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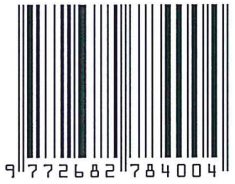

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THE ANTECEDENTS FOR HOMELESSNESS IN BUKIT BINTANG, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Mohd Ramlan Mohd Arshad[1], Nurul Fatin Madzlan[2], Nurhafizah Mawi[3] & Mohd Nazir Rabun[4]*

[1,2,3] *Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Negeri Sembilan, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia*

4Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Kampus Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia

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Corresponding Author:
mramlan2957@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the antecedents for homelessness in Bukit Bintang with the main objectives of exploring the relationship between the variables namely poverty, unemployment, domestic violence and addiction towards homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. 150 respondents of this study are community that become homeless that get shelter in the roadside of Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Purposive sampling technique was used with questionnaire as the instrument. Correlation and regression analysis were conducted, and the findings show that there are significant relationships between the variables and homelessness with domestic violence as the main factor. Hence, various parties such as authority, non-governmental bodies and community has benefited from the study.

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1. Introduction

Homelessness can be found in most countries all over the world including the developed countries. There is a phrase of saying “first world country with a third world country’s issues”. Meaning to say that, no matter how developed a country is, homelessness is still one of the problems that need to be faced by the government (Duffield et al., 2011). Since the late 1990s the homelessness problem has been referred to as a “disaster” and the mayors of Canada’s major cities have called it a “crisis”, while the United Nations agency elevated its assessment of the situation to describe homelessness in Canada as a “national emergency” (Tony, 2009). There are many ways taken to curb and eradicate or reduce the rate of homelessness but surprisingly, the rate is increasing year by year. The number of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur have increased by three-fold, from 600 in 2014 to at least 2,000 people last year based on a survey conducted by the Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL) (Irsyad, 2016). Despite, there are no accurate figures on the number of homeless people in the city as only a few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are aware of their existence (da Costa Nunez & Collingnon, 2010). In addition, there are only 10 percent of homeless persons in the city of Kuala Lumpur are non - Malaysians. This implies 90 percent of them are truth be told

local people. As indicated by Reach Out Malaysia president and founder, Pete Nicholl, the demographics of sleeping on the streets straight forwardly relate with the demographics of the country as far as race, religion and ethnic foundation. This has proven that local people are the bigger contributor to the statistics of the homelessness rate in Malaysia. As a result, this have shown that number of homeless has risen and this is the serious problem which should be given attention by the government.

According to Irsyad (2016) 10 out of the 25 homeless people aged above 50 years old immigrated to Kuala Lumpur in order to find and search of better life. However, most of them only get the jobs that offered no security or becoming jobless. After retirement they realized that they cannot afford to feed themselves and to survive and some of them also has no one to fallback to thus lead them to be part of homelessness community in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, the Federal Territories Ministry has worked closely with other Government agencies and NGOs in order to create a standard operating procedure (SOP) to ensure this problem can be addressed effectively (Penang Institute, 2015). However, the number of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur keep growing by almost two-fold especially since the government announced that a 12,000-sqft shelter is being built for them (Hall & Maza, 2018). This made the homeless problem becoming more complicated to be solved although there are many strategic approaches undertaken by the government and authorities to eradicate this problem .

Homelessness will always exist among people experiencing unexpected poverty, struggling with mental illness or substance abuse, or coping with other unexpected events (Nunez & Fox, 2014). There are many factors and real causes that could lead to this problem such as the surveys of city officials that the most frequently cited reasons for family homelessness are a lack of affordable housing, poverty, and domestic violence, for unaccompanied youth while the chief factors cited are mental illness, substance abuse, and lack of affordable housing (Better Home Fund, 2015). There are some consequences arise due to this problem, for instance, homelessness has particularly adverse effects on children and youth including hunger, poor physical and mental health, and missed educational opportunities (Dail, 2016). Therefore, examining the contributing factors to homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur in order to find the solutions to reduce the rate which has been increase from time to time is highly significant.

