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RESEARCH ARTICLE **Open Access**

LEVERAGING RURAL AREAS & EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURAL & NON-AGRICULTURAL SECTORS TO ERADICATE HOMELESSNESS IN USA: A STUDY OF RURAL, SUBURBAN, AND URBAN CoCs INCLUDING A MAJOR CITY CoC

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Abstract
The study aims to explore the potential of using rural areas to develop strategies to end homelessness, including job creation initiatives, by examining the relationships between homelessness, urban and rural areas, and unemployment rates. Using descriptive analysis; histograms, summary tables, and regression analysis, the research finds a lower incidence of homelessness in rural areas. Regression results indicate that homelessness increases by 1294 individuals in urban areas but decreases by 402 individuals in rural areas per unit increase in the count of rural areas. Additionally, homelessness increases by 202 individuals for every unit increase in the unemployment rate. ANCOVA testing confirms the significant impact of Area Category (<0.001) on homelessness, with unemployment rates being lowest and highest in Largely Rural areas among the sampled locations.

Keywords Homelessness, Welfare Policies, Employment, Rural, Urban
JEL Codes: D63, H12, I3, J21

INTRODUCTION

The housing crisis in the United States, particularly in the District of Columbia, presents multifaceted challenges that extend beyond affordability, affecting over 82,000 residents, constituting 12% of the city's population (Solari, Lo, Rashid, & Bond, 2023). This issue transcends conventional definitions of homelessness, encompassing a spectrum of challenges such as unaffordability, inadequate living conditions, and involuntary relocations. As disparities along racial lines overlap with socioeconomic factors, understanding the intricate details of housing insecurity becomes imperative for effective policymaking and resource allocation.

To comprehensively address the housing crisis, research conducted by the Urban Institute and The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness adopted a survey methodology. This methodology, developed in collaboration with stakeholders and informed by focus groups, aims to capture the nuanced manifestations of housing insecurity. Over a dozen metrics, including housing affordability, living conditions, and mobility patterns, are utilized to categorize respondents meeting predetermined criteria to be considered as experiencing housing insecurity, ensuring a holistic

assessment of the issue. The studies reveal a staggering prevalence of housing insecurity in Washington D.C., disproportionately affecting Black and Hispanic households, comprising 68% and 14% of the housing insecure population, respectively (Solari et al, 2023).

The findings of the studies reveal the need for targeted interventions to address the diverse dimensions of housing insecurity. While subsidies such as rental assistance offer relief to financially burdened households, other forms of instability necessitate tailored interventions, including landlord mediations and housing quality improvements. Moreover, the research highlights the interconnectedness of housing insecurity with broader socio-economic challenges, necessitating a holistic policy approach.

Therefore, this paper intends to create a broader solution to homelessness in the United States by using the rural areas as a leverage to resolve housing problems. The objective is not to deny the occurrence of homelessness in rural areas, but rather to demonstrate their comparatively lower incidence rate. Consequently, rural areas could potentially serve as a foundation for crafting and implementing more targeted remedial strategies by including job creation in such strategies.

Hence, it is necessary to understand the level of homelessness and job availability in the rural areas. For instance, a current report on employment reveals that rural America, despite adding over 200,000 jobs in 2022 (Melotte, 2023), still lags behind pre-pandemic employment levels. employment grew by 1% in September 2023 compared to 2022, reaching 20.4 million jobs. Urban counties have outpaced rural areas in employment recovery, with urban employment growing by 2% compared to a 0.31% decrease in rural areas, as of September 2023. Only 43% of rural counties have returned to pre-pandemic or better employment levels, while about two-thirds of urban counties have achieved this milestone (Melotte, 2023). Other highlighted underlying issues to be addressed are inadequate childcare infrastructure, support services, and education initiatives to enhance economic resilience and create job opportunities outside urban areas.

As the United States, especially the District of Columbia, grapples with a high level of homelessness, understanding the trends in rural employment becomes crucial for devising effective strategies to address housing insecurity in the nation, if rural areas should be central in the designed solution.

In conclusion, the objective of this research is to determine if housing insecurity in the United States especially in urban areas with a high concentration of homeless individuals can be resolved by leveraging rural areas and employment opportunities within such areas to devise a strategy for addressing housing demand pressure and promoting economic equity. It is important to note that the type of sampled locations in this study were determined based on the designation of the Continuum of Care (CoC) program organized by the US Department of Housing and Development (HUD), details provided under subheading “sources of data”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

William Alexander indicates that the idea of relocating unhoused individuals is not a new idea and in fact, have been a common suggestion. He sarcastically stated that:

There is a sentimentalism in America about "the country" as a place to live. Fresh air, in the minds of many of our people, particularly city people, is thought of as a satisfactory substitute for a living wage, decent income, wholesome food, medical care, educational opportunities, and everything else which city

dwellers think of as necessary, even a decent roof over their heads. Many city people think that the unemployed can be taken care of by moving them to the country, where they will live like the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air, without taking thought and, what is better, without anybody else having to take thought for them (Alexander, 1939).

In essence, he highlighted that housing problems do exist in rural areas as well, in the form of slums scattered widely across farming lands. However, it is important to determine if this assertion still holds true. A more recent publication on living conditions in rural US is a study by Yousey & Samudra (2018) which emphasizes on the pervasive nature of homelessness in the United States, with 553,742 individuals reported as homeless in 2017, marking a slight increase from the previous year. This equates to 17 people per 10,000 being homeless nationally, emphasizing the scale of the issue. Notably, rural homelessness fluctuated between 13-17% from 2007-2017, indicating a significant proportion of homeless individuals residing in rural areas compared to the total count. Moreover, the doubling of homeless students in public schools from 2006-2007 to 2013-2014, reaching approximately 1.3 million, highlights the alarming impact of homelessness on youth education.

Additionally, the authors reiterated the points made by Alexander Will by reporting that scholars have raised concerns about the urban-centric focus of homelessness research, urging attention to the distinct challenges faced in rural areas. Moreover, they mentioned that the HEARTH Act's expansion of the "at risk of homelessness" definition to include individuals living in precarious housing situations acknowledges the unique vulnerabilities experienced in rural communities, previously overlooked by some federal agencies. The findings emphasize on the need for comprehensive approaches that address both urban and rural homelessness, recognizing the diverse realities of poverty and housing insecurity across different geographic contexts.

