Homeless in Kuala Lumpur: A Way Out of The Street

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The number of homeless in Kuala Lumpur has increased ten-fold over the past few years. Over the years, awareness about the welfare of the street peoples has been on the rise. Although the intention of the groups is good, the overflow of this charity movement proved to create another issue, over-giving. The lack of effective intervention from the government agencies also has been blamed for worsening the issue further. Hence, the paper intends to come out with a long term programme that aids the homeless of Kuala Lumpur beyond the basic need and to be independent and out of the street. To archive, the aim is by identifying a set of objectives which are: to categorise the homeless into several groups, to analyse the current policies and initiative programmes in Malaysia, and lastly to compare the existing strategies and aids for the homeless in Malaysia with others countries. A qualitative content analysis method is used in this study by summarizing literature review on the programmes that aid the homeless to come out of homelessness in Malaysia and other countries. Comparison is focusing on government intervention programmes as well as national policies regarding the homeless issue. This paper will hopefully bring significant changes to the way we design and execute homeless intervention programmes in the future.

Keywords: Homelessness, Initiatives, Homeless Aids Program, Rehabilitation, Malaysia Homeless

1. INTRODUCTION

The homeless are not only those living in the street but also include those who live in a below minimum living standard or living in fear or insecure (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2015). They also have limited access to health care and services, making them more vulnerable to the element. Hence, this resulting in the life expectancy of the homeless is significantly less than the average population by 30 years (Sparkes, 2019). In Malaysia, the homeless persons, especially in a big city like Kuala Lumpur, has become a norm to the city sceneries. It is only recently the issue have caught the eyes of the authorities and NGO's. So, it is not surprising that Malaysia has yet had our clear definition of the homeless. Now, each Malaysian agencies and authority have their own set of definition and characteristic of homeless people (Li, 2018).

More so, sometimes the definitions are contradicting to one another. This makes tabulating one cohesive data for the homeless in Malaysian difficult. Hence, it is masking the real severity of the homelessness problem.

Although to most, it seems that homelessness is a self-explain annotation, there still no clear understanding as to what governs homeless (Alhabshi et al., 2014). While Amore et al. defined the homeless as a group of people that live in severely inadequate housing (Aizuddin, Abdul Jabar and Idris, 2019), where the accommodation is lacking in essential services like plumbing heating, electricity and upkeep (Brennan et al., 2018). As it is widely agreed that homelessness is a multifaceted issue, many other significant factors affect the rise and fall of the population. The leading identified causes are unemployment or underemployment, substance abuse, mental

illness and violence, among many other reasons (Institute of Global Homelessness, 2019). Whereas in developing countries, there is an additional threat that causes like climate change, the war of civil crisis, and the global economic uncertainty the hike in the number of homeless (Speak, 2019).

The world homeless population is estimated to be around 100 million people and over a billion more people live in inadequate housing where the vast majority are living in developing countries (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2005). This concern leads to multiple agencies to do research and conference to come out with recommendation and guidelines for the countries to follow in hope to curb the growing homelessness problems. In particular, the United Nation has been committed to fighting the crisis (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2005). So, Malaysia, as one of the participant countries in the United Nations should uphold the UN vision and commit to works towards eliminating homelessness. However, based on the current situation and find in Malaysia, it is clear that the authority and policies maker are not serious enough in handling the issue.

The number of homeless in Kuala Lumpur has increased by ten-fold over the past few years with an estimate of 1,500 to 2,000 homeless occupy the street of Kuala Lumpur in 2016 compared to just over 600 in 2014 (Li, 2018). Over the years, awareness about the welfare of the street peoples has been on the rise. There is a lot more social service, and NGOs organization have been set up to help and assist the homeless. There are few organizations in Malaysia works to support people out of homelessness (Amalina et al., 2018). Although the intention of the groups is good, the overflow of this charity movement proved to create another issue, over-giving. This issue occurs because they only concern about the people's immediate need that is food. Also, the lack of coordination among the charity groups has resulted in overlapping of their focus area and negligent of the not-so-well-known area of the homeless.

