Homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia:
A Case of Agenda Denial

Dr Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi, Senior Lecturer, International Institute of Public Policy & Management
Alifatul Kamilah Binti Abdul Manan, Head Assistant Director, Federal Service Department

Abstract

The objective of this study is to highlight the real causes of homelessness and what constitute homelessness in Kuala Lumpur (specifically and Malaysia in general) and how are the issue being managed. This research is carried out because large percentage of the society and public officials strongly believes that homelessness is self inflicted, rooted from complacency and laziness. The research findings albeit small reveal otherwise.

Keywords: Homelessness, Houselessness, Policy, Marginalised, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Homelessness is an emotive word that conjures up in people's minds image of an individual walking the street, smelly, dirty and hungry, or the alcoholic, obnoxious, loud and drunk. Thus apart from the negative connotation, there is no clear understanding as to what constitute a homeless. The stereotyping has also act as an obstacle to tackling issue of homelessness. In Malaysia there is no proper and adequate definition of homelessness yet. Affairs of the homeless are lumped under the category of displaced and marginalised groups which fall under the broader umbrella of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) with enforcement duty mandated to the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Currently running of MWFCD is guided by four major policies, the National Social Policy, National Policy on Women, National Policy for the Elderly, and National Social Welfare Policy. None of the policies have direct bearing to houseless and homeless persons implying that thus far this type of marginalised group have not been receiving much attention.

This research focuses on the homeless rather than the houseless. But it will be mentioned when it causes homelessness. The area of study is Kuala Lumpur, specifically the central business district. There have not been much academic writing that touches on issue of homelessness be it in Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia, perhaps because homelessness is still a relatively hidden from public viewing. However, for those who walk the streets of Kuala Lumpur, uses public transportation knows that houseless and homeless people is everywhere.

2. Research Methodology

This research involved mainly interviews, observations and discussions. Interviews were conducted only on 25 homeless through the assistance Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK). KSK is an NGO outfit that dedicated itself to help the homeless. KSK conducted two kinds of reaching-out exercise. The first exercise provided packed lunch to homeless at KSK outlet which is located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. Objective of the exercise apart from feeding the homeless is to reach out to those wanting assistance such as job or medication. The KSK initiatives have been proven rewarding for they have been able to assist many homeless men and women to take permanent job and finally leave the streets.

A small number of homeless were able to be interviewed because many homeless shy away from strangers while some are not approachable due to drunkenness or sickness (mental illness). Thus this research used the KSK extensive familiarity with Kuala Lumpur homeless to conduct interviews and observations. The researchers spent few months with KSK helping them in food preparation, distribution and packing. During this time many hours were spent observing the homeless as well as talking to those who are willing. Special trips were also made every Saturday midnight to reach out to homeless that did not participate in KSK luncheon activities. On this mid-night outing researchers with other volunteers distributed packed food (consisting of chicken rice, apple or oranges, bottled drink, and other tit-bits) and distributed it homeless around the CBD. The distribution hour began after midnight to ensure that the homeless were back in their hideout or resting spot. Volunteers formed team, each team consisting of four persons. At about midnight each team loaded about 50 packs of foods in their vehicle before driving off to their designated destinations. Researchers took the opportunity to observe and when possible interview the homeless while handing out their food bag. The first round of visit to the homeless hideouts was a hard to forget experience. Some scolded us and few shunned us away. However, after few visits we were able to gain their trust and appreciation. Some even allowed be photographed.

Observations were conducted on wider population of homeless in various areas of Kuala Lumpur specifically in the vicinity of Dang Wang and Central Market. Dang Wangi is situated north from the Merdeka square (Dataran Medeka), next to Bukit Nenas and located between the Gombak and the Klang Rivers. Dang Wangi is a famous shopping strip for the middle and upper middle income groups. The area provides ample odd jobs, as this study found, of the 25 respondents, 19 were working as restaurant helper, pamphlet distributor, parking attendant, recycle items' collector, security guard and general shop helper. Dang Wangi never fail starts bustling by 6 in the morning with petty traders lining the streets and alleys with their carts, supported by hyper centers adding vibrant to the area by 10 in the morning and ends just before midnight when the homeless will transform the dark shop doorways, bus stop and benches as their bedroom.