Furthermore, the data released in 2022 by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), indicate that California, Vermont, and Oregon have the highest rates of homelessness among all the 50 states besides Washington, DC which had the highest rate in the whole of USA at 65.6 per 10,000 people. On the other hand, Mississippi is ranked the lowest at the rate of 4.1 per 10,000 people. In numbers, California is ranked the highest in the US with 171,521 homeless people in the state while New York is rated second in the nation with 74,178 homeless people, and the third state is Florida which had 25,959 homeless people as of 2022 (Solari, Lo, Rashid, & Bond, 2023).

Nevertheless, the data shows that homelessness is not an occurrence limited to urban areas because most states that are largely rural such as Vermont is also inhabited by homeless people, as a matter of fact, 65% of the population reside in rural areas, and has highest rates of rural homelessness in 2022 (Solari, Lo, Rashid, & Bond, 2023).

Lastly, in 1999 a National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) was conducted to gather updated information about homeless assistance services and the characteristics of homeless clients by comparing homeless clients from central city, suburban, and rural areas. It aimed to aid federal agencies responsible for administering homeless assistance programs and other interested parties. While the data cover the entire nation, the survey was not intended to produce a count or estimate of the total number of homeless individuals.

Findings from the survey reveal that a significant majority of homeless clients, 71 percent, were

interviewed in central cities, with smaller percentages in suburban (21 percent) and rural (9 percent) areas. This distribution contrasts with the residential patterns of all poor Americans, with 43 percent living in central cities, 34 percent in suburban and urban fringe areas, and 23 percent in rural areas. Further analysis shows that homeless clients from different areas exhibit distinct demographic characteristics. For instance, homeless suburban clients have a higher proportion of females, while homeless rural clients include more Native Americans, individuals aged 35 to 44, and high school dropouts, and fewer black non-Hispanic clients.

Additionally, a greater percentage of central city clients report residing in unsuitable living conditions compared to suburban clients. Central city clients are also more likely to have utilized soup kitchens and drop-in centers than clients from suburban and rural areas.

Furthermore, central city clients tend to have lower incomes compared to other homeless clients, with a median income of $250, while suburban and rural clients have higher median incomes of $395 and $475, respectively. Additionally, a higher percentage of central city clients report no income over the last 30 days compared to clients from other areas (OPDR, 1999).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is not to assert that homelessness does not occur in rural areas but to prove that rural areas have a lower rate of homelessness and hence, could serve as a springboard for designing and executing more strategic remedial plans.

In accordance with the viewpoint of this study, some papers postulate that one of the factors responsible for homelessness is high cost of rent among other factors. Therefore, establishing housing programs or initiatives and employment opportunities in the rural areas where rents are typically lower might be a more reasonable strategy and cost-effective approach to alleviate homelessness. For instance, Early (2005) studied the factors influencing street homelessness by creating and analyzing a model that tracks the sequence of events leading to street homelessness. The findings suggest that the likelihood of homelessness is elevated for households with children, when the head of the household struggles with alcohol or illicit drugs, in regions where the cost of renting the cheapest available housing is high, and for households headed by younger individuals. Moreover, among homeless households, those headed by nonwhite individuals with children were notably less likely to be living on the streets.

Furthermore, according to Pleace (2016), comparative analysis has shed light on structural factors; economic systems play an active role in fostering inequity such as barriers to accessing welfare, health, and housing services, along with insufficient homelessness services, all play a role as contributing factors. Particularly in recent research from Denmark, which contrasts outcomes with those in the USA. The research suggests that the characteristics of homelessness can vary significantly in countries with vastly different welfare systems. In Denmark, homelessness primarily linked to poverty appears to be uncommon, in stark contrast to the situation in the USA (Benjaminsen, 2016). Also, existing services were found to be ineffective in bringing some individuals out of homelessness, a trend observed not only in EU Member States but also in the USA (Sahlin, 2005).

Existing Housing Programs and Initiatives

Several initiatives have been designed to address rural housing problems across all cities in the US. According to (Kimura, 2021), in rural America, the pressing need for affordable housing is garnering increasing attention, prompting developers to address the housing requirements of diverse groups

including homeless individuals, families, and agricultural workers. Kimura's article highlights the proactive initiatives of organizations like Self-Help Enterprises, which spearheaded the development of Sequoia Commons in Goshen, California, offering 126 affordable homes, including 22 units designated for individuals transitioning out of homelessness. This signifies a notable shift in community development strategies, wherein there is a concerted effort to incorporate permanent supportive housing (PSH) units into developments to cater to evolving regional needs.

The article also emphasized on the misconception that homelessness is exclusively an urban issue, providing statistics indicating a significant surge in rural homelessness, exemplified by a 22% increase in Tulare County, California, between 2019 and 2020. Despite the relatively lower housing costs in rural areas, residents often grapple with rent burden due to meager incomes. Moreover, the rural homelessness crisis extends beyond single individuals, with homeless student populations experiencing the highest growth rates. Nonetheless, rural homelessness tends to remain largely "hidden," complicating resource allocation efforts. To tackle these challenges, developers are tapping into diverse funding sources such as federal and state low-income housing tax credits (LIHTCs) and the Federal Home Loan Bank's Affordable Housing Program to finance pivotal projects like Sequoia Commons and Finca Serena in Porterville, California.

Other literature on housing programs includes works by authors like Olsen (2001) who conducted research on housing subsidies offered to low-income households in the United States and highlighted that this sector of welfare programs has the highest allocation compared to feeding and other parts of the welfare system but that research to evaluate the effect of government expenditure is scarce. According to the report, the largest rental programs are the HUD's Public Housing and IRS's Low Income Housing Tax Credit, stating that several cost-effectiveness analyses of housing programs are centered around ratio of present value of cost to present value of market rent and the program with the highest value is Public Housing in Pittsburg at 2.20 from the study conducted by Mayor et al (1980).

