

Investigating Social Relationships and Skills of The Homeless People

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness has long been recognized as a worldwide problem that affects the poorest people in both developed and developing countries. Homelessness affects thousands of people in Malaysia, regardless of their age group, race, education, professions, and geographical regions. All aspects of the human experience are significantly influenced by human needs that promote well-being. However, for the homeless people, basic needs such as food, water, healthcare, education, and even shelters have often been difficult to be met. The study aims to investigate the factors contributing to the well-being of homelessness. The study employed a quantitative method using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and data was collected using purposive sampling from 102 respondents from the city of Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. Findings indicate that social relationships and skills have a significant influence on the well-being of homeless people.

Index Terms—*homelessness, homeless people, social relationship, skills, wellbeing*

I. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a global issue (Salhi and Doran, 2021). Thousands of people are homeless regardless of their age groups, ethnicities, education, careers, and geographical regions (Rusenko, 2015). In 2015, Habitat for Humanity estimated that 1.6 billion people live in "inadequate shelter" around the world. According to Joseph (2017), it was estimated that there are 150 million homeless people across the globe. The top five cities with the greatest number of homeless people are Moscow in Russia, Los Angeles, New York, and California in the USA, Mumbai in India, and Manila in the Philippines. Although Malaysia is not on the list, the number of homeless people in the country is alarming and requires immediate response from the government (Amira et al., 2018). Based on the latest statistics established by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, there are 3,472 homeless people in the country. Malaysian authorities regard the homeless people as destitute persons under the Destitute Persons Act 1977 (Akta Orang Papa 1977) (Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2020).

Homelessness matter is under the role of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), while the Social Welfare Department is responsible for the enforcement of the vagrants (Ghee and Omar, 2015). Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL) estimated that there are between 1,500 to 2,000 homeless people in Kuala Lumpur in 2016, a threefold rise from 2014 (Kay Li, 2018). Most of the homeless people in Kuala Lumpur, regardless of their employment status hardly afford to rent a room or a house (Amira et al., 2018). The bulk of Malaysia's homeless is Malaysians, with non-Malaysians amounting to 10% of the total (Ghee and Omar, 2015; Social Welfare Department Malaysia, 2020).

The homeless are not only those living on the street but also include those who live below the minimum living standard or live in fear or insecurity (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2015). Homelessness may arise in a variety of ways including unemployment, labor exploitation (including unpaid wages), housing loss, physical illness or injury, mental health difficulties (including severe depression), debt, family breakup, addiction, domestic abuse, and/or legal troubles are all common causes of homelessness (Rusenko, 2015; Fleury et al., 2021). Unemployment, low income, and old age without families were stated as the top three reasons for homelessness (Penang Institute, 2015). Homeless people face the same difficulties in meeting their needs; poor housing conditions, food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, social isolation, attack danger, and barriers to healthcare and other services (Fleury et al., 2021).

The homeless needs and well-being should be assessed as it is affected the local economy (Dietrich, 2018). The primary cause for the rising number of homeless due to the prolonged economic stagnation of recent years (Wong, 2018). Multidimensional reasons such as unaffordable housing, housing speculation, land scarcity, tribal warfare, rapid unplanned development, and privatization of civic services are the factors of homelessness (Ekhaese et al., 2021). The author further

A Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) FRGS/1/2019/SS06/MMU/03/1 was awarded to the researchers by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia in 2019.

stated that homelessness is linked to a lack of land, and there is a growing trend to criminalize the homeless or escalate violence against them. Psychological trauma and general well-being concerns are frequently the results of these events.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Homelessness can be found in almost every country and community in the world (Alowaimer, 2018). As a result, it is widely acknowledged that homelessness is the world's most serious societal problem in the twenty-first century (Alowaimer, 2018). Their rights and well-being should be assessed apace with business owners' concerns about homeless people's impact on our country's local economy and sustainability. Government should comprehend both individual challenges and wider structural social and economic issues to properly address homelessness (Rusenko, 2015).

