

HOMELESSNESS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of homelessness is stated to be one of the poorest forms of urban poverty and social vulnerability. It is largely upsetting and also an impediment within the course of the development of the country, that a large number of poverty stricken people in urban areas are homeless. In a civilized society and an independent India, a large number of individuals, who do not have proper education, employment opportunities, and other facilities that are required for an efficient living are homeless, i.e. they do not even have proper roofs over their heads and have to live on the streets. In this research paper, the concept of homelessness has been studied, the main areas that are taken into consideration are, causes for homelessness, lifestyle of the homeless individuals, problems and difficult situations experienced by homeless individuals, National Policy and housing for the poor homeless and the homeless girl child. Amongst the homeless individuals, women constitute one of the groups that are affected by homelessness on an extreme basis. The individuals who are homeless, encounter numerous problems, they are deprived of human rights and suffer from the most severe kinds of abuses and violence. There have been individuals, who at one point of time, led a good life, had access to educational and employment opportunities, but the occurrence of natural calamities and disasters have left them in a homeless state. It is evident that the circumstances that have led the individuals and families to homelessness are prevalent worldwide and there are absence of tasks that would integrate these homeless individuals into the mainstream society.

Keywords: Homelessness, Individuals, Lifestyle, Housing, Population, Urban Areas

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly urbanising India, within the urban areas, the problem of homelessness is an increasing concern. Over 286 million people are in the present existence, residents of the country's cities; three of them, namely, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata, are home to 17 percent of the world's slum dwellers. The Census in 2001 numbered 1.94 million homeless people in India, of whom 1.16 million lived in rural areas, and only 0.77 million lived in cities and towns. These numbers have since expected to have increased in the 2011 census, though the detailed results of the 2011 census on homeless individuals are not yet available, and there have been reports of undercounting on account of the invisibility; the reason being, homeless tend to be exceedingly undetectable group, these numbers are likely to be gross underestimates. It is estimated that at least one percent of the population of cities is homeless. This places the estimates of urban homeless persons in India to around three million at the minimum (The National Report on Homelessness for Supreme Court of India, 2011).

The Census of India defines houseless population as the persons who are not living in census houses. A census house is referred to as a structure with a roof. Census enumerators are trained to make an observation of the places, where the homeless population is likely to live such as on the roadside, pavements, in pipes, in the construction areas, parks, under staircases or in the open, temples, pavilions, platforms and so forth. These individuals do not have proper houses with all the basic facilities, therefore, they are termed as homeless individuals. They are described in various terms such as homeless, houseless, roofless, shelter less people, and pavement dwellers. The economically weaker sections of the population, who do not have access to any form of housing or any form of community shelters, there are several lakh families and individuals who lead a shelter less life within the cities of India (The National Report on Homelessness for Supreme Court of India, 2011).

CAUSES FOR HOMELESSNESS

Critical factors that lead to homelessness have been stated as follows: (Chaudhry, Joseph & Singh, n.d.).

Forced migration from rural areas due to distressed conditions – The occurrence of natural calamities and disasters such as earthquakes, floods, drought, rural indebtedness, agrarian crisis, and large scale industrialization and infrastructure projects contribute in displacing them from their habitats and compelling them to migrate to cities and towns in search for the better livelihood opportunities for survival. When they migrate to cities, it is hard to make provision of a place to live on immediate basis, hence, they are homeless when they migrate to cities and towns.

Lack of affordable housing – In the absence of public housing and low cost housing schemes in urban areas, the poverty stricken people are forced to live on the streets as obtaining shelter even in a slum area is beyond their economic ability. Accessing housing is even more difficult for women and there are women who are single and widows and they live on the streets along with their children.

Slum demolitions and evictions without rehabilitation – Forced evictions that are accompanied by violent acts have been on an increase in India. In the absence of rehabilitation, the individuals are forced to live on the streets; women and children are most severely affected in this case. Most of the rehabilitation sites are located on the peripheries of the cities and there it is impossible for the families and individuals to obtain livelihoods.