Homelessness

Homelessness or house lessness can be defined in many ways. According to Sharifah Mariam and Alifatul Kamilah (2012), 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. In general, homelessness phenomena often seen as a negativity by the publics. Lack of awareness and understanding may be caused the publics to avoid and ignore this issue. They tend to have a negative and stereotype thinking on this homeless community. Homelessness describes a range of different material housing situations. In Australia the definition that is most influential describes homelessness as housing situations which do not meet the prevailing cultural standard in terms of facilities and security of tenure (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992). Three kinds of homelessness are described by this definition: primary homelessness (literal rooflessness), secondary homelessness ('couch surfing', or temporary shelter with friends or relatives, as well as boarding houses or refuges), and tertiary homelessness (including, for example, single rooms in boarding houses, with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities and no security of tenure.) This definition will form the basis for the following arguments. The symbolic burden of homelessness is the experience of a form of disempowerment and describes a unique kind of marginality which may be associated with

the'symbolic burden' that the notion of homelessness as a cultural trope and a set of subject positions carry.

However, homelessness is often seen as an identity, reducing structural inequality to a static characteristic of individuals. There is a broad acknowledgement within the literature relating to homelessness that people (young or otherwise) who experience homelessness are often positioned as inferior in day to day life. People who experience homelessness are denigrated in face-to-face interaction (Lee and Farrell, 2003; Lankenau, 1999) and rejected by peers (Roschelle and Kaufman, 2004). Popular and media representations construct 'the homeless' as morally suspect, irresponsible, dangerous, dirty, obscene or lacking active subjectivity (Hodgetts et al., 2006; Beresford, 1979), and people experiencing homelessness are acutely aware of this (Hodgetts et al., 2006). The consequences that this has for subjectivity have been described in terms of stigmatization, low self-worth and shame (Kidd, 2007), feelings that are part of subjectivities articulated in the language of a discourse which constructs homelessness as an individual, personal failure (Harter et al., 2005). Participants in the work of Boydell et al. (2000) experienced shame, as well as devaluing the ontological worth of their homeless subjectivities as part of autobiographical narration. Different researches, dealt with the causes of homelessness, gathered the personal information about people who have to live in the street. Though, analyzing that information, it is clear, that mostly, people lived in the poor districts, where there was a high percentage of unemployment, family violation, low education, drug abuse etc. All these factors can be considered as the primary ones. So, judging by this information we can say clearly, that a possible way of solution is to stop the process of becoming homeless at the very beginning of it. The government should primarily pay attention to such districts – it should organize the work of the social programs in the way, so that they can help people, who are on the verge of homelessness. First, there should be some social services, which should determine the financial and moral state of different families in the districts with a high percentage of risk of homelessness. Social workers should be close to such families, they can help them to solve some psychological problems connected with the child's education or with different kinds of parents' abuse. Special attention should be paid on the part of the neighbors, police, spiritual leaders and the landlords, as such vulnerable families are seen better by those, who are in the nearest position to them.

Theoretically, it sounds great, but, unfortunately, people nowadays have lost their humanity qualities, they are interested only in their proper wellness and prosperity and they don't care about the problems other people may face. This is not a good state of things, we forget about mutual help, compassion – we are led by the desire of great amount of money, and the problems of the others are of no matter for us. That is why such social programs of mutual help bring no result at all. There is a reverse of the coin – if there are people, who would like to help the others to solve at least their psychological problems, there is a possibility that families with such problems can just skip this help. It is natural, that when people are in a tight situation, they are not enthusiastic about discussing their problems with the others. The other way around – they become angry, aggressive, as if everyone who surrounds them is guilty of their poverty. Of course, when people become homeless, this is a real shock for them, especially when it happens unexpectedly (such variants can also happen, when there is an accident, in which almost all the members of the family die or people can just go to pieces and become bankrupt). They are morally, spiritually and even psychologically destroyed and we should understand it. Supporting housing has become rather widespread nowadays. They provide different services connected with mental and physical health and employment. In this way, they help families, who are on the edge of homelessness, when they still have the houses, and the work of this supporting housing is coordinated in the way to support the families and help them to find a job before they