Individuals and society benefit from knowledge and skill development is well recognized. Homeless people frequently have a variety of requirements and disadvantages, which have both contributed to and exacerbated their situation. Many homeless persons feel that they lack the necessary life skills (such as money management, dealing with agencies, and communication) as well as social networks to live independently. Homeless people may find it difficult to find and keep working in the paid labor market (Luby and Welch, 2005; Jones, 2018). Schultz (1961), one of the founders of human capital theory, claimed that the knowledge and skills acquired through training and education are significant forms of capital that should bring advantages (Collins, 2016). Some homeless individuals lack most of these skills, either because they have never acquired them or because they have forgotten them owing to prolonged homelessness. Finding and sustaining a job can be difficult for homeless persons due to a variety of issues, confirming their status outside or on the outskirts of mainstream employment. Homeless people are lack working experience, lack formal education, unable to secure affordable accommodation, have mental and physical health problems, and other social challenges (Alowaimer 2018; Fleury et al., 2021).

Homeless individuals are the people who have missed the opportunities to improve their literacy, cognition, and other skills due to their poor condition. Besides that, according to Alowaimer (2018), education is the most fundamental necessity for anyone who wants to obtain a suitable profession and live a dignified life, otherwise, the person will face difficulties to survive. Without proper education, particularly children will face severe challenges to survive in this modern world. Learning new skills or relearning old ones is an important aspect of overcoming homelessness. Therefore, the following hypothesis is being formed:

H1: Skills have a positive influence on the well-being of the Homeless.

Valuable bonding between family members, friends, or others is classified as social relationships. People's health and well-being are directly influenced by social support and relationships (Shier et al., 2011). People experiencing homelessness are socially isolated and have little social support and functioning (Fajardo et al., 2021). The author further stated that homeless people do not have social or family support or service providers. It is reported that homeless people have major health issues, and their lack of social support adds to their poor health. Matulic et al. (2020) stated that family, friends, and neighbors may provide significant social support to homeless people, thus resulting in a positive impact on their wellbeing. According to Omerov et al. (2020), possible techniques for reducing barriers to wellbeing include societal support to accommodate fundamental human needs, supportive relationships with health and social care providers, and specific programmes that connect health and social care, including flexible, drop-in services. Hence, the following hypothesis is being formed:

H2: Social Relationships have a positive influence on the well-being of the Homeless.

The needs of homeless people have to be managed to restore the image of the cities (Dietrich, 2018). Beamer, Corole, Hodges, and Ella (2014) suggested that a study should be carried out to thoroughly explore the experiences of those who are homeless as well as the needs that they have. Jobless, poor, bad living environment, lack of food, social isolation, assault danger, and impediments to health care and other services are among the challenges that homeless people face in achieving their basic needs (Fleury et al., 2021). To satisfy the unique needs of the homeless population, health services and social service providers must collaborate to establish trust and long-lasting relationships (Liu and Hwang, 2021).

Inaccessibility to health services, inadequate housing, inequitable welfare, and economic systems will affect homeless families and individuals. Government programs and policies should be addressed and reformed adequately to have a clearer understanding of the definition. Challenges in mainstream programmes (such as a lack of a stable, fixed residence) frequently prevent some people experiencing homelessness from participating. Frequently, there should be revisions made to the process of establishing and enhancing auxiliary support services, based on the challenges encountered and needs to be needed by the homeless so that the services given are still tailored to the actual needs and circumstances (Drani et al., 2020).

Particular family members, according to Winland et al. (2011), can play a key role in fostering the supportive relationships that are important for overall wellbeing. Learning new skills or relearning old ones is an important aspect of overcoming homelessness. The field of research focusing on the well-being of homeless people should be investigated. A similar but more recent study would be highly beneficial because the most useful study is over two decades old. Their well-being should be taken care of for them to experience health, happiness, and prosperity. It entails good mental health, a high level of life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and the ability to cope with stress (Davis, 2019).