However, all similar studies conducted by Wallace et al (1981), Olsen and Barton (1983), and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1974) unanimously concluded that it costs significantly more than one dollar to provide housing worth one dollar under construction programs like Public Housing, Section 236, and Section 8 New Construction. Research on housing certificates and vouchers reveals that the total costs of these programs exceed the market rents of the units by roughly the same amount as the administrative expenses. Excluding administrative costs, the earliest studies show excess costs of public housing ranging from 10 to 17 percent, while more recent ones indicate a range of 65 to 106 percent. The estimated excess cost range for Section 236 is 33 to 87 percent, and for Section 8 New Construction/Substantial Rehabilitation, it is between 30 to 40 percent.

In summary, housing subsidy programs developed for low-income households from 1937-1998 are listed on Table 1 showing the agencies that administered the programs and the column with the heading "ownership" shows if the houses belong to the government or to private individuals.

Table 1. System of Housing Program History

Year	Program	Agency	Type	Ownership

1937	Public Housing	HUD	Rental	Publicly Owned
1949	S502	USDA	Homeownership	
1954	S221(d)(3) MIR	HUD	Rental	Privately Owned
1959	S202	HUD	Rental	Privately Owned
1961	S221(d)(3) BMIR	HUD	Rental	Privately Owned
1962	S515	USDA	Rental	Privately Owned
1965	Rent Supplements	HUD	Rental	Extra Subsidy to Private Projects
1965	S23	HUD	Rental	Leasing Existing Units for Public Housing Tenants
1968	S235	HUD	Homeownership	
1968	S236	HUD	Rental	Privately Owned
1969	Modernization Subsidies for Public Housing			
1969	Rents in Public Housing Limited to 25% of Income			
1970	Substantial Operating Subsidies for Public Housing			
1974	S8 Existing	HUD	Rental	Tenant-Based
1974	S8 New Construction/Substantial Rehab	HUD	Rental	Privately Owned
1975	Operating Subsidies for Public Housing (Performance Funding System)			
1976	Operating Subsidies for Privately-Owned Projects (LMSA & PD)			
1979	Modernization Subsidies for Privately Owned Projects (Flexible Subsidy)			
1983	Housing Voucher Demonstration	HUD	Rental	Tenant-Based
1986	Low Income Housing Tax Credit	IRS	Rental	
1990	HOME	HUD	Rental and Homeownership	Block Grants to States and Localities
1998	New Voucher Program	HUD	Rental	Tenant-Based

Source: Content of table is an excerpt from Housing Programs for Low Income Housing Households by Olsen (2001).

Other and more recent initiatives such as the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) are working towards ensuring equitable access to affordable housing resources for rural communities through programs like the rural affordable housing workforce housing program in Wisconsin (WHEDA, 2024). Several innovative models such as the Casa OMICA in Miami-Dade County, Florida, are addressing the unique housing needs of agricultural workers by providing shared housing arrangements (FHDC, 2024). Also, Mia Casa, which Miami-Dade County acquired through the Homeless Trust, houses 120 older adults who are homeless and aged 65 or older and finding permanent housing in the community as of March 31, 2023 (Homeless Trust, 2024).

It can be deduced from these examples that the significance of collaborative endeavors among developers, policymakers, and community organizations are indispensable in crafting tailored affordable housing solutions to meet the diverse needs of rural populations and could serve as a foundation to strategize the provision of more housing in rural areas to reduce urban homelessness.

Furthermore, the 2024 report by the Housing Assistance Council stated that in rural areas, homelessness presents unique challenges, with individuals often living in vehicles, couch surfing, or facing severe

overcrowding, leading to undercounting in federal estimates. Despite this, recent data shows a significant increase in homelessness, particularly in rural areas, with over 43% being unsheltered. The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) advocates for tailored resources like the Department of Housing and Urban Development Special NOFO in 2022 to address rural homelessness effectively. Additionally, homelessness intersects with substance abuse, mental health issues, and chronic conditions, posing additional hurdles to stable housing. Customized funding is necessary for rural communities to provide essential, evidence-based support services and treatment to residents facing these complex challenges (HAC, 2024).

Additionally, "Everyone Home DC is an initiative that provides Family Rapid Re-Housing, it is a program aimed at swiftly transitioning homeless families to permanent housing. The program offers short-term rental and utility assistance, along with case management, employment preparation, affordable housing search support, and various other services tailored to each family's needs. In 2022, the program supported 81 families, comprising 83 adults and 130 children, facilitating their transition out of homelessness. Referrals to the program are made through The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, and assistance can be accessed at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (Everyone Home DC, 2024).

The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program which aims to foster a collective community effort towards eradicating homelessness is relevant to the methodology applied in this study as the program provides a large database of homelessness counts. Its objectives include providing financial support for non-profit organizations, states, Indian tribes or tribally designated housing entities (as defined in section 4 of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996), and local governments to swiftly rehouse homeless individuals, families, individuals escaping domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, as well as youth. This is done with the aim of reducing the trauma and upheaval associated with homelessness. Additionally, the program seeks to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of mainstream programs for homeless individuals and families, while also promoting self-sufficiency among those experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2024).

In the District of Columbia, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offer low rental assistance programs to low-income individuals and families in the District of Columbia. These programs consist of already existing programs such as subsidized apartments, public housing, and Housing 6Choice Vouchers and HUD provides resources such as housing counseling agencies, utility bill assistance, and information on tenant rights and protections (HUD, 2024). Regardless, the DC has a high concentration of homeless individuals.

Despite the ongoing efforts, certain challenges hinder the advancement of the housing programs. For instance, in spite of the burden of homelessness on the state, on October 2023, the National Park Service (NPS) announced its plan to clear a homeless encampment at McPherson Square in Washington, D.C., due to safety concerns and rising crime. Despite opposition from advocates and local officials, NPS intends to proceed with the eviction. Homeless advocates argue that the action contradicts President Biden's efforts to end homelessness and have called on Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to intervene. Critics claim that NPS's approach exacerbates homelessness and fails to address root causes. The closure highlights broader challenges in managing homelessness in urban areas and raises questions about the role of federal agencies in addressing social issues (NHLC, 2024).