Domestic violence – The prevalence of various forms of crime and violence largely increase the vulnerability of the women to homelessness. When there is lack of protection by the law enforcement officials or the legal system, the women get more susceptible to homelessness and experience further violence. Domestic violence is considered to be one of the critical causes that lead to homelessness of women. The women who are experiencing domestic violence, also develop the associated fear of homelessness and this fear compel them to survive in hazardous and unsafe conditions.

Breakdown of family and partnership in marriage – Separation from the husbands, eviction of women from the house upon the death of the husband, fathers or husbands remarrying and mental illness are some of the reasons due to which women lose their homes

and live on the streets. The lack of informal networks of care and support expose individuals to the risk of homelessness.

Inequitable planning and land use – Across urban India, land use planning is considered to be largely inequitable and favours a development paradigm that has the main objective of benefiting the individuals belonging to upper class and elite. Housing and settlement spaces are unsafe for women, especially those who migrate from the other regions. The failure to reserve the land for low cost housing and the expensive prices of housing has made housing unaffordable, thus leading to homelessness.

Inadequacy of the law – The existence of discriminatory laws and anti-poor legislation such as the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959, it was adopted in Delhi in 1961, combined with the lack of resilient legal protection for housing rights and women's rights, resulting in women finding themselves highly susceptible to homelessness and violence in urban areas. Though the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 comprises an establishment, acquiring women's rights to remain in their place of residence, inadequate implementation of the Act remains to result in victims of domestic violence being evicted of their homes or being forced to leave the conditions of crime and violence.

LIFESTYLE OF THE HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

There has been classification of various points that signify the living of the homeless individuals: (Mander, n.d.).

Sleeping - The homeless individuals usually sleep in coarse areas, which may include staircase, near the shops or homes, in market corridors, railway platforms, bus stands, courtyards or places of worship, drainage pipes, government night shelters, deserted buildings, NGO night shelters, roadsides, parks, bridges, flyovers and so forth. When individuals are unable to sleep on the floor, they even sleep in their rickshaws. These individuals are largely poverty stricken, they just have blankets during the winters to protect themselves from cold. Mainly they light fires in order to create heat during the winter season. Sleeping in these areas, normally put the lives of the homeless individuals under threat from the drunken drivers and hence, they have to protect themselves and find a safe place to spend their nights.

Occupation – The individuals who are homeless are normally engaged in minority jobs, the various kinds of jobs that these individuals are involved into include, street vendor, daily wage labourer, construction worker, rickshaw puller, rickshaw load puller, handcart puller, rag picking, shoe polishing, street performing, these people are normally unskilled but they perform on the streets such as, various kinds of dances and singing, and when people observe them, they get money, domestic workers, garage workers and mechanics. There are homeless individuals, who are not involved in any occupation and usually live on alms and some of them are even students, who migrate to urban areas to acquire education but are unable to find safe and affordable housing.

Diet and Nutrition – The diet and nutrition requirements and the availability of food to urban homeless people are mixed. The quantities may, but are not always enough, however, the quality tends to be repetitive, very basic, often of reduced nutritional value, and in the

nature of their existence, the food is unhygienic. In Delhi, for instance, 22.5% people consumed nothing but cereals, and another 25 consumed vegetables or protein only once. Except those with families in the streets, they seldom obtain home cooked food. Yet they spend the major part of their earnings in the daily struggle to feed themselves and their dependents. Individuals who reside near the religious places, normally obtain their meals from the religious places.

Embattled with the State - The relationship and the connection between urban homeless people and the State is considered one of extreme mutual opposition and distrust, an unending and an understood cold war. The authorities are doubting the conditions of the homeless residents of cities as freeloading, indolent, unhygienic, polluted, unhealthy, unlawful and largely immoral. Homeless people have possessed this viewpoint that they are discriminated against by the society, they are not being helped or assisted in any manner and they are depressed about their living conditions.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED BY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS

It is clearly understood that individuals who will not have proper roof above their heads will experience numerous problems and difficulties, the main problems and difficult situations have been stated as follows: (Chaudhry, Joseph & Singh, 2014).