lose everything they have. However, there is another problem, connected with homelessness – how to understand, whether a person really needs your help. Unfortunately, some people managed to create their business, based on charity for homeless people. The procedure is simple: a person begs for money in a specific place, and this is only his place, and at the end of the day, a part of the money is given to a chief. In case, when people, who are really in need, decide to occupy the same place, he won't have a success. It is sad even to think about those people, who have built their business on the grief of the others. Who are those people, who can freely use people's despair for their own benefits? The problem is extremely pressing and this one should be solved on the level of the government and with the aids from other parties. Special services should deal with these "businessmen" and punish them according to the legislation in power.

Homelessness in Malaysia Context

In Malaysia, homelessness falls under the broader umbrella of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) with enforcement duty mandated to the Social Welfare Department (SWD) (Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). There are four major policies under this ministry which are, the National Social Policy, National Policy on Women, National Policy for the Elderly, and National Social Welfare Policy. Meaning to say that, in Malaysia there is no direct or specific policy for homeless people. This community has not been receiving much attention. Majority of the public do not know about how serious this issue is because homelessness in Malaysia is hidden from the public viewing.

Early research proved that there are so many contributed factors of homelessness. People become homeless for many reasons. Some become homeless after retirement or loss a job. Some people have injuries, illness, or disabilities that make it hard to earn income (Food Not Bombs, 2014). Every individual that end up living on the streets must first had encountered such situation where they have no choice rather than to live on the streets. It is vital to identify the contributed factors of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur so the prevention action can be taken and together this issue can be solved or at least reducing the rate of homelessness in Malaysia. In term of ethnic breakdown, 53% were Malays followed by Chinese (23%) and Indians (18%) (Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). 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 (Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). The Chinese homeless favorite the Bangkok Bank because it is very close to Petaling Street or sometimes referred to as China town (Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). 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%) (Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). Based on the findings, the homelessness issue has given impact to all races in Malaysia, especially Malays. The homeless people live in a community based on the location as mentioned in the findings.

Theoretical Perspective

Structural theory sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. This is supported by statement made by Koegal et al (1995) which is structural factors determine why pervasive homelessness exists now while individual factors explain who is least able to compete for scarce affordable housing. According to Marvasti (1966) structural theory

emphasizes on factors such as, unemployment, number of low-income housing and social welfare assistance or programs. Thus, briefly structural theory suggest that the problem arise due to the structure of the country itself not on the homeless capabilities. Furthermore, government policies are best reflecting of structural factors. This can be said as they are related to income reductions, unemployment, and cutbacks of social welfare and social security programs (Marvasti, 1966).

There are researchers such as Fitzpatrick (2005), whom argues that homelessness is socially constructed. This is due to the facts that structural theory view homelessness as the inability to access to accommodation or housing (Sharifah Mariam and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). The theory argues that inadequate housing, inequitable welfare and economic systems will influence family and individuals where a continued pressure will cause and perpetuate homelessness (Sharifah Mariam and Alifatul Kamilah, 2012). Central to Fitzpatrick's realist explanation of homelessness is the claim that: 'Homelessness is not a cultural phenomenon, but rather a signifier of objective material and social conditions' (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Here 'structure' is contrasted with 'culture', 'objective' with 'subjective', and 'material' or 'real' with 'ideal' (Sommerville, 2013). The ' causes' of homelessness are then identified mainly as 'structures' of different kinds (economic, housing and patriarchal/interpersonal) plus 'individual attributes' (basically, factors that reduce personal resilience) (Sommerville, 2013). Fitzpatrick (2005) goes on briefly to explore how these different factors might be related in different contexts, specifically, poverty among groups in particular places, acting to increase the 'weight of the weighted possibility' of their homelessness.