In conclusion, a one size fits all solution is unlikely to have a desired outcome, rather, it is imperative to devise new strategies for more lasting result.

The State of Rural Employment and Opportunities

Regarding the opportunities currently available in rural areas, Schindelheim (2024) emphasizes on the current workforce dynamics within rural areas stressing that it is imperative to allocate resources towards training individuals for available jobs and enhancing awareness of employment opportunities within rural communities especially because of the demographic shifts characterized by an aging populace and the migration of younger individuals away from rural areas.

Nevertheless, rural regions have experienced an influx of residents during and after the pandemic between 2020 and 2022 representing a departure from previous trends of sluggish growth. Presently, approximately 14% of the total U.S. population, equating to around 46 million individuals, resides in rural locales (USDA, 2023). However, despite this demographic upsurge, rural workers continue to confront challenges such as job automation and inadequate internet connectivity, impeding their ability to engage in online work. However, Ongoing efforts to the address the identified employment problems are being propelled by the Center on Rural Innovation, established in 2017, and it endeavors to cultivate tech economies in rural regions by supporting tech startups and generating innovation-centered employment opportunities.

According to a fact sheet released by The White House in 2022, to propel the growth of tech hubs, the federal government is injecting billions into the national economy via the bipartisan 2022 CHIPS and Science Act, aimed at amplifying semiconductor production to benefit rural areas. Concurrently, efforts are being escalated to ensure high-speed, reliable internet access across all rural areas. Furthermore, investments are being directed towards infrastructure development to foster job creation, notably in clean energy sectors like wind, solar, and biofuels. A recent infusion of $5 billion seeks to catalyze economic progress in rural communities through diverse initiatives encompassing infrastructure enhancements and the adoption of "climate-smart" agricultural practices (The White House, 2022).

The U.S. Department of Labor's Employment Training Administration, under Manny Lamarre's leadership, prioritizes equipping the rural workforce with skills for local, sustainable employment. Lamarre highlights the Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) grants, targeting regions like the Appalachian, Lower Mississippi Delta, and Northern Border areas to address historic inequities and create career pathways. Since 2019, over $166 million has been invested in training, apprenticeships, and services, aligning with national strategies like the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the Chips and Science Act. Mark White, academics such as a clinical associate professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, suggests investing in local training and raising awareness of job opportunities to address demographic shifts. Initiatives like Missouri's apprenticeships and programs such as The Thomas Jefferson University Physician Shortage Area Program aim to retain talent in rural areas (Schindelheim, 2024).

Furthermore, the Rural Innovation Network, spearheaded by the Center on Rural Innovation, endeavors to develop tech economies, and create jobs across rural America. Through pilot programs in job training for roles like web developers and cybersecurity specialists, the network aims to match skills training with employer demands. Overall, these efforts represent a pivotal moment in recognizing and addressing the

workforce dynamics in rural America, aiming to foster economic growth and competitiveness beyond urban center.

We need to determine if ongoing employment initiatives in rural areas ought to be broadened with the goal of targeting the problem of homelessness.

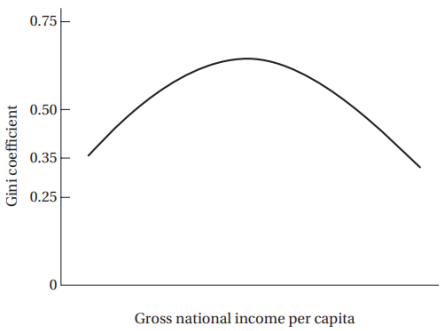
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Kuznets and Lewis proponed the most related theories about rural and urban dynamics in relation to development as it pertains to the topic of this study such that early growth may be focused in the modern industrial sector, as described by the Lewis model, where employment opportunities are limited but wages and productivity are high. The model primarily focuses on the process of labor migration from rural to urban areas and the concurrent growth of output and employment in the modern sector. Both labor migration and the growth of employment in the modern sector are driven by the expansion of output within that sector. The pace of this expansion is dictated by the rate of industrial investment and capital accumulation in the modern sector. Such investment is made feasible by the surplus of profits over wages in the modern sector, assuming that capitalists reinvest all profits.

Additionally, Lewis posited that wages in the urban industrial sector remained constant, set as a predetermined premium over a fixed average subsistence wage in the traditional agricultural sector. At this constant urban wage, the supply curve of rural labor to the modern sector is considered to be perfectly elastic.

Simon Kuznets proposed that during the initial phases of economic development, income distribution tends to deteriorate, with improvement occurring only in later stages. This concept became known as the "inverted-U" Kuznets curve, as depicted by longitudinal plots of changes in income distribution, such as those measured by the Gini coefficient. These plots appeared to follow an inverted U-shaped curve as per capita Gross National Income (GNI) increased, based on Kuznets' studies. The changes in the income distribution might be related to the initial growth stage in Lewis model. Kuznets had two similar explanations for this historical phenomenon: workers migrated from agriculture to industry and rural workers moved to urban jobs. Criticism of the Kuznets curve based on calculations of GNI per capita and Gini coefficients of several countries including USA, Ethiopia, Asian and Latin American countries contradict the proposition of Kuznet as these countries have varying level of inequality regardless of the GNI per capita (income).

Figure. 1. Kuznets Curve



METHODOLOGY

Based on already established findings, the identified conditions of homeless people in the United States are intersected with substance abuse, mental health issues, and chronic conditions. A general profile is that a majority face housing instability, unaffordability, inadequate living conditions, and involuntary relocations. These general problems apparently boil down to the problem of income and will be targeted accordingly in this chapter. Hence, we must have a background knowledge about these individuals, their educational and occupational status, and the possibility of moving into new types of employment to test the hypothesis that the absence of employment opportunities and programs in urban areas contribute to homelessness and that if arrangements are made to encourage homeless people to settle in rural areas, they will henceforth find more employment opportunities and earn sufficient incomes.