The least number of respondents were found from the Central Market area or the craft market. Central Market is located on Jalan Hang Kasturi, a few minutes away from Petaling Street, a popular shopping strip for imitation products. Central market was originally a wet market transformed into a centre for Malaysian culture, arts and handicrafts in the 1990s. Generally, the area offers few secluded spots for sleeping because it remains quite busy and noisy up to very early morning.

Other sources of data collected were from the national rehabilitation centre or Desa Bina Diri (DBD) an office under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare. DBD role is to care for destitute and occasionally also takes in the homeless. The objective of visiting this centre were to obtain views of officers that manages the 'marginalised society", and secondly, to have a closer view of an institution provided for the marginalised community. The Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development were also approached to explore their views on the homeless issues in Kuala Lumpur.

3. Past Research

Definition can influence the perceived extent of a problem and can also circumscribe the possible solutions to the problem. In the case of Malaysia there is no single definition of homelessness which has allow officials, advocates, researchers, and policy makers to interpret the issue in a multitude of ways. However defining homelessness has been difficult because of complex nature.

The most common element found in the definition of homelessness is on housing situation, i.e. relating homelessness to 'houselessness' (Springer, 2000). The European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) has elaborated a typology of homelessness called ETHOS. According to FEANTSA (2007), homelessness exists in three "domains":

Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain) (FEANTSA, 2007).

City of Calgary Community and Neighbourhood Services (2008) adopted a more comprehensive schema of definition of homelessness consisting of housing situations ranging from rooflessness (living on the street or in emergency shelters), to houselessness (living in various types of shelters or institutions), to insecure housing (living under threat of eviction or violence), and finally to inadequate housing (living in unfit or overcrowded conditions). However, homelessness is not all about houselessness rather should include "a condition of detachment from society characterised by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structure (Bahr, 1973).

Because of the complexity embedded in the causes of homelessness and consequences of being homeless, Ravenhill (2008) suggests five home main types of definition of homelessness. The first is based on the legal definition as used in the United Kingdom. Homeless definition is based on the Homeless Persons Act 1977 (amended in 1985, 1996, 2002). The definition place the onus on the individual to prove that they are homeless so that they deserve help. For example, families with dependent children and without access to accommodation are considered homeless and eligible to be housed. The single people identified as undeserving, such as not pregnant, not old or not mentally ill are not considered homeless.

The second definition is based on the individual's relation to housing, housing need and the type of tenure they have. Architectural Research and Development Overseas (CARDO) for example based their studies of 9 developing countries, Peru, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Egypt, India Bangladesh, Indonesia and China (Speak & Tipple, 2007). They found four types of homelessness categories; tenure-based, shelter-based, suitability and quality based and permanence and stability based. Tenure based refers primarily to home ownership or secure land tenure. In the case of Zimbabwe, the National Housing Taskforce assumes that anyone who does not own a home in an officially approved residential area is homeless. Those who are not living under a shelter with structure and roof are also considered homeless. Examples of such structures are marginal housing, shacks, kiosks, staircase, rooftops, squatter settlements, rooms built in the backyards of dwellings, etc.

Homeless definition in the United States also based itself on the continuum definition. Homeless individual or homeless person, includes those who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate night time residence; who has a primary night time that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill; an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (McKinney, 2001). This means in the US homelessness include both streets homeless and shelter homeless.

The third definition is based on statistics. Statistics are used to identify an issue as a social problem then measure the magnitude of that problem. For example in the case of Kuala Lumpur, small percentage of homeless people implying that social delivery system in the country is working well. However, analysts such as Rossi (1989) may see otherwise. Sometimes statistics present a snapshot of an issue thus could be unrepresentative to be used as comprehensive explanation of homelessness.

The fourth definition used housing shortage as measure. Lack of accommodation or its unsuitability or affordability could cause houselessness and possible homelessness. This is the most common definition of homelessness because it is the simplest to implement.

The fifth definition concerns manipulation or abuse of funds in the name of the poor and other marginalized group. This definition is seldom used to define homelessness rather it is used to enhanced discussion on homelessness.