Methodology

The study used quantitative methodology with cross-sectional design as the technique in collecting data. Self-administered questionnaire was used as the instrument in collecting data. The unit of analysis involved are 150 homeless people around Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Thus, the best sampling techniques that suit to the nature of the study is purposive and convenience sampling, which specific criteria of respondents were chosen which is homeless that stayed in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Therefore, only respondents who matched the scope of this study were asked to participate in this study and they were approached based on their availability and convenience cause. The instrument used for the measurement were taken from previous literature such as by Amadeo (2016) in measuring poverty, unemployment and homelessness. The other variables such as domestic violence and addiction were measured using Somers et al. (2003) that found valid and reliable for measuring both variables. The statistical analyses used were Pearson Correlation to generate the relationship between the independent variables namely as poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, addiction and the dependent variable which is homelessness while Regression Analysis was used to determine the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Result

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity issues. Based on Table 1, the strongest correlation is between Homelessness and of Domestic violence ($r=.86$, $p<.05$). This shows that domestic violence is a factor that highly correlated to homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. It is followed by the second highly correlated antecedents which is Addiction ($r=.62$, $p<.05$). For poverty and unemployment, the obtained results show that there is significant moderate correlation between these variables and homelessness as proven by ($r=.44$, $p<.05$) and ($r=.42$, $p<.05$) respectively. Thus, it can be ascertained that for homeless in Bukit Bintang, most of them are the victims of domestic violence.

Table 1:
Summary of Relationships using Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	R	P-Value	Decision
Relationship between Poverty and Homelessness	0.44	(p<.05)	Significant
Relationship between Unemployment and Homelessness	0.42	(p<.05)	Significant
Relationship between Domestic Violence and Homelessness	0.86	(p<.05)	Significant
Relationship between Addiction and Homelessness	0.62	(p<.05)	Significant

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

Firstly, all the assumptions of regression have been fulfilled for this study which is the Durbin-Watson fall between value 1 to 4. Multicollinearity was examined through Tolerance and Various Inflation Factor (VIF). Tolerance can be explained as the total of variability of specified independent variable are not dependent by other independent variables while VIF is the measurement of the standard error of a regression coefficient influence on the other independent variables. The presence of multicollinearity and sigularity is affected by tolerance values of less 0.10 and VIF values above 10. In this study, all the values of tolerance are less than 0.10 and VIF value is more than 10. Hence, this result proposes that it is not violated the multicollinearity assumption. There is also no critical issue for Mahalanobis value as all is below the critical value of 13.8.

Secondly, based on the results, it shows that all independent variables are able to explain 24.5 percent of the variance (R Square) in Homelessness. It means that there is 75.5 percent of impact from other variables which is not covered in the study that may have significant association toward homeless in Bukit Bintang. The model is said to be statistically significant as proven by F Value 105.800 at p<.05. Most importantly, Table 3 also reveals that in Bukit Bintang, domestic violence is the main antecedent that directed to people become homeless in that area with β=.82, p<.05. The other variables found to have no significant impact in regression analysis.

Table 2:
Summary of Influences using Regression Analysis (DV: Homelessness, N:150, p<.05)

Variables	Standardized β Value	P-Value	Decision
Poverty	-0.005	(p>.05)	Not-Significant
Unemployment	-0.042	(p>.05)	Not-Significant
Domestic Violence	0.821**	(p<.05)	Significant
Addiction	0.094	(p>.05)	Not-Significant
R Square	0.245		
F	105.800		
Sig.	0.00		
Durbin-Watson	2.143		
Sig.	0.000		