Besides, concerned about the homeless in Kuala Lumpur is often raised when there are ideas and planned for rejuvenation of the Kuala Lumpur core. The homeless often give the perception of poor safety, influencing the number of customers and users of the area (Dietrich, 2018). The NGO's and the city authority are often in disagreement because of the different approach and perception of the homeless community (Augustin, 2017; Subramaniam, 2014). Whatever the strategy is, it is still relatively ineffective as the statistic show a steep incline of the homeless. Hence, the issue of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur must be tackled more holistically. This is not only to ensure the concerned of the stack holders and business owner well addresses but also the need of the homeless is also fulfilled. The more efficient and well-rounded policies and programs also can potentially save lots of resources in the long runs. This has been proven in the experimental programs done in the US where their integrated and holistic ways of handling homeless saved a couple of hundred thousand a year in comparison of segregated programs (Maceri, 2014). Hence by curbing the homelessness in the country should help to improve the economic situations.

2. TYPES OF HOMELESS CATEGORIES

There already many kinds of researches are done in categorising the homeless as the homeless issue become more pressing as times past. The most common and primary grouping of the homeless is by gender and age, which has been widely used in the preliminary stage of categorising these homeless. DBKL has adapted this grouping type in its survey of the homeless population in KL in 2017 (Dietrich, 2018). Although this method is a quick and easy way to get the overall idea of the situation, it is not enough to give an insight into the homeless background. Therefore, the followings are examples of the homeless categories that have been mapped out by some of the field's expert.

Table 1: DBKL Homeless people counted in Kuala Lumpur hot spot zones in 2017 (Source: Dietrich, 2018)

TARIKH / MASA		10 MEI 2017 / 02:00						
KATEGORI		DEWASA		KANAK-KANAK		OKU		JUMLAH
ZON	KAWASAN SEKITAR	L	P	L	P	L	P	
1	JALAN LUMUT	133	19	3	1	-	-	156
2	JALAN IPOH KECIL	19	3	-	-	-	-	22
3	TIONG NAM	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
4	PASAR CHOW KIT	51	3	-	-	-	1	55
5	ALKA RIA	35	5	3	-	-	-	43
6	MEDAN TUANKU	16	1	-	-	1	-	18
7	MASJID INDIA	67	11	3	1	1	-	83
8	JALAN PETALING	69	8	-	1	-	-	78
9	LEBUH PUDU	144	2	-	-	-	-	146
10	BUKIT BINTANG	80	8	-	1	-	-	89
11	KOLEJ SEGI	155	4	1	1	-	-	161
12	HOSPITAL KUALA LUMPUR	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
13	KLCC	64	1	-	-	-	-	65
14	MASJID NEGARA	57	3	-	-	-	-	60
15	BRICKFIELDS	46	-	-	-	1	-	47
	JUMLAH	950	68	10	5	3	1	1,037

2.1 The Global Framework for Understanding and Measuring Homelessness

Busch-Geertsema et al. (2015) stated that there are three main characteristics of homelessness. The categorization is derived from the widely acceptable homelessness definition which is "living in severely inadequate housing due to a lack of access to minimally adequate housing". The categories are mostly similar to the grouping done by Mackenzie and Chamberlain in a study in 1992. The 1992 survey is the first study that illustrated the more diverse view of the homeless issue compare to before the study (Yu and Norliana, 2015). This categorising is widely used and accepted by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee of Homelessness in 2001 (What is homelessness, 2019). Hence the categories are accepted and used the accommodation as the measurement for homelessness on a global scale. The said categories include: (i) People without accommodation which refers to people that sleep and stay in places that are not suitable for human habitats; (ii) People living in temporary or crisis accommodation where this category is also known as sheltered homeless is where people that used the temporary shelter as their sleeping places; and (iii) People live in severely inadequate and insecure accommodation, referring to people that live in inadequate housing with lack of basic amenities in their dwelling made it an unacceptable condition to live in.

Although these groupings are recommended to be used, it is not necessary to accept all indicator of homelessness in our country. It is possible to only focus on two out of the three categories. It is more feasible to focus on a more needed group and have an efficient and effective initiative than trying to solve all of the group issues at the same time. Busch-Geertsema et al. (2015) also strongly suggest the countries come out with their framework and categories while using their structure as the basis.

2.2 The State of Homelessness in Developing Countries

This topic outline details model II. Text size is Times New Roman 12. Homelessness characteristics can be grouped into three categories (Speak, 2019). These characteristics were derived especially for the developing countries after more than 20 years of study based on the diverse socio-culture, economic, political and environmental context of these countries. As the socio-culture context of developing countries is different from developed countries, the characteristics of homelessness are also different. Those three generalisations are:

2.2.1 Gender

It generally accepted that men dominated the homeless population in the developing, but that does not mean that homeless women are lesser or do not exist. Many of the homeless women are much less visible than men. This is because women generally avoid sleeping in the street for safety reasons. Hence, making their existence undercounted. When the definition of homelessness expends to live in inadequate housing, it was founded that the gender proportion changed. In a UN study done in 2005, it shows that poor female-headed household has a more prominent tendency to become homeless.