In reference to projects that have been implemented in rural areas where the WORC projects have been initiated since 2019 by the Department of Labor and more than $80.7 million have been invested in 62 projects within the Appalachian regions alone with the specific aim of preparing displaced workers for new opportunities in 288 Appalachian counties. A projection to provide more than 18,334 workers with new or enhanced jobs in healthcare, information technology, construction, and manufacturing across the Appalachian Region. When the rural areas in Delta region and the Northern Border Areas are taken into account, a total value of $165,116,693 have been expended on the project from 2019 to 2023, only the northern border areas were excluded between 2019 and 2022.

Therefore, to conduct the empirical study, the rural and urban counties were selected in the Appalachian region and Delta region along with the District of Columbia to determine the relationships and association among the size of the areas, homelessness, and unemployment rate by running Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and regression analysis on the data in 2019 to 2023. Additionally, a descriptive analysis is presented to understand the age distribution of homeless people among the counties.

Based on the propositions of Kuznets curve, a combination of factors that cause growth and eventually reduce inequality are migration of labor to urban areas, employment, and output.

$$\text{Inequality} = f(\text{migration to urban areas, employment, output}) \quad (1)$$

To test the hypothesis of this study and in relation to the subjects of study in the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, which compared homeless individuals from central city, suburban, and rural areas. Let us replace the variables in equation 1; inequality with homelessness, unemployment replaces employment and the type of area represents if it is an urban area, suburban or rural area in the mathematical model presented in equation 2 that illustrates the dependent and independent variables to determine the relationship among them by running the analytical test on SPSS.

$$\text{Homelessness} = f(\text{type of area, unemployment rate}) \quad (2)$$

Sources of Data

The data on the count of Overall Homeless, Overall Homeless - Under 18, Overall Homeless - Age 18 to 24, Overall Homeless - Over 24 within the rural, suburban, and Major city CoCs in the US from year 2019 to 2023 were obtained from the database of the Office of Policy Development and Research in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report: 2007 - 2023 Housing Inventory Count by CoC, URL: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/xls/2007-2023-PIT-Counts-by-CoC.xlsb

Data on average unemployment were calculated based on the unemployment rates in counties in the year

2019-2023 obtained from the US Bureau of Labor statistics,

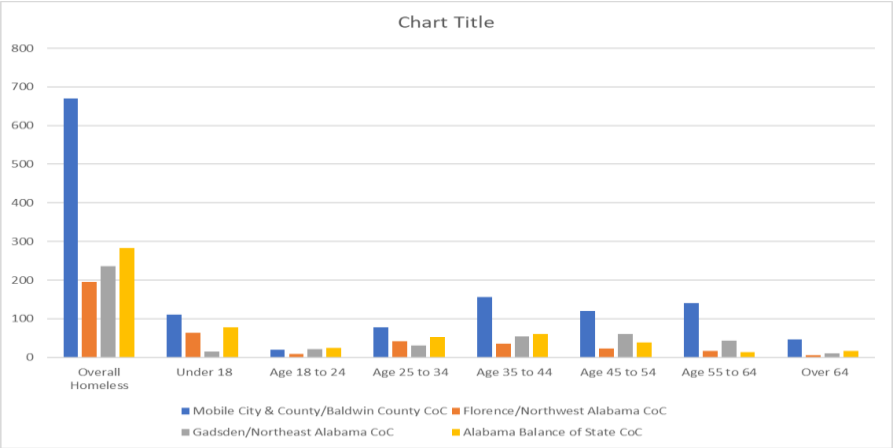
URL: https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet, Rural areas were identified with the help of a list compiled by the US department of Housing and Urban Development, , URL:https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/CPD/documents/CoC/Unsheltered-and-Rural-Homelessness-NOFO-FR-6500-B.pdf.

The categories of geographical areas were also specified in the database of the Office of Policy Development and Research in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report: 2007 - 2023 Housing Inventory Count by CoC.

Descriptive Statistics of Homelesssness According to Age Classification

The ages of homeless individuals in the graphs range from under 18 to above 64 years among various urban and rural counties in the selected states.

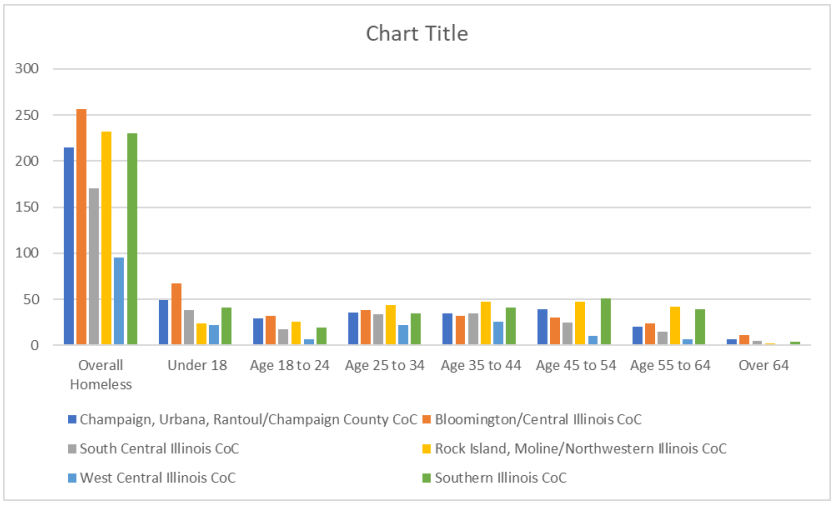
Figure 2. Geographical Areas and Age Categories of Homeless Individuals in Alabama State



Note. The graph shows the cities with the highest to the lowest number of young to older individuals in rural and urban counties within the state of Alabama. Data source: Office of Policy Development and Research. Annual Homeless Assessment Report.

In Figure 2, the prevalence of homelessness is most pronounced in Mobile city and Baldwin County CoC, which is rated "Other Largely Urban CoC" as revealed in a comprehensive report issued by CoC detailing the main outcomes of the January 2023 Point-In-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC). The report entails the national, state, and CoC-level estimates of homelessness for 2023, along with figures pertaining to chronically homeless individuals, homeless veterans, and homeless children and youth.