Discussion

Domestic violence can be suffered either by the wife, husband, children or the other member of a family institution (FEANSTA, 2007). A person faces domestic violence not only suffered physical injury but the most importance is mentally tortured which resulted to poor life survivalist and end up become homeless with no specific life direction due to bad experience that they encountered. The problem of domestic violence is a serious and far-reaching one, which affects society. It both arises from, and reflects, power-structures and how they order society and the place of any group of people within it. Domestic violence is a problem that cuts across all backgrounds and socio-economic groups. Domestic violence against women is a major obstacle to equality, development and peace and nullifies or impairs the full enjoyment of human rights by women. The reduction and elimination of all forms of violence against women is the focus of ongoing international campaigns of action by human rights bodies such as the UN, Amnesty International and the Council of Europe. Lack of affordable housing and long waiting lists for assisted housing mean that many women and their children are forced to choose between abuse at home and life on the streets. Approximately 63% of homeless women have experienced domestic violence in their adult lives (National Network to End Domestic Violence). Moreover, shelters are frequently filled and must turn away battered women and their children. In 2008, most cities saw an increase in family homelessness, though a large number of foreclosures has also influenced this number. Yet, cities have been responsive. Barely any homeless families were found living on the streets in 2008 compared to 2007 when 25% of people living on the streets were families (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008).

In Kula Lumpur, it is proven by the correlation output where the value is the $p< 0.01$, ($p= 0.00$) and $r= 0.860$ as high strength of correlation. This proves that the hypothesis of this study had been successfully achieved since there is a positive correlation between domestic violence and homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. This result explains that the domestic violence is one of the important contributors to the homeless problem in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. In addition, this result is consistent with one study in Massachusetts which found that 92 percent of homelessness had encountered extreme physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives, 63 percent had been victims of violence by a cozy partner, and 32 percent had been attacked by their present or latest partner (Somers et al., 2003). Such studies propose a relationship between domestic violence and homelessness. This result also consistent with the research of Aratani (2009), stated that domestic violence creates vulnerability to homelessness for women and children with limited economic resources. Among mothers with children experiencing homelessness, more than 80% had previously experienced domestic violence. In addition, the previous studies have shown that approximately 50% of all women who are homeless report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2013). By that, it can be said that domestic violence is one of the main contributors to the homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur.

Conclusion

Domestic violence not only affects the level of homelessness in Malaysia, but it does reflect the lack of efficient family institution management and other multipliers effects for such violence for example increasing number of street children, improving drugs selling and buying and other criminal activities that directly lead to increase in the number of social problems. Homelessness needs a holistic cure process. People need to be educated more on homeless issue in this country.

For instance, by improving knowledge to reduce stigma and fear. Create awareness to public on how to treat their elders and spreading more information on various chronic illnesses on how it affects the individuals are among others best initiaves. Furthermore, encouraging private institutions that provide health care to assist government thru their Corporate Social Responsibility also can be part of solutions as domestic violence is part of public health care issues. Besides that, government also needs to review the minimum wage and labor laws to ensure fairness to employees to prevent this group from joining homelessness citizens due to increase in cost of living especially in the city, as poverty and unemployment found significant in this study even though not the main antecedents for homelessness in Bukit Bintang.

Furthermore, various efforts as mentioned above such as giving assistance and improving the current law may help at least to reduce this problem when it is difficult to eliminated it. By having this study on factors that lead to homelessness in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur it may help the government in order to reduce the problem on future as the roots of the problem are discovered. It also may increase the awareness of the responsible authority including the society in order to concerned on this matter and to take any action in order to help the homeless people to have a better life on future. However, it needs to be reminded that the number of homeless has increased from 600 in 2014, to 1,500 and 2,000 in 2016 according to latest census conducted by DBKL (Arief, 2016). With the number of violent crimes reach 21,366 cases in 2017 (DOSM, 2018), there is huge potential for the victims to be part of homeless in this country. Thus, in future the studies on the government measurement should be tested whether they are compatible in curbing the factors that cause homelessness in this country.

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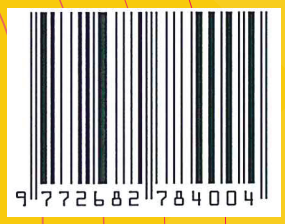

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