2.2.2 Age

It was found that the majority of the homeless fall under the age group of 18 to 59 years old. However, the number of older homeless has been an increasing trend overtimes. On the other hand, child homelessness has also increased. The homeless child population also include those in the homeless household. There is another type of child homelessness which is the street children. These street children are either orphan or children who are estranged from their families. UN has estimated that there are up to 150 million of homeless children around the globe. This statistic is worrying as children should not in under any condition subject to this type of harsh living condition.

2.2.3 Poverty and Economic Activity

Despite popular belief, most homeless in developing countries are not beggars. Many of them have minimal paid works. This makes the economic activities and financial standing of the homeless in developing countries is more diverse than developed countries. Generally, the homeless have a low level of education, hence why they mostly work in a low-skilled informal job. It is also more comfortable for the homeless to get informal works as those jobs usually do not require a permanent address or bank account.

2.3 Mackenzie and Chamberlain's Homeless Career Path

Contrasting with (Speak, 2019), MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) suggest to emphasis more on categorising the homeless through the reasons and stage of homelessness. The study draws attention on how to intervene to prevent and end homelessness at every stage of becoming homeless. The authors had called these categorisations as 'homeless career' path. Three career paths have been identified which are homeless youth career, housing crisis career and family breakdown job.

2.3.1 *Youth Homeless Career*

The youth homelessness is often rooting from dysfunctional families. At this stage, early intervention is essential before the youth enter the adult homelessness. These interventions are usually in the form of family reconciliation and school support through counselling. The initial sign of at risk of being homeless is when the underage person spends the night out of their house without their parent knowledge. Figure 1 shows the career path of youth homeless toward the chronic homelessness stage. The stages show that many of the young homeless stay at school even after having a permanent break from their family. This is particularly important as early intervention can still be possible through school involvement and support to prevent the youth from becoming adult homeless.
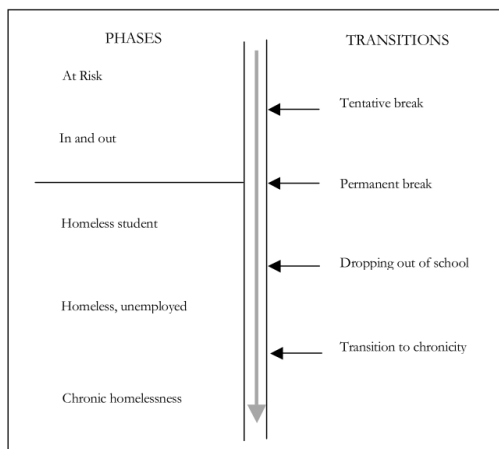

Figure 1: Homeless Youth Career
(Source: MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2003)

2.3.2 *Housing Career Crisis*

The housing crisis is one of the career paths into adult homelessness. It is known that poverty is closely related to poverty. Therefore, one of the reasons for being homeless is eviction when they accumulated enough debt to the point they cannot afford a stable home. Loss of home signal the opportunity for early intervention is over. However, the response at this stage is still possible as many adult homeless are reluctant to becoming chronically homeless. Figure 2 shows the phases and transition of homelessness through the housing crisis. They normally become at risk of homelessness when an unexpected financial crisis occurs. At this stage, the problem can be solved by early intervention in the form of assistance either financially or finding alternative accommodation.
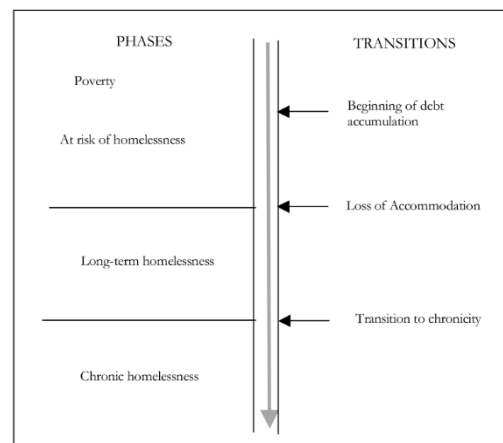

Figure 2: Housing Crisis Career Typology
(Source: MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2003)