Differentiation of definitions contains pertinent points that could be used to describe homelessness in many countries. In the context of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur, for example, three of the five definitions seem appropriate to define homelessness in Malaysia. The first definition emphasised homeless as displaced and marginalized group. This characteristic fit the Kuala Lumpur homeless behaviour. The second definition relates

to inability to access to housing which caused people to become houseless and possibility of becoming homeless. This point was also captured during our interviews highlighting. Many said that because that can't rent even a decent room had no choice but to remain on the streets. The fourth definition relates to bad planning and designing of homes for the poor and hard-core poor. The consequence of this inaction resulted in barrier to cheap rental home and house ownership. This latter definition was also mentioned and may also relevant to the cause homelessness in Kuala Lumpur.

4. Theoretical Perspectives

A definition is an explanation of how we termed homeless. A clear definition of what constitute homeless allows policy makers to have better understanding of what is meant by the term homeless. Mere understanding may not suffice, it is necessary also for policy makers to confirm and expand their ideas or understanding from various perspectives especially when discussing an issue as complex as homelessness.

The structuralist theory for example theorizes on the inability to access to accommodation or housing. The theory argues that inadequate housing, inequitable welfare and economic systems will have an effect on family and individuals. Continued pressure (supposedly without intervention) will cause and perpetuate homelessness. The functional theory move away from housing policy or employment structure instead look at the homelessness from the perspective of their behaviour. The tendency of the homeless to isolate themselves is seen as a symptom of dysfunctional, abnormal or even deviant behaviour. The causes rooted from stressed, criticism and violence family.

Theory of functionalist deviance by Durkhiem (1938) and structuralist deviance developed by Cohen (1956) an extension of functionalism and structuralism sees homelessness both as a threat to society and a natural function of a healthy society. The theory is further developed by Merton (1949) stresses that the way society is structured (for example, class systems) forces deviance on individuals within that society. This means homelessness (deviance) part of the nature of society rather than the individual's nature. Structuralist deviance looks at individuals' or a subgroups' position within the social structure of society. Subcultures are seen to be the product of a group of individuals who form an alternative set of norms and values to that of mainstream society. In their extreme, subcultures take mainstream society's norms and values and turn them upside down. Thus according to Cohen (1956) deviance is perceived as a negative reaction to a society that excluded some members, with subcultures offering those people a sense of inclusion even though this may be viewed as deviance. Homeless culture, then, would be the product of marginalised people within society coming together in reaction against the mainstream to form an alternative parallel culture.

Mead (1934), Blumer (1969) and Goffman (1959, 1968) popularised the theory classed as a symbolic interactionist. This theory places emphasis on social process rather than structures and functions. Individuals interpret themselves and their everyday environment in terms of their actions, reactions and interactions with everything around them. This is a self-oriented approach that places the individual at the centre of analysis and looks at the way they construct, deconstruct and reconstruct themselves, their worlds and their own reality. This theory explains how the norms and values that functionalists speak about are absorbed into collective culture, and the way people construct their self-image and therefore their self-worth.

Indeed no single theory adequately encapsulates the whole of the problem of homelessness. Each theory offers insight into specific facets of homelessness which further justify the complexity of understanding the issue of homelessness.

5. Findings
5.1 Brief profile of the Homeless

In term of ethnic breakdown, 53% were Malays followed by Chinese (23%) and Indians (18%). Malays were found mostly in Dang Wangi area. Dang Wangi is in close proximity with a Malay village called Kampung Baru and the famous Malay shopping center, Jalan Masjid India. The Chinese homeless favorite the Bangkok Bank because it is very close to Petaling Street or sometimes referred to as China town. The sample is reflective of the KSK's database (ethnic Malay representing higher than 40% and the Chinese almost 40%) but was the reverse with the Social Department database (Chinese representing 45.2% followed by Malays 32.2%, Indians 17.7%, Sabahan and Sarawakian Bumiputras and others represent 4.8%).

In term of age (Figure 1), respondents between the age 30 to 60 years old makes the highest percentage, and below 30 and above 60 the lowest. The youngest respondent was a 20 year old Chinese man, left home in 2009 to escape his abusive father. The oldest respondent aged 70, was an Indian man living with HIV positive. Generally, besides minor aches and pains, the homeless seemed physically fit (at least during the time of the

visits). In accord with the Department of Social Welfare data that found generally the homeless are without any serious physical illnesses.