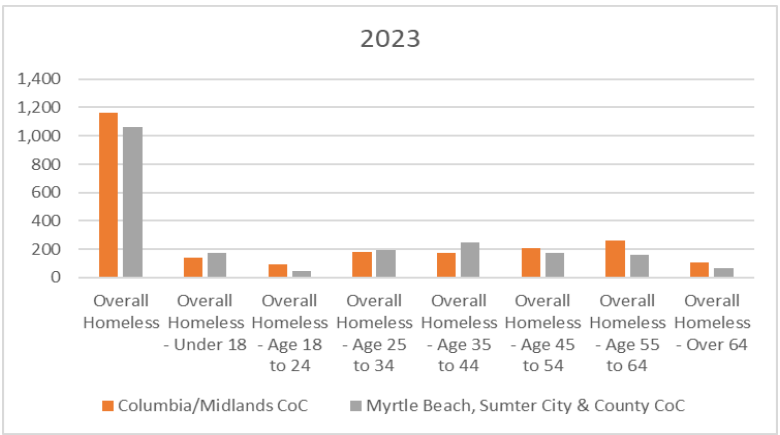
Figure 3. Geographical Areas and Age Categories of Homeless Individuals in Illinois State



Note. The graph shows the cities with the highest to the lowest number of young to older individuals in rural and urban counties within the state of Illinois. Data source: Office of Policy Development and Research. Annual Homeless Assessment Report.

In Figure 3, overall homelessness occurred in Bloomington/Central Illinois CoC which is rated as "Largely Urban CoC" in the same January 2023 Point-In-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) as mentioned in Figure 1.

Figure 4. Geographical Areas and Age Categories of Homeless Individuals in South Carolina State



Note. The graph shows the cities with the highest to the lowest number of young to older individuals in rural and suburban counties within the state of Illinois. Data source: Office of Policy Development and Research. Annual Homeless Assessment Report.

In Figure 4, overall homelessness occurred in Columbia/Midlands CoC which is rated as "Largely Suburban CoC" in the same January 2023 Point-In-Time (PIT) count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) as mentioned in Figure 2.

From the graphs, it appears to be a trend of higher levels of homelessness in the urban CoCs. Nevertheless, a conclusion cannot be made based on these indications which seem to imply that the level of homelessness in each city or county is determined by the geographical classification of an area.

To run further descriptive analysis, data on the numbers of homeless people in the CoCs listed below were compiled from 2019 to 2023.

Champaign, Urbana, Rantoul/Champaign County CoC, Bloomington/Central Illinois CoC, Mobile City & County/Baldwin County CoC, Florence/Northwest Alabama CoC, Alabama Balance of State CoC, Columbia/Midlands CoC, Myrtle Beach, Sumter City & County CoC, West Central Illinois CoC, Jackson/Rankin, Madison Counties CoC, Mississippi Balance of State CoC, Gulf Port/Gulf Coast Regional CoC, and District of Columbia CoC.

Table 2. Summary of Range, Minimum, and Maximum values

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall Homeless	6453	68	6521	850.52	1486.903
Overall Homeless - Under 18	1606	0	1606	155.47	299.565
Overall Homeless - Age 18 to 24	774	2	776	96.73	187.658
Overall Homeless - Over 24	4378	22	4400	484.87	902.755
Average Unemployment Rate	6.3560	2.4670	8.8230	4.744417	1.6089302

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

Table 2 is a descriptive analysis result showing the range of overall homelessness in the listed counties and it shows that the range (the difference between the highest and lowest value in the compiled data) has a value of 6453 which indicates a wide gap of homelessness among the various CoCs. The maximum value is 6521 and is the total count of homeless individuals in the District of Columbia in 2019. The minimum value is the lowest count of all homeless individuals (68) and this count belongs to West Central Illinois CoC in 2019 while in the year 2020, among the category of age 18 to 24, the CoC had the lowest count.

Among individuals below the age of 18, the maximum count belongs to a major city CoC –the District of Columbia in 2019 at a count of 1606 but the total count is lowest (minimum) in Florence/Northwest Alabama CoC, a largely rural CoC at 0 and this means there was no homeless individual under the age of 18 in the CoC in 2021, among those between the ages of 18 to 24, the lowest count belongs to the same CoC but in the same year. The highest count (maximum value of 776) within this category belongs to Columbia/Midlands CoC in 2022, and the CoC is rated as largely suburban.

Individuals over the age of 24 have the highest count in the District of Columbia within the year 2020 while the lowest count belong to Gulf Port/Gulf Coast Regional CoC – a largely rural CoC in 2021.

From these indications, homelessness is more prevalent in urban counties or cities across all categories of age and overall count of homelessness.

The figures for average unemployment rate show that the lowest is 2.4670 in percentage value and it belongs to Florence/Northwest Alabama CoC – a Largely Rural CoC in the year 2023. The maximum value of average unemployment rate is 8.8230 in percentage value and happens to belong to Mississippi Balance of State CoC – a Largely Rural CoC as well in the year 2020.

Regression Analysis

To run a regression analysis on IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.2.0 with the aim of determining the relationship among the variables, the econometric model in equation 2 depicts the dependent variable which is the Overall Homelessness, then the independent (explanatory) variables starting with D2 which is a dummy variable and it represents the CoCs, where Urban Areas = 1, Non-Urban Areas = 0. Likewise, the variable D3 is a dummy variable that represents the CoCs, where Rural Areas = 1, Non-Rural Areas = 0. Since there is an intercept, the dummy variables only have two (2) categories to avoid perfect collinearity among the variables even though the CoCs have 3 categories (Major City/Urban, Suburban, Rural). Lastly, the variable X4 represents the average unemployment rate for each CoC in this study.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_2 D_2 + \beta_3 D_3 + \beta_4 X_{4+} \mu_i \quad (3)$$

The null hypothesis to be tested is that the geographical type of the CoCs do not have an effect on the count of overall homeless individuals. The T test of significance in the result will be measured against a standard T- test level of significance (p-value = 0.05) to determine if the independent variables have a significant effect on the dependent variable.