2.3.3 *Family Breakdown Career*

The second path into adult homelessness is because of a relationship breakdown between life partners. When this happens, one or both of them may become unstable financially or emotionally, which can lead to being homeless. This type of career often stems from domestic violence. The victim that fled the abuse become insecure and felt threatened to be in a permanent home when the abuser still is a threat to their safety.
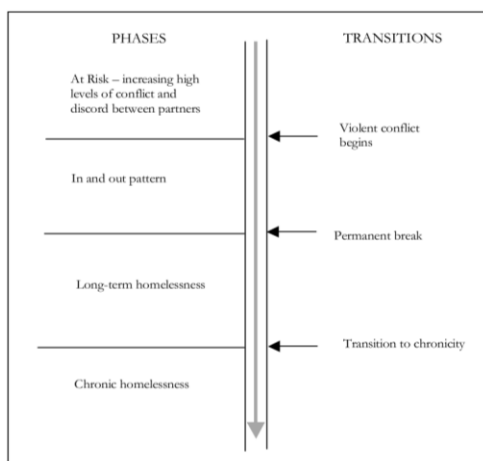
Figure 3: Family breakdown career
(Source: MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2003)

In a way, the family breakdown career resembles the homeless youth career, but there are differences. The family breakdown is often in the form of discord and conflict with extreme threats and violent confrontation. Most of the victims are the female partner of the household. This type of relationship is hard to severe, especially when there are children involved. It is even more complicated when the victim is not financially stable on their own, hence dragging out the period of 'in and out' pattern.

These career paths are developed to understand the specific risk and factor of being homeless for different types of group. The paths also point out the suitable intervention and assistance at a different stage of the homeless path to avoid the victim from entering the chronic homeless phases. It is accepted that when the person allows being homeless is their way of life, intervention and assistance are often trickier and hard. MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) emphasise the importance of early intervention whenever it is possible as it is the most promising way of preventing homelessness. However, it does not mean that after the stage of at risk of becoming homeless, the person is homeless. There are still assistance and intervention that can help them get a stable life.

3. CURRENT ACTS AND REGULATION IN MALAYSIA

The homeless issue falls under the responsibilities of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have the mandate to oversee the enforcement regarding the homeless (Yu and Norliana, 2015). On the other hand, the act that largely governs the issue if the 1977 Destitute Persons Act (DPA). The DPA generally create "to provide for the care and rehabilitation of destitute persons and the control of vagrancy" (Bomb-KL, 2014). The said law that has not been revised since a lot of controversies surrounds 1977. The primary public concerns are the law is against human rights and offer no practical solution to the homeless problem. There are a handful of programs under the government initiative likes Ops Kaseh, Anjung Singgah, Pusat Transit Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur, and Desa Bina Diri

Aside from the Malaysia Government programs, the non-government organisations (NGOs) have been actively involved in providing help and assistance for the homeless community. Some of the well-known NGOs are Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (PERTIWI) Soup Kitchen, Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK), Dapur Jalanan, Need to Feed the Need (NFN), and many others (Amalina et al., 2018). While there is plenty of this type of agencies, their main concern is mostly on the immediate need of the homeless. Where they usually distribute free food and drinks for the street people, or they have their hall for the soup kitchen. Although it is undeniable that the effort is excellent and well-mean, the popularity of the aids and service raises a rather unforeseen issue which is over-feeding. The overlapping coverage area among the welfare group resulting in the homeless of the area ends up with more food than they needed. Moreover, most of the group tend to give out perishable food.

4. POLICIES BY OTHER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Australia, Japan and Canada are having holistic policies and programmes for the homeless as well as the availability of the information. Like in most of developed, relatively more researches have been done about the homeless issue compared to Malaysia. Hence, it is reflected in their programmes and policies which are more sophisticated and focused. In those countries, it is considered good practice in policy responses when the policies and programmes involved combinations of prevention, early intervention, crisis intervention, and long-term support strategies.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Categories of homeless

Article/Study	1st Group	2nd Group	3rd Group
The global framework for understanding and measuring homelessness	People without accommodation	People living in temporary or crisis accommodation	People living in severely inadequate and insecure accommodation
The State of Homelessness in Developing Countries	Gender	Age	Poverty and Economic activity
Mackenzie and Chamberlain's homeless career path	Youth Career Path	Housing Crisis Path	Family Breakdown Path

The study done above shows several ways of categorising the homeless. The most accepted way of grouping globally is based on the type of accommodation that the homeless reside in. This type of categorises emphasis on counting the homeless population thoroughly. The cluster is mostly useful to show the current situation of the issue without missing out the less visible vulnerable group. However, in the purpose of this research, it is unrealistic to consider in categorising the Kuala Lumpur's homeless population using this indicator. This is because of time and resources constrain. Another reason is the problem will be too big to solve and impractical to try coming out with a solution over a short period.