Twenty-two (88%) (Table 1) of the respondents were male comparable to the DSW and MWFCD database showing that 85% of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur were male. The three female respondents were a lady aged 50 wanted to remain nameless, she has been on the streets for few months. She came to Kuala Lumpur (from Kelantan, located in the northern eastern corner of Peninsula Malaysia) in search of employment, however, only managed to secure an odd job at a night market in Jalan Bonus. The other two ladies aged 45 and 55 were forced to the streets because of addiction.

Shop frontage with relatively smooth floor, covered by strong roof, secluded by sometime huge pillars is a "night home" for the homeless. This study found all of the homeless that sleep in these areas were male. According to KSK officials, female homeless usually do not sleep along shop corridors due to safety reason. This was confirmed by one of the female respondent, said that she shared a room that cost about RM30 to RM50 a night with few other homeless women. Occasionally, when totally broke she will sleep in a temple compound. The other two female respondents confirmed the statement but added that sometimes they took turn spending their nights in a friend or relative house.

In term of literacy interesting to note that none of the homeless was illiterate. One respondent could read and write in Indian language. Fourteen (56%) has had primary level education, nine (36%) secondary education and 1 person has had tertiary level education. In accord with the DSW, most of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur have attained at least primary education (about six years of schooling).

Of the 25 respondents, thirteen (53%) claimed to be single. Four said they were not married yet claimed having children. The denial caused by reflection of bad marriage or victim of abusive husband which to some was a cause of them being homeless. In line with Ravenhill (2008), family is strongly associated with feelings of home. Thus relationship breakdown represents far more than the loss of a partner; it also represents the loss of stability, altered identity, ontological insecurity as well as the loss of home or the feeling of home.

5.2 Policy of Neglect

Theoretically, public service delivery is crafted for the people. However, in the process of delivering the services, certain groups will be forgotten sometimes consciously due to various factors. With regard to homelessness, it is easier to deny them services because there is no policy or guidelines on homelessness. Welfare implementing agencies claimed, issues of the homeless were too complicated. They said duty in taking care of the homeless cannot rest with them alone rather should be a shared responsibility with other public service agencies. Justifiably, many countries have realised that handling the homeless was a complex business and normally requires support from not only various public bodies and NGOs but friends and families.

The findings of this study confirmed the complexity and impossibility for agencies to manage the multitude of problems of the homeless which were compounded by no policy guideline.

5.3 Impact of Family

Ten (41%) of the 25 homeless all aged above 50 years old came to Kuala Lumpur years ago in search of better life. All landed with jobs that offered no security. Upon retirement realised they could no longer afford to feed themselves. Soon realised has no friends or family to fallback to. As a case, one of the homeless known as Pakcik Ali (has been living on the streets for 7 years). Pak Ali has a kind mannerism which makes him popular among other homeless as well as KSK volunteers. According to Pak Ali his parents passed away many years ago leaving him nothing. He has no one to return to except for friends on the streets. Thus has been trying to make the best of life on the streets. This is what Mead (1934) meant by a self-centered approach that an individual takes to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct themselves, their world and their own reality to fit in the environment they are forced to be in. In other words, the homeless are not passive victims of social structures or dysfunctions rather are active agents who could be directed their own lives.

Mahmud used to work for a foreign embassy in Kuala Lumpur proven by his good command of English language. He told us he has made a big 'mistake' during his younger years which led to his divorce. After the divorce his life started to turn "upside down" which soon left him penniless and homeless. The story of Mahmud gave us a sense of pity and sadness towards those living on the streets, especially for those who used to have a family, a job and education. The research learned that relationships are an integral part of society; they become part of people's identity. Family and cohabiting relationship are strongly associated with feelings of home. Thus relationship breakdown represents far more than the loss of partner; it also represents the loss of stability, altered identity, insecurity as well as the loss of home or the feeling of home.