Regression Result

The regression result of the analysis run on SPSS is presented on Table 2 and the result shows that the R2 value is .284 which means the model explains 28.4% of the change in overall homeless count. The R value is the correlation coefficient and is a positive correlation of .533 (relationship) between the dependent and independent variables.

The unstandardized coefficients show that for every increase in the unit of urban CoCs, the count of overall homeless individual will increase by 1294.221 points (or by 1294 individuals), while an increase in the unit of rural CoCs will cause a decrease of -401.907 points (or approximately 402 individuals). Unemployment causes an increasing effect on the count of overall homelessness by 201.925 points i.e. for every unit increase in unemployment rate, approximately 202 individuals are likely to be experience homelessness.

Table 3. Model Summary, Coefficients and ANOVA

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error ofthe Estimate	Durbin - Watson
1	.533a	.284	.246	1291.173	.802

a. Predictors: (Constant), Average Unemployment, Urban CoCs, Rural CoCs

b. Dependent Variable: Overall Homeless

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	-196.611	603.358		-.326	.746			
	Urban	1294.221	532.024	.380	2.433	.018	.483	.309	.275

	Rural	-401.907	467.853	-.134	-.859	.394	-.379	-.114	-.097
	Average Unemployment	201.925	105.713	.218	1.910	.061	.228	.247	.216

Dependent Variable: Overall Homeless

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	37082890.192	3	12360963.397	7.415	<.001b
	Residual	93359136.791	56	1667127.443		
	Total	130442026.983	59			

Dependent Variable: Overall Homeless

Predictors: (Constant), Average Unemployment, Urban CoCs, Rural CoCs

The ANOVA table shows that the independent variables significantly predicts the dependent variable, $F(3, 56) = 32.393$, $p < .001$. Hence, the regression model is a good fit for the data and that there is no specification error.

ANCOVA

The ANCOVA model is similar to ANOVA but it used to determine the means of 3 or more independent groups. It can be used to ascertain the true effect of an explanatory variable by running a controlled analysis i.e. excluding a covariate in a second analysis to check the true effect of a variable and the reason for this further investigation is that a covariate is not usually part of the main research question but it could affect the dependent variable hence, the necessity to control for it.

Assumptions of ANCOVA

i. Correlation between dependent variable and covariant must be less than (>.80)

ii. Dependent variable should be normally distributed.

iii. Variances must be similar across all groups i.e. homogenous variances and absence of heteroscedasticity.

Table 4. Correlation Test on Dependent & Covariate

Assumption 1

Correlations

		Overall Homeless	Average Unemployment
Overall Homeless	Pearson Correlation	1	.228
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.079
	N	60	60
Average Unemployment	Pearson Correlation	.228	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.079	
	N	60	60

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

A correlation test was run between overall homelessness and the covariate –unemployment rate and the result show a positive Pearson correlation, albeit below 0.80 which satisfies the first assumption of ANCOVA.

Table 5. Test of Normality

Assumption 2

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Overall Homeless	60	68	6521	850.52	1486.903	2.955	.309	7.798	.608
Valid N (listwise)	60								

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

The skewness and kurtosis values show that the dependent variable is not normally distributed. Therefore, the reciprocal square root values of the dependent variable were taken and used in place of Overall Homeless values. A second bivariate correlation was run between the reciprocal square root values and unemployment rate. The Pearson correlation showed as -.153, satisfying the second assumption of ANCOVA model.

Table 6. Second Test of Normality

Assumption 2*

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
RecSqrtHomeless	60	.0124	.1213	.056114	.0244038	.210	.309	-.170	.608
Valid N (listwise)	60								

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

In Table 6 above, the skewness is 0.210 and kurtosis is -.170, both values are well below 1, proving that the reciprocal square values of Overall Homeless are normally distributed.

To test the last assumption of homogenous variances across groups, Levene's test need to be insignificant to be able to arrive at a conclusion that there is homogeneity of variances. Hence, a null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups need to be rejected by observing the significance test in the Levene's test table. The test is included in Table 7 below

Table 7. Levene's Test of Variance Equality

Assignment 3

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a]			
Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.271	3	56	.090
Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.			
a. Design: Intercept + Average Unemployment + Area Category			

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

The test of homogeneity in the variance is displayed on the Levene's test of equality of error variances,

and the level of significance is higher than 0.05 hence, the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups is rejected. As a result, the third assumption of ANCOVA model is satisfied.

ANCOVA Test Result without the Variable Average Unemployment rate

Table 8. Estimated Marginal Means

Pairwise Comparisons

Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless

(I) Area Category	(J) Area Category	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.[b]	95% Confidence Interval forDifference[b]	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Largely Rural CoC	Largely Suburban CoC	.014	007	.356	-.006	.035
	Largely Urban CoC	-.001	007	1.000	-.021	.020
	Major City CoC	.048*	010	<.001	.020	.075
Largely SuburbanCoC	Largely Rural CoC	-.014	007	.356	-.035	.006
	Largely Urban CoC	-.015	009	.659	-.040	.010
	Major City CoC	.033*	012	.037	.001	.065
Largely UrbanCoC	Largely Rural CoC	.001	007	1.000	-.020	.021
	Largely Suburban CoC	.015	009	.659	-.010	.040
	Major City CoC	.048*	012	<.001	.016	.080
Major City CoC	Largely Rural CoC	-.048*	010	<.001	-.075	-.020
	Largely Suburban CoC	-.033*	012	.037	-.065	-.001
	Largely Urban CoC	-.048*	012	<.001	-.080	-.016

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless

Source	Type III Sum ofSquares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
CorrectedModel	.012[a]	3	.004	9.135	<.001	.329
Intercept	.082	1	.082	194.982	<.001	.777
Area Category	.012	3	.004	9.135	<.001	.329
Error	.024	56	.000			
Total	.224	60				
CorrectedTotal	.035	59				

a. R Squared = .329 (Adjusted R Squared = .293)

Univariate Tests

Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Contrast	.011	3	.004	8.468	<.001	.316
Error	.023	55	.000			

The F tests the effect of Area Category. This test is based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means.