Applicable Theories

The “Maslow hierarchy of needs”, which has been around for a long time, is still one of the most comprehensive frameworks for quantitative, open-ended explorations of needs in numerous life domains (Fleury et al., 2021). In his Hierarchy of Needs, Abraham Maslow emphasized the need of satisfying or supply a person's most fundamental needs first to ensure their survival and development in other areas of life (Ann, 2015). Maslow categorized human needs in a progressive arrangement, beginning with “physiological (fundamental) needs and advancing through safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization” at the top of the pyramid structure (Fleury et al., 2021).

According to Maslow, once one need is satisfied, another progressively takes its place (Maslow, 1943). The central focus of the hierarchy of needs of Abraham Maslow is on exploring how the attitude of people is stimulated by human desire in different communities in society to meet certain human needs. It theorizes the inability to access the basic needs of homeless people. The following shows five different levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

1. Physiological needs - Needs of physiology are principal human needs that are crucial to humans living in different social orders that engage in society (Aruma and Melvins, 2017). Human essential needs, such as nourishment, water, clothes, shelter facility (settlement or lodging), rest (sleep), and procreation. However, homeless people today will find it difficult to meet the lowest level of the hierarchy.

2. Safety needs. There are various ways of safety. There are many examples namely, emotional security, financial security, personal health and wellbeing, rules and regulations, asset safety, and social stability. Personal safety or physical safety is the first one. It is rarely safe for the people who live in the streets or even shelters. This lack of trust causes homeless people to lose their trust and hope. The next degree of safety consists of economic and financial security. This safety factor is equally essential for homeless people.

3. Belongingness and love need. Belongingness; alludes to a human emotional need for interpersonal relationships, connectedness, and being part of a group. It also includes love, affection, trust, and friendship. For the majority of homeless families, shifting is a way of life. Although homeless families try to provide their children with a sense of love and belonging, the absence of secure housing and the insufficient support from their extended family due to homelessness can result in a loss of traditions or a feeling of not belonging to a culture or society (Aruma and Melvins, 2017).

4. Esteem needs. Self-esteem is the fourth level of need which includes accomplishment, respect, and self-worth. Humans want to be welcomed by others and respected. We need self-respect as well. Being a homeless person can be a traumatic and devastating experience for their self-esteem. Living on the streets can impact their self-esteem negatively. Self-esteem is made up of these two wishes. Guardians need to satisfy all the requirements of their children, no matter their socio-economic status in life. Many people regularly label homeless individuals in their current situation, but they fail to understand that this is what they do to survive and how they attempt to handle their torment.

5. Self-actualization. Realizing a person's true potential requires the ability to live up to his or her total potential. It is simple to see that few destitute individuals can reach the most elevated level of the progression of Maslow. Once more, Maslow pushed that sometime recently higher needs can be considered, lower essential needs must be met, and homeless now and then come about in a need of one or more of these essential needs being met.

6. Understanding needs. Understanding is the sixth level of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and it deals with people's desire to know about their surroundings. This makes us aware to humans of the crucial need of obtaining suitable knowledge, skills, information, and attitudes to perform efficiently and successfully in a wide variety of social contexts. There is a definite need for people to acquire pertinent knowledge, skills, information, and attitudes so that they can contribute to the repositioning of their multicultural areas through social development initiatives (Aruma et al., 2017). The learning of pertinent knowledge, skills, information, and attitudes through the medium of education will aid recipients at the community level in understanding how the acquired knowledge, skills, information, and attitudes will aid them in enhancing community growth in their respective communities.

In 2011, Seligman suggested the term PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) as a set of five quantitative elements that lead to well-being (Seligman, 2018). Seligman chose five for WBT because they are “naturally rewarding” (i.e., intrinsically motivating) to individuals all over the world: “positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement (a.k.a. PERMA)”. He claims that each of these five elements is intrinsically fulfilling, implying that they are worthwhile aims for doing anything (Fallon et al., 2017).