Phua a 50 year old Chinese lady was interviewed during the KSK food giveaway session in Central market. Phua was abandoned by her family for reason she prefers not to elaborate. Through our conversation we were able to capture that Phua had a husband and children. Separation from her family has had devastating effect on her which slowly drove her mentally ill. As Ravenhill (2008) explained, this type of sickness often accompanied by feelings of low self-worth, a lack of confidence, low power of self-motivation and, in its extreme form, it can lead to self harming and suicidal feelings. Rossi's (1989) affirmed that the nature of this problem although it is tractable but it takes time to cure mainly because it is difficult for the sufferers to recognise that they need help.

5.4 Negative Habits

Many studies have affirmed that the common causes of homelessness are addiction to drugs, alcohol and gambling. The same causes of homelessness are also found in this study. Their stories are narrated below.

5.4.1 Substance Abuse

Singh became homeless because of his drinking habit. We met Singh on our first night out as KSK volunteers however was not able to communicate with him because he was highly intoxicated with alcohol. Singh has not been able to stick to a job because he could not kick his drinking habit. He admitted having a family but prefers not to return home for by retuning he will burden and embarrass them, he said. An article by Pohl (2001) affirmed that many of the people who are homeless today have been married at one point. Most of the time the point at which the marriage broke down is when the homelessness began. In part, this is due to the amount of alcohol that was being consumed. According to studies (Leavitt, 2007; Koegel, 2008; National Health Care for the Homeless Council 2008; National Coalition for Homelessness, 2009) people who are alcoholics are sometimes forced to live a life of homelessness. For example, in Canada alone, there is an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 people at any given time that do not have a home. They live in places like shelters, cardboard boxes, tents in the wooded areas, or simply out on the streets.

Another case of drug abuse was told by Malik, an addict of more than 30 years.   Malik holds a recognised college diploma, has been married with four children. He left his family for Kuala Lumpur to gain easy access to cheaper drugs (not available in Pahang). His wife currently lived in Pahang (state in the eastern corner of Peninsula Malaysia) is managing a catering business initiated by fund obtained from Malik employment compensation gratuity or Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) amounting RM26,000. Malik's money plus by his wife effort has managed to send one of his children to private higher learning institution in Selangor and another to boarding school in Selangor. He left his family for Kuala Lumpur to gain easy access to cheaper drugs.

Another male respondent Rahim has been detained for drug abuse several times yet could not rid of his addiction. As an addict he was only concerned about where the next 'hit' was coming from and where to sleep, he said. This constant obsession with drugs has led him into crime and aggression thereby has increased and compounded his problem.

David an Indian man told a similar story; has been diagnosed as HIV positive due to his involvement with drugs. According to David, he can no longer live on the streets because the disease-HIV is rapidly eating him. David's case is well supported by the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (2008) study on homeless people with HIV/AIDS. According to the study, due to factors such as poor hygiene, malnutrition, and exposure to cold and rainy weather, homeless people are already three to six times more likely than housed people to become ill. Greeson et al., (2008) added, psychological factors play an additional role in the progression of HIV/AIDS. Psychological distress has been shown to increase the severity of the disease. People who are homeless experience a great deal of stress on a daily basis, which exacerbates the progression of HIV/AIDS.

The situation of Singh, Malik, Rahim and David explained that when people become addicted, either before or during homelessness, there is no simple, easy solution. Instead, there is a web of complex, psycho-social problems that need to be dealt by many agencies. The problems they raised are interconnected which cannot be viewed in isolation if solutions are to be effective and far reaching.

5.4.2 Gambling

Many studies (for example, SSWR, 2008) found that homelessness and problem gambling are serious social concerns. Like substance abuses, many problem gamblers experience serious adverse consequences leading to loss of jobs, families, and, ultimately, housing. This is substantiated by findings from this study.

Chang was in his sixties, he has been homeless for more than 10 years (mid-1990s). He was forced to the streets because of gambling debts. After selling his house to clear off his debts, he stayed for awhile with his son. The arrangement did not work well thus he decided to leave and has been living on the streets since then. Some

authors, such as Ravenhill (2008), sees Chang addiction to gambling as an individual's problem rather than circumstances that push the individual into using addiction as part of their coping strategy.