Verbal and Physical Abuse – The homeless people are often verbally and physically abused by the individuals, who are usually the people passing around them; when they ask for some money or beg for alms, they are usually abused. Homeless women normally experience these forms of abuses from their husbands, who get angry at them because of the depressed living conditions, such as unwashed clothes, unhygienic meals, lack of finances and so forth.

Sexual Violence and Exploitation – Homeless women who are young in age, usually are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, sexual trafficking and drug abuse. These women normally spend their days and nights looking after their dependents and look out for ways for proper management of their homeless living, such as making provision of food for their family members, washing clothes and so forth. These women are largely subjected to sexual violence and exploitation.

Lack of Basic Services and Risk to Security and Personal Safety – The homeless individuals do not have proper access to restrooms, bathing areas, electricity and clean water. They have access to unclean water and bathe in the open. The lack of access to these basic services is regarded as the major risk to their health conditions, as they are human beings and need proper civic amenities in order to lead an efficient life.

Inadequate Living Conditions and Risk to Health – Health does not mean absence of illness, but it is the state of complete physical, mental, cultural and spiritual wellbeing. The homeless individuals live in extremely unhygienic conditions, they are subjected to the weather conditions of heat, rain and cold, they do not even possess enough clothes, therefore, they suffer from various kinds of illnesses and diseases. Malnutrition is one of the most severe problems amongst the homeless individuals.

Lack of Access to Government Schemes and Livelihood Opportunities and increasing Vulnerability – Homeless individuals do not have any access to Government schemes. Livelihood, entertainment and recreational opportunities are absent amongst them, such as they do not even watch any kinds of television shows, movies or listen to music. Homeless individuals are unable to find any kind of good employment opportunities as they are considered to be impure and there is a humiliation attached to being homeless.

Difficulty in Accessing Healthcare – When homeless individuals are suffering from any kinds of diseases and illnesses, they have difficulties in obtaining proper medical and healthcare services. They are not allowed to enter hospitals and other medical centres, they are denied treatment and are turned away from the hospitals. These people are unaware of nutritious diet, medicines and other things that are required to maintain good health, hence, lack of information and awareness even results in an increase in the mortality levels amongst the homeless individuals.

NATIONAL POLICY AND HOUSING FOR THE POOR HOMELESS

National Agenda of Governance (NAG) has identified Housing for All, both in urban and rural areas, as a primacy area with particular prominence laid on the requirements of the susceptible groups. Although, shelters or housing for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs), Low Income Groups (LIGs), slum dwellers and homeless individuals may be a collective concern in the rural as well as urban sectors similarly, the difficulties of the homeless individuals are more intensely pronounced in the urban sector, particularly in the wake of large scale relocation and the occurrence of rural-urban evolution. There is, however, some observable change in the policy, the change of mass forced expulsions and oppositions by co-operations and contribution, in the development of slum areas, provision of enhanced infrastructure and liveable conditions and so forth (Kanth, n.d.).

More than one-fourth of India's population (28%) are dwelling in nearly 5161 urban centres, (2001) already being in the cities, by 2021, 40% of the population is projected to be in the urban centres. The turmoil for the proper settlement within the urban areas with the policy emphasis on productivity, environment, community health, education, quality of life, equity and poverty alleviation is exceedingly well placed since nearly 2/3rd of the national income is generated in the cities. The involvement of the 93% (unorganized) work force being employed to generate proportional goods and services for India's rapidly growing economy has to be looked upon in its holistic viewpoint. For those who are predominantly answerable to operate these 'engines of growth' there is very less room and infrastructural facilities generated in terms of accommodations, working and living conditions befitting their distinguished presence (Kanth, n.d.).