The other grouping is based on the person's age, gender and their source of income. These categorise are primarily design for the developing countries to understand the bigger picture of the homeless issue. The common characteristic of the homeless in developing countries is rooting out from poverty. Hence priority should be put toward income generation assistance (Speak, 2019). It also said that providing shelters and basic homeless aids like food can encourage people to be homeless as an easy way out of their problems. This proved why the issues in Kuala Lumpur has become worsen as the homeless support aids increase over the year. Instead, we should shift the goal of the homeless support initiative toward encouraging the street sleeper to works for improving their skill to have a more stable income. Therefore, this type of grouping deems as practical to be implemented in this research study.

The last type of grouping is based on the route toward homelessness. This categorises emphasis on preventing homelessness begin in the first place. The key to these programmes is identifying the at-risk individual from the early stage and providing them with the support that is tailored to their individual needs and situation. The overall idea of the study is to end homelessness altogether and would be an efficient way if it is done right. However, as Kuala Lumpur homeless issue is still at the beginning stage of combating homelessness, the focus should be put toward the most apparent homeless which is, according to the Mackenzie and Chamberlain's study, the chronic homeless.

Table 3: Homeless Policies and Programmes by Countries

	National Data System	Affordable Home Programme	Personalised Programme	Temporary Shelter / Home Assistance	Skill Improvement Programme
Australia	√	√			
Japan	√	√	√	√	
Canada	√	√		√	
Malaysia		√		√	√

The table above shows the comparison of the policies and programmes done by the chosen countries and Malaysia. Only Malaysia did not have a national system to keep track of the homeless statistic. Still, Malaysia is the only country that has self-improvement and skill development programmes for the homeless. At the same time, Japan is the only countries that have a personalised plan to cater to the specific individual needs of the person. From the data shown, Malaysia has run similar programmes and policies as the other countries. Still, it is hard to conclude the effectiveness of these programmes as there is no reliable and centralised data to show proved of the declining statistic of the homeless.

6. CONCLUSION

It is well understood that to have effective policies and programmes for the homeless, it is critical to have a clear understanding of the definition of homelessness (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007). In Malaysia, the policy-makers still did not have an official definition of homeless yet. Thus, make the initiative and programs launch mostly targeting the general community of the homeless while disregarding the minority sub-group of the impoverished people. This also makes plans and strategies made barely on the surface and ineffective. The lack of understanding of the root problem, also making it complicated for the relevant agencies to shape the suitable programs that can tackle the roots of the homeless problem. By knowing the cause of homeless like because of changing labour market, poverty, the housing issue, nature of the welfare state or others, causes are crucial for the problem to be addressed adequately.

Based on the literature reviewed done, it can be assumed that knowing the real situation of the problem is essential in tackling the homelessness issue. All three sample countries have their own set of ways to keep up-to-date data and statistic of the item. Other than that, it is also worth to note that these countries tried to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. Like how Australia and Canada have a clear policy on their affordable housing which help to ensure that an adequate house is within reach for all the citizens. Meanwhile, Japan has programmes that assist their people at the time of crisis. Even though the Seikatsu Hogo only a respond programme for those who are in need, the objective is still to keep people off the street and ensuring them to have shelter until they get back on their feet.
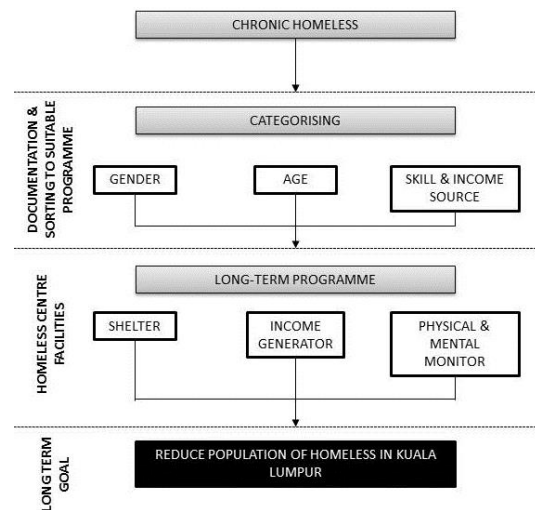

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework for Homeless Initiative Strategies

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