1. Positive emotions include sentiments of happiness, optimism, and joy. Individuals around the globe aspire to feel positive emotions. Positive emotions are a crucial indicator of well-being, according to research, because they are associated with satisfaction with life, tolerance, awareness, incentives, work outcomes, and overall wellbeing (Coffey et al., 2016).

2. The act of getting fully engaged, interested, or concentrated in life activities is a second essential indicator of well-being. Flow, the most prevalent form of engagement, occurs when an individual engages in an activity that is both hard and requires a lot of expertise; these traits induce a complete lack of self. Other indices of well-being, such as life satisfaction, job and leisure satisfaction, and increases in good effect after the engagement experience, are also positively associated with engagement.

3. Feeling respected by others and having deep, mutually satisfying relationships is a further key indicator of well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Humans have a natural, biological predisposition to form close relationships throughout their lives, beginning at a young age. Similarly, some argue that intimate connections are a fundamental human need (Ryan and Deci, 2001). According to research, friendship relationships are positively correlated with self-esteem, and perceived improvements in friendship quality are associated with greater happiness (Coffey et al., 2016).

4. Meaning—having a sense of purpose derived from something larger than oneself—is the fourth determinant of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). People want meaning because it makes life worth living and provides them a sense of fulfillment, regardless of where it comes from (e.g., religion or relationships) (Seligman 2011). Throughout the adult lifespan, meaning is linked to better levels of enjoyment, more life satisfaction, and fewer psychological issues (Coffey et al., 2016).

5. The sixth indication of well-being, striving for achievement (or accomplishment), is defined by Seligman (2011) as “a persistent or determined desire to master or accomplish something for one's own sake”. As a result, rather than analyzing actual accomplishments, achievement as an indication of well-being should be operationalized by examining people's desire to do something (e.g., persevering attitude). WBT and existing research on PERMA best align with operationalizing achievement as having a persisting mindset (Seligman, 2011). Providing a subjective measure of performance that is generalizable across settings and ages also guarantees that the pursuit of excellence is a continuous and continuing endeavor.

As a result of the development of these theories, the following variables have emerged in terms of explaining how and what factors influence the well-being of the homeless and the government's role.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative technique. Surveys have been conducted on 102 homelessness and most of them were identified around the capital city of Perak, Ipoh, Malaysia. The face-to-face interviews had been carried out in the central of the city with the full consent of the homeless individuals. The design of the questionnaires includes close-ended questions with a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Non-probability purposive sampling was chosen to be used for the respondents. The researcher selected the respondents depending on their willingness to participate. The type of purposive sampling selected is a homogeneous sampling that focuses on individuals who have comparable traits or attributes. The PLS-SEM analysis has been performed to analyze the relationship between multiple variables. For this study, the researchers focused on the homeless social relationships and skills.

IV. FINDINGS

Figure 1: Respondents’ Demographic

Variables	Dimensions	Frequency (N=102)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	33	33
	Male	69	67
Age	0 to 20	0	0
	21 to 30	0	0
	31 to 40	11	10
	40 and above	91	90
Ethnicity	Malay	57	56
	Chinese	11	11
	Indian	34	33
	Other (Malaysian)	0	0
	Others (Non-Malaysian)	0	0
Marital Status	Single	29	28
	Married	35	34
	Divorced	25	25
	Widowed	13	13
	Others	0	0
Education	Primary School	35	35
	Secondary School	54	52
	STPM/Diploma/Foundation/Certificate	0	0
	Bachelors/Master’s Degree or PHD	0	0
	None of the above	13	13
Current Job	Yes	1	1
	No	101	99
Work Experiences	Yes	84	83
	No	18	17

The figure above illustrates the demographic statistics, where 90 percent of the respondent are aged 40 and above. 67 percent of the respondents are male, the greatest number of respondents. The majority of respondents are Malays followed by Indians, and Chinese. 35 percent of them are married and 54 percent of them managed to get a secondary school level of education. 99 percent of them are currently jobless, however, 83 percent of them have job experience.