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

The result of the test of between-subjects effects F(dbetween, dfwithin) = T Statistic, there was a significant change in Reciprocal Square Root Homeless (standardized values of overall homeless), p = F(3, 56) = 9.135, p = <.001, on the account of the variable "Area Category" (Largely Rural CoC, Largely Suburban CoC, Largely Urban CoC, Major City CoC) when the covariate "Average Unemployment" is not included in the analysis.

The partial Eta squared value measures the magnitude of the effect the independent variable has on the dependent variable by using Cohen's scale which ranks effects from small rate marked as 0.2, moderate effect as 0.5, large effect as 0.8. Therefore, for the variable Area Category, the partial ETA is 0.329 on Table 6 indicating that the rate of change is below moderate. Moreso, it also indicates how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variable Area Category which is, in this case, 32.9%.

The final step in the methodology is to determine if the outcome of the dependent variable in relation to Area Category is influenced by unemployment rate or not.

ANCOVA Test Result with the Variable Unemployment Rate

Table 9. Univariate Analysis of Variance

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
Area Category	Largely Rural CoC	35
	Largely Suburban CoC	10
	Largely Urban CoC	10
	Major City CoC	5

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless			
Area Category	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Largely Rural CoC	.062319	.0215157	35
Largely Suburban CoC	.048469	.0215677	10
Largely Urban CoC	.063359	.0201718	10
Major City CoC	.013480	.0009460	5
Total	.056114	.0244038	60

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a]			
Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.271	3	56	.090
Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.			
a. Design: Intercept + Average Unemployment + Area Category			

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: RecSqrtHomeless						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	.012[a]	4	.003	6.830	<.001	.332
Intercept	.014	1	.014	31.890	<.001	.367

Average Unemployment	.000	1	.000	.271	.605	.005
Area Category	.011	3	.004	8.468	<.001	.316
Error	.023	55	.000			
Total	.224	60				
Corrected Total	.035	59				
a. R Squared = .332 (Adjusted R Squared = .283)						

Source: Computation of data on SPSS

Table 9 is the same ANCOVA but with the variable unemployment included in the analysis and the result of the test of between-subjects effects F(dbetween, dfwithin) = T Statistic still shows a significant change in Reciprocal Square Root Homeless (standardized values of overall homeless), p = F(3, 55) = 8.468, p = <.001, on the account of the variable "Area Category" (Largely Rural CoC, Largely Suburban CoC, Largely Urban CoC, Major City CoC) when the covariate Average Unemployment is included in the analysis.

As already stated, partial Eta squared value measures the magnitude of the effect the independent variable has on the dependent variable by following Cohen's rating which ranks effects from small rate marked as 0.2, moderate effect as 0.5, large effect as 0.8. Therefore, for the variable Area Category, the partial ETA squared is 0.316 on Table 8 indicating that the rate of change is below moderate. Moreso, it also indicates how much of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the variable Area Category which is, in this case, 31.6%.

In conclusion, the impact of Area Category is not influenced by the average unemployment rate because the impact is significant with or without controlling for Average Unemployment rate. Therefore, we understand the result of the analysis conducted in regard to area category without any erroneous inference or bias.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of the regression analysis shows that the model explains 28.4% of the changes in the dependent variable, as aforementioned, many other factors contribute to situations that inevitably ends in homelessness. The most common causes are substance abuse, mental health issues, and chronic conditions. Additionally, factors such as criminal background, veteran status, and race are prominent and established factors that have a high positive correlation with homelessness.

However, this research recommends that the issues of substance abuse, mental health issues and chronic conditions should not be addressed as a problem of homelessness, instead they should be regarded as underlying issues. Hence, victims of substance abuse, mental health issues and chronic conditions require separate and separate strategies.

Secondly, the descriptive analysis as shown in the graphs and summary table, shows that there is a tendency for homelessness to be lower in rural areas. Thirdly, the regression result proves further that urban CoCs have an increasing effect while rural areas have a decreasing effect on homelessness. This inference supports the alternative hypothesis of this study which states that the rural areas have lower level of homelessness, and that unemployment contributes to homelessness. However, there is no proof that unemployment is higher in urban or suburban CoCs, instead the highest average unemployment rate was in a largely rural CoC.

Furthermore, the ANCOVA analysis shows that the type of area has a significant effect on the level of homelessness but unemployment rate does not have a significant effect.

Based on these results, it is recommended that the US government should expand the Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities (WORC) to enhance the earning opportunities for the destitute, create housing facilities within the rural areas, enforce the relocation of homeless people to rural areas and assign jobs to such individuals within and outside the agricultural industry. In the field of agriculture, modern techniques that do not require professional or educational skills can be taught to the beneficiaries through the WORC program. Such farming techniques consist of hydroponics farming, and more recommendable to the younger group is the GIS Software and GPS Agriculture that help to gather patterns of weather, rainfall, crop yield, and other information on farmlands. They can as well take up roles such operators of self-driving vehicles, drones and robots currently used for clearing, weeding, irrigation, sowing and harvesting. Additionally, knowledge of blockchain technology for tracing the journey of seeds and food supply chain can be disseminated through training workshops.

Other techniques are soil and water sensor for detecting the source of defects in harvested crops by examining the state of the soil and effect of pest activities. The Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology is used for crop tracking, it is a scannable barcode from many feet away on and off the farm fields and contains stored crop name, location, date of planting and harvest, delivery information as well as the origin, and processing details.

The above-mentioned technological techniques can prove to be more considerable and attractive to the individuals in the young category. However, it is important to emphasize on excluding people with substance abuse, mental health, and chronic conditions to employ a more pragmatic approach in providing care and shelter for individuals in this category.

It was an impossible challenge to include the educational status of homeless people in the US as a variable because the official databases have no record pertaining to the education status of these individuals or personal and family background. Hence, it is highly recommended to make concerted effort to understand the profiles or identities of the homeless individuals beyond their race, and their conditions such that a more holistic approach can be employed in preventing the predicament of homelessness from the root and for the opportunity to conduct further research and panel data analysis is suggested as a methodological approach for conducting such research.

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