Lee was also made homeless because of gambling. Lee was a cook in a Chinese restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. His gambling habit makes him heavily indebted. His wife demanded a divorce after which asked him to leave their home.

The fate of people like Lim and Chang has been well researched by Nower et al., (2008). The study found problem gambler is a serious social concern. This is because many problem gamblers experience serious adverse consequences leading to loss of jobs, families, and, ultimately, housing. Some commentators (Cockersell, 2006; Krauthammer, 1985) even view this kind of addiction as mental health problem. Once been categorise as such solving the case will be difficult because there are huge variations of mental health problems.

5.5 Income and Job
Some people end up homeless because they cannot find a job that pays enough. In the context of Malaysia there are many labourers (with home and family) being paid as low as RM20 a day or RM600 a month. This happens because the country has no wage policy to support labourers, such as minimum wage policy. This study found of the 25 homeless interviewed, 13 held odd jobs (such as parking attendance, general helper in restaurant and stalls, pamphlet distributor). The wage they earned was too low even to cover a decent room rental. For example, Kumar work as a restaurant helper earning about RM400 per month. He said the longest he could stay in a decent room (low cost motel costing RM30 to RM50 per night) was two nights per month.

Kamal a Malay man (in his early 30s) is a new homeless, has been on the streets for only three months. His main source of income was distributing pamphlets to residential areas. For every 1000 pamphlets he received RM10. Kamal spent a big part of his earning on his motorbike, a vehicle he used to carry out his job.

Those who opted to work even though for pittance are mostly the new homeless and were relatively younger homeless. The older homeless generally have given up and have no qualm of living on mercy and handouts.

5.6 Parental Abuse
Abusive father has been named as a primary cause of homelessness by many studies. Young people who flee violent homes are at heightened risk for emotional and behavioural problems. Chan in his early twenties was abused by his father since he was a boy. Because of his traumatic life experience, Chan became very reclusive. In the words of Rossi (1989), Chan was showing a symptom of dysfunction. In line with Baker (2001) early experiences of bullying, neglect, rejection and problems at home will cause fear, anxiety and self-loathing. The results of these behaviours according to researchers (Whitbeck et al., 1997; Yates et al., 1998) are ready targets for exploitation from both adults and peers, and victims of physical and sexual assaults.

6. Role of Institutions
Homelessness is becoming an issue in Malaysia but the fact has not been fully accepted by the public office. Lacking awareness and understanding of what constitute homelessness is one of the reasons. Key welfare related agencies that authors approached, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and Desa Bina Diri (DBD) rehabilitation centre have their own stance as to what constitute homelessness. MWFCD and DBD categorised the homeless as destitute, i.e., defining them as beggars and vagrants. Beggars refer to persons who live by asking for money or food and vagrants refer to persons without a settled home or regular work who wanders from place to place and lives by begging. In their opinion the Act (Destitute Persons Act of 1977) could be used to enforce control over the homeless.

DSW, a department under the ambit of the MWFCD disagrees. The spokesperson Zulkapli Sulaiman labelled the homeless as drifters and "trouble makers". They could not be placed under the Destitute Act of 1977 according to Zulkapli because many of them are healthy and some do have job.

Of a sample of 25 this research was able to capture the varied perspectives and causes of homelessness. The situation confirmed difficulty to name one institution to be accountable on the homelessness. Consequently crafting a policy for the homeless will equally be difficult. This is because way a social problem is defined leads to the way policy is constructed and the way policy is constructed leads to organizations (public or private) being created to deal with that problem (Jacobs et al. 1999). Indeed in this study, there is no unitary understanding on what constitute homelessness even among relevant welfare institutions namely the MWFCD and DBD. They see the homeless as destitute thus bind them under the Destitute Act. The DSW on the other hand sees the homeless as a public nuisance thus has left them to be dealt by the police.

7. Conclusion

Throughout this study, various factors have been identified as the causes of homelessness. A person cannot or would not easily become homeless without having a set of stressful life events and problems. Connecting factors such as unemployment, abject poverty, substance abuse, rejection by the family and society, mental illness, etc could lead a person to houselessness and then homelessness.