The Union Government is accountable for the design of a policy with regards to the policies, programs and approaches for active operation of social housing schemes, particularly, those concerning the underprivileged sections of the society. The Housing and Habitat Policy 1998 was recruited to report the problems relating to sustainable development, infrastructure and resilient public-private partnership for shelters, in pursuance of the stated NAG. It was recommended to assist construction of 20 lakh additional units

every year, with prominence on EWSs and LIGs of the population, as also to cater to the needs of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other vulnerable groups. Working Group on Housing has evidently stated that over 90% of housing shortage is for EWS and LIG, HUDCO's 55% of the distribution being for these segments. For unexplained reasons, however, the shelter needs of the most susceptible and underprivileged among them, the shelter-less becoming destitute, has not been allocated the precedence it deserves in the national policies and programs (Kanth, n.d.).

THE HOMELESS GIRL CHILD

India has the largest number of street children in the world. According to the figures of the Indian Embassy, there are 314,700 children living on the streets of Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kanpur and Hyderabad, and another 100,000 in New Delhi. These numbers, however, may not reflect the true picture, as accurate census information is difficult to collect. Children's human rights to protection, education, secure housing, and participation, as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are violated. For instance, the recently passed Right to Education Act (2010) in India does not possess less for ensuring that homeless children are able to access their Fundamental Right to Education. Street children, in particular girls, find it difficult to go to school and are not able to access many government schemes, including Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The indecision of tenure of stay at any place, fear of eviction or being thrown out and not having any identity proof giving them a sense of existence and over all the need for survival has made education a distant dream for the homeless children. Though Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has several schemes, there were no determinations made by the education department to promote education amongst the street children.

In India, 0.14% or 1.7 million people are homeless; a little more than a fourth, i.e. 26% of the homeless population reside in urban areas in the five major metropolitan cities, and 0.37% of the population residing in the urban agglomerations is homeless (Kumuda, 2014). Homelessness has been a major hindrance for the children in concern of their education and force them to drop-out of school, even before they develop their basic literacy skills.

CONCLUSION

The term 'homeless' means when an individual does not have a proper place to live, in other words, he lives on the streets, bus stations, railway stations, road sides, near shops, offices, parks and so forth, he has to carry out all the activities of daily living on the streets, making use of public utilities. There are various causes for homelessness, these are forced migration from rural areas due to distressed conditions, lack of affordable housing, slum demolitions and evictions without rehabilitation, domestic violence, breakdown of family and partnership in marriage, inequitable planning and land use and inadequacy of the law. The lifestyle of the homeless individuals are inundated with various kinds of problems and difficulties; their nights are stressful, they do not find proper places to sleep peacefully and experience problems especially in the winter season. The kinds of occupations that these

individuals are engaged in are minority jobs; regarding diet and nutrition, these individuals do not get proper nutritious diet to fulfil their daily requirements. Homeless individuals are embattling with the state on a continuous basis, they are of the viewpoints that State is not making any provision of any kind of assistance to them.

The main problems and the difficult situations that are experienced by the homeless individuals are, verbal and physical abuse, sexual violence and exploitation, lack of basic services and risk to security and personal safety, inadequate living conditions and risk to health, lack of access to Government Schemes and livelihood opportunities and increasing vulnerability and difficulty in accessing healthcare. These areas depict that homeless individuals, experience problems in all areas such as in meeting their daily requirements, their existence, in maintenance of good health, in the acquisition of education and in obtaining employment opportunities. In accordance with the 2011 census of India, there are 449, 761 homeless families, therefore, in order to eradicate the problem of homelessness, it is vital that there should be construction of 50,000 to 60,000 houses each year in order to make provision of shelter for each one of them by the year 2022. In the developing countries, rapid urbanization, the urbanization of poverty, structural adjustment programs, disintegration of traditional family linkages and poor life opportunities in rural areas are contributing in the introduction of homelessness, particularly amongst the young individuals.

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