a follow up survey that we gave out to both the Willow Shelter as well as the Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council. The purpose of this survey is to check up on the Willow Shelter as well as compare it to the Strycker's Bay Neighborhood Council. This helped support our claim and strengthen our argument.

The second survey is conducted to help further support our hypothesis by analyzing the security of shelters in a more critical manner. From this survey, we were able to gather enough information to strongly support our claim as well as provide enough information to strongly support that it is correct.

After we gave out this follow up survey, we combined it with the information gathered from our first survey. The combined data was enough to strongly support our hypothesis.

We have concluded that our hypothesis is correct proving that homeless shelters are unsafe and therefore must change in order to provide the homeless with a safe place to stay. Shelters are supposed to be a place where the homeless can use as a temporarily home so that they are not forced to live in the streets but because of there poor security, shelters will never be able to provide the homeless with such a place.

Proposal

The security of shelters has always been a serious issue that has not been given much attention by the government recently. Homeless people go through an extremely difficult time while living in the cold unforgiving streets of New York City. Their only choices are the unsafe shelters or the harsh streets. Homeless people know that in the streets they have little protection but would rather remain there, than even consider spending a night in a shelter. Our surveys provide us with data that proves that most of the workers in local shelters feel that security is an issue of high priority. The program that my group is proposing, Faith for the Streets (F.F.S.), will help improve the security of shelters by training the current security guards as well as hiring guards that are better suited to work in a shelter. From the data we collected, we gathered that the homeless to security guard ratio places the security guards at a great disadvantage. Due to this, we must place more security guards in shelter in order to stabilize the ratio. This program will only be able to work if the community, local police force, as well as outside organizations are willing to help. The program will run in every shelter and will stop working in a shelter if that specific shelter has achieved a sufficient level of security.

Appendix

Survey distributed to the Willow Shelter, South Bronx

1) Do you believe that the security in homeless shelters is adequate?

Yes

No

2) Do you believe that homeless shelters should be improved?

Yes

No

3) Do you believe that homeless shelters should receive more funding for their security?

Yes

No

4a) Is there an age limit for security officers?

Yes

No

4b) If so, what is it? Circle all that apply!

20-30 years

31-40 years

41-50 years

51-60 years

60+ years

5) Are there metal detectors?

Yes

No

6) Are they required to have a physical?

Yes

No

7) Did the security officers have prior training?

Yes

No

8) Do you believe that government money should be used to improve the security of homeless shelters?

Yes

No

Survey distributed to the Strykers Shelter, South Bronx

1) How much money is allocated for shelter security in NYC?

2) What is the population: security ratio?

3) What causes crime in shelters and the lack of security?

4) What are some statistics/cases of individuals that experienced crime while in a NYC shelter?

5) What is the current state of security in shelters?

6) Do you believe that the homeless people that are currently residing in the shelters are involved in any form of crime outside of the shelter?

References

1) Youth Service Opportunities Project
-Homelessness

<http://www.ysop.org/statistics.htm>

2) NYC Department of Homeless Services
-Statistics

-- Homeless Outreach Population Estimate 2003, 2004, and 2005

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml>

3) World Socialist Web Site

-“Nearly half of New York City’s homeless are children”

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/jan2004/nyc-j07.shtml>

4) Coalition for the Homeless

http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/advocacy/basic_facts.html

5) National Coalition for the Homeless

- Facts about Homelessness

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

6) Eyewitness News Article: “*NYPD To Assign Cops To City Homeless Shelters*”

- Eyewitness News

http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/news/WABC_020402_shelterfolo.html

7) Opinion Journal Article: “Street Crime”

- Brendan Minter

<http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=105001962>

8) Survey

- Jordan Liz

Gabriell Copeland

Acknowledgements

- 1) Dr. Sat
- 2) Carlos Restrepo
- 3) NYU School of Medicine
- 4) Harlem Children Society
- 5) Alicia, Shannon, Varun, and Gabo
- 6) Gabriell Copeland