Considering the current change in demographic profile of Malaysia, with increasing aging population and rapid increase in costs of living, stories told by the homeless could happen to anyone. Relationship breakdown, for example, is a common phenomenon today. Grief, despair and a sense of failure are few of the major causes of depression that are now becoming a popular sickness among young couples and generally are making many marriage counselors very rich and famous.

In the opinion of this research, the global economic uncertainty will increase houseless and homelessness community, perhaps even introduced new type of 'homelessness'. The new generation of homeless people are no longer seen as being almost exclusively male, alcohol-dependent and transients rather are families, women, children, youth, the elderly and marginalised ethnic or migrant groups. This new homelessness will call for new responses in the types and levels of service provision. But thus far Malaysia has not even begun to understand the current causes of homeless, implying the remote possibility to discuss issue of the new homeless. In the opinion of this paper the relevant welfare-related agencies need to buck-up for at this moment they have been lagging far behind on the issue of homelessness. The situation will worsen if this attitude continues.

**Dr Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi
Senior Lecturer
International Institute of Public Policy & Management
University of Malaya

Ms Alifatul Kamilah Abdul Manan
Head, Assistant Director
Public Service Department
Malaysia

References

- Auckland City Council. (2009). *Update of the Homeless Action Plan: 2008-2013*. http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/documents/homeless/default.asp (accessed 22 March 2010).
- Bahr, H. (1973). *Skid Row: An Introduction to Disaffiliation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, O. (2001). *Hidden but not Forgotten: The Experiences of Hostel Residents.* London: Crisis.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Cockershell, P. (2006). Drugs, disease, madness and death. In *Homelessness in Europe.* FEANTSA, Winter.
- Cohen, A. K. (1956). *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV). http://www.helpthehomelessdc.org/site/PageServer?pagename=11_homelessness_homelessness_facts&JServSessionIdr004=c06mpkcrq1.app341a (accessed 22 March 2010).
- Doak, M. J. (2008). *Social Welfare: Fighting Poverty and Homelessness*. Detroit: Thompson, Gale.
- Durkheim, E. (1938). *The Rules of Sociological Methods*. New York: The Free Press.
- Esptein, I. (1996). Educating Street Children: Some Cross-cultural Perspectives. *Comparative Education* (3)32, 289-302.
- FEANTSA. (2006). Health and homelessness: looking at full picture. *Homelessness in Europe.* FEANTSA, Winter.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1968). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Penguin.
- Greeson, J. M., Hurwitz, B. E., Llabre, M. M., Schneiderman, N., Penedo, F. J., and Klimas, N. G. (2008). Psychological distress, killer lymphocytes and disease severity in HIV/AIDS. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* (22)6, 901-911.
- Jacobs, K., Kemeny, J. and Manzi, T. (1999). *The Struggle to Define Homelessness: Public Policies and Private Troubles.* London: Cassel.
- Koegel, P. (2007). Causes of homelessness. In *Homelessness Handbook,* eds. Levinson, D. and Ross, M. Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing.
- *Lee, Hock Guan. (2008).* Ageing in Southeast and East Asia: Family, Social Protection and Policy. *Singapore: ISEAS.*
- Malaysia. (2006). *Destitute Persons Act 1977, (Incorporating all amendments up to 1 January 2006) Act 183, Laws of Malaysia* http://www.agc.gov.my (accessed 22 March 2010).
- Malaysia. (2009). National Social Welfare Policy. www.kpwkm.gov.my (accessed 20 March 2011).
- Malaysia. (2009). National Social Policy. www.kpwkm.gov.my (accessed 20 March 2011).
- Malaysia. (2010). National Housing Policy. www.kpkt.gov.my (accessed 4 April 2011).
- Mckinney-Vento. (2001). *Domestic Violence, Homelessness and Children's Education. Law into Practice.* North Carolina: Greensboro.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). In *George Herbert Mead: On Social Psychology* ed. Straus, A. (1964) Chicago: Phoenix Books.
- Merton, R. (1949). *Societal Theory and Social Structure*. Illinois: Free Press.
- Minnert, J. and Greenhalgh, E. (2007). Approaches to homelessness policy in Europe, the United States, and Australia. *Journal of Social* (63)3 641-655.
- Leavitt, M. O. (2007). Strategic Action Plan on Homelessness. US Department of Health and Human Services: Secretary's Work Group on Ending Chronic Homelessness. Retrieved Mac 22, 2010 from http://www.hhs.gov/homeless/research/endhomelessness.html
- National Coalition for Homelessness. (2009). Substance Abuse and Homelessness. Washington, D.C.