Figure 2: Variables Descriptive Statistic

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Relationship	102	3.2952	.19207
Skills	102	3.6467	.11431
Wellbeing of Homeless	102	2.9219	.27625
Valid N (listwise)	102		

From the figure above, Skills has the highest mean with a standard deviation of 0.11431, followed by Social Relationship with a standard deviation of 0.19207. Well-being of the Homeless has the lowest mean with a 0.27625 standard deviation.

Figure 3: Path Coefficients

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta Value	Standard Error	T Values	P Values	Decision
1	Skills -> Wellbeing of Homeless	0.283	0.057	5.003	0.000	Supported
2	Social Relationship -> Wellbeing of Homeless	0.145	0.041	3.537	0.000	Supported

H1: The hypothesized path relationship between Skills and the Well-being of the Homeless is statistically significant.

H2: The hypothesized path relationship between Social Relationships and the Well-being of the Homeless is statistically significant.

Figure 4: Coefficients of Determination R2

Construct	R Square (R2)
Wellbeing of Homeless	0.717

Henseler et al. and Hair et al. state that an R2 value of 0.75 is seen as having substantial significance, an R2 value of 50 is viewed as having moderate significance, and an R2 value of 0.25 is regarded as having insufficient significance. The value of the coefficient of determination, R2, for the Homeless population's Well-being as an endogenous latent variable is 0.717. In light of this, we can deduce that the latent variables (Social Relationships, and Skills) substantially explain 71.1% of the variance in the Well-being of the Homeless.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Skills factor contains six instruments that were used in the questionnaires; there are (1) engaging in training and activities, (2) possess of self-skills, (3) opportunities given, (4) missed opportunities, (5) independent living, and (6) willingness to learn to improve personal wellbeing. Most of the respondents agreed that due to missed opportunities (no permanent address or accommodation, transportation issues, lack of information and communication), they are not able to engage themselves in training and activities that were organized by both government and non-government organizations. On the other hand, most of them do not possess Malaysia Identity Card (IC) because they lost it or were stolen. Without proper documentation, it would be difficult for them to get a new replacement IC and secure jobs. They agreed that with proper knowledge and skills, they can improve their well-being and come out from the deprived situation of being homeless. Thus, they would be able to live an independent life without always being in dire need of helping hands from others.

The social relationship factor contains five instruments that were used in the questionnaires; there are (1) preference to remain silent rather than expressing thoughts and feelings, (2) discrimination by employers, (3) discrimination by landlords and neighbors, (4) sharing thoughts and emotions makes uncomfortable and (5) shelter services was a better alternative than maintaining an unhealthy living situation with a roommate. Findings reveal that most homeless people choose to remain silent and avoid sharing their problems with their friends or families because it makes them uncomfortable and would not like to bother them with their problems.

Government is one of the biggest service providers to the homeless community. More research on the well-being of homeless and homelessness issues is needed for the policymakers to grasp and comprehend the unresolved homelessness issue from various perspectives. Findings revealed that social relationships and skills are vital to enhancing and improving the well-being of homeless people to reintegrate them into society.

VI. CONCLUSION

The discoveries of this study are highly important in achieving Sustainable Development Goals Indicators for Malaysia: “No Poverty (1), Zero Hunger (2), Good Health and Well-being (3), Decent Work and Economic Growth (8), Industry Innovation and Infrastructure (9), Sustainable Cities and Communities (11), and Partnerships (17)”. The findings tend to provide input for government authorities in handling the homeless, especially on the importance of knowledge and skills, thus improving the overall wellbeing. The ruler acknowledges the necessity of providing appropriate support to vulnerable populations to prevent them from becoming homeless and to allow them to stay at their present residences, where they are likely to have existing support networks and community connections.

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