- National Health Care for the Homeless Council. (2008). "Health Care for the Homeless: Comprehensive Services to Meet Complex Needs." Retrieved Mac 22, 2010 from http://www.nhchc.org.
- Neale, J. (1997). Homelessness and theory reconsidered. *Housing Studies* 12(1) 47-63.
- Nower, L., Eyrich, K., Pollio, D. E. and Carol, S. (2008) (January) Problem gambling and homelessness: prevalence of mental health problems and patterns of substance use. In Society and Social Work and Research: University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center http://sswr.confex.com/sswr/2008/techprogram/P8608.HTM (accessed 22 March 2010).
- *Nurul Huda Jamaluddin, (Nov. 2 2010). The lazy homeless.* The Malay Mail Online, *2 November.* http://www.mmail.com.my/content/53907-lazy-homeless (accessed *22 March 2010).*
- Pohl, R. (2001). *Homelessness in Canada*. Calgary: Street Level Counselling and Consulting.
- Ravenhill, M. (2008). *The Culture of Homelessness*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Rossi, P. (1989). *Down and Out in America: The Origin of Homele*ssness. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shelter. (2011). What causes homelessness? The Housing and Homelessness Charity, London. http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/housing_issues/tackling_homelessness/What_causes_homelessness (accessed 22 March 2010).

- Smith, J. (2003). Defining homelessness: the impact of legislation on the definition of homelessness and on research into homelessness in the UK. In Centre of Housing and Community Research. London: London Metropolitan University.
- Speak, S. and Tipple, G. (2007). Housing and homelessness in developing nations. In *Homelessness Handbook, eds.* Levinson, & Ross. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Springer, S. (2000). Homelessness: a proposal for a global definition and classification, *Habitat International* 24: 475-484.
- Tipple, G. and Speak, S. (2009). *The Hidden Millions: Homelessness in Developing Countries*. New York: Routledge.
- United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). (2000). Strategies to combat homelessness: Nairobi, Kenya. *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 2003*. http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/043/88/IMG/NR004388.pdf (accessed 3 January 2011).
- Weinreb, L. and Rossi, P. H. (1995). The American homeless family shelter system. *Social Service Review*, 69(1) 86-107.
- Whitbeck, L. B. (1990). Mental *Health and Emerging Adulthood Among Homeless Young People*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Yates G, MacKenzie R, Pennbridge J, and Cohen E. (1988). A risk profile comparison of runaway and non-runaway youth. *American Journal of Public Health,* 78: 820-821.
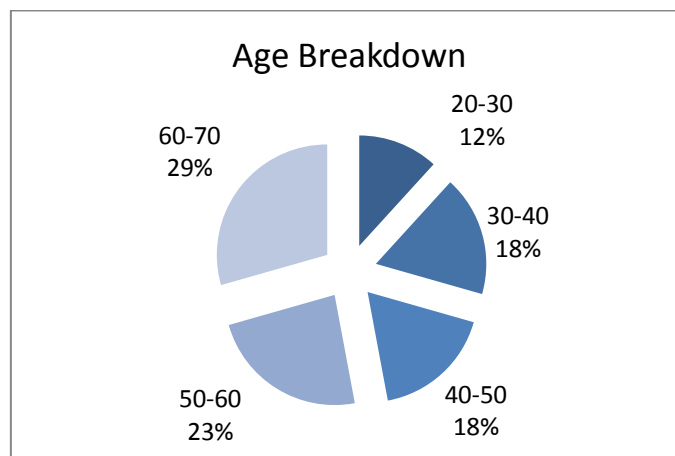
Figure 1: Respondents by Age

Table 1: Homeless Respondents

Location	Sampled homeless		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**
Central Market	2	2	4
Dang Wangi	11	1	12
KSK Office	4	-	4
Bangkok Bank	5	-	5
TOTAL	22	3	25