

## SLEEP COMES ALL THE WAY: A STUDY OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Present study is an attempt to explore the experiences of homeless people about their life and living standards. The population of this study consisted of those homeless people who are living in Lahore and using different public places to sleep. The universe of this study was Lahore city and within city three areas Chaoburji, Data Darbar and Ichhra were selected for in-depth interviews with respondents. Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents. In-depth interview was technique of data collection and Interview guide was tool of data collection. Questions were asked initially about the issues of homelessness and then probed for more information depending upon whatever they emphasized (Jerolmack 2007). Total 12 in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were conducted during 8:00 pm to 00:00 because the respondents were only accessible at night as they were busy in their labor during day time. All interviews were conducted at open places where respondents were available. Interviews were audio recorded with permission of respondents.*

**Keywords:** Homelessness, Affordable Housing, Shelter Houses, Public, Awareness, Lahore.

### INTRODUCTION

Homeless person is an individual who does not have a place to stay (Tota, 2004). Homelessness is an urban issue not only prevailing in developing countries but also in developed countries. According to US Interagency Council on Homelessness 150,000 Americans experience homelessness each year. Chicago has 2722 homeless persons on an average night (Henslin, 1997). Homelessness is a growing social problem in Pakistan as well. Due to rapid urbanization in Pakistan, people from different rural areas of the country are attracted towards city life to earn their livelihood. This situation had affected the city life. Some problems like overcrowding and lack of housing facilities are the consequences of urbanization. During the last four decades housing conditions for a vast majority of people have deteriorated in urban centers of Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2010). Due to lack of housing facilities and price hike in Pakistan people especially labor class can not afford the rent of houses. Due to population explosion and rural to urban migration the land can not provide the rural poor with large scale jobs (Siddiqui, 2010).

Lahore is a major city of Punjab. Due to attraction of city life and job opportunities people migrate from the rural areas and small cities of the province. It has created a massive bulk of population in Lahore. Majority of the people belongs to lower socio-economic class and cannot afford the rent. These people use open public places to sleep at night. These public places may be parks, shrines, footpaths, fronts of markets etc. As there is no restriction from police and city district government on this homeless population so they can use these public places without any fear.

Following are the potential areas of homeless people in Lahore:

1. Data Darbar
2. Minar-e-Pakistan
3. Chauburji
4. Shahi Qilla
5. Bhatti Chowk

In addition to these places homeless people also used some play grounds, public parks and front portion of markets in different areas of the city. The problem of homelessness is also attached with some other social issues like drug addiction, theft, homosexuality and prostitution. Some criminal groups take shelter in these places and due to lack of police patrolling, watch and ward system police cannot discriminate these people from ordinary labor class. These areas also the shelter for people who are suffering from some mental disorders.

In Pakistan due to lack of institutional support and proper mechanism to deal with the issue of homelessness there are no emergency shelters in urban areas. Financial assistance to unemployed or homeless labor class can play a significant role in minimizing this issue. In private sector again there are few organizations working on this issue. There is a lack of trained professional staff which can provide assistance to these homeless people. Through formal social control system police and other law enforcing agencies can identify criminals and drug addicts from this population. Through this strategy the incidents of theft and other criminal activities can be controlled.

Conlin (1993) suggested improvement and support for homeless youth. He further emphasized the need of establishing emergency shelters and financial assistance to homeless people. His findings showed that training of service providers is very significant, because trained staff can provide better services. In Pakistan common people are unconcerned about the issue of homelessness. They consider it as a routine matter. It indicates the lack of awareness of general public about their social responsibility. Doyle (2003) indicated the need of public awareness because it creates social responsibility among people of the society. They can contribute a lot to minimize this issue through their direct participation and involvement in social issues. Provision of basic facilities is responsibility of the state but through participatory approach general public can share the burden with the state through collective efforts.

Different categories have been identified of homeless people in Lahore. During interviews and field observations it was observed that homeless people at *Ichra* and *Chaoburji* were purely from labor class. No drug addict and mentally ill patient was found at these places. But situation was different at *Data Darbar*. That was a place where some drug addicts and people involved in criminal activities were detected.

*Data Darbar* is famous for the shrine of great sufi saint Hazrat Ali Hajveri. Free food is available there as a system of *Lunger* or free meals. In front of the shrine there are so many footpaths and a small park. Food and shelter are basic human needs. This place can easily provide these two facilities so homeless people prefer to stay over there. The Mosque attached with the shrine provides facilities to take bath and use toilets. This place is also near to main bus terminal of Lahore. This area is the hub of homeless vagrant. Some mobile sex workers

also utilize this place especially Chowk Yadgar and main terminal to sell sex facilities to labor class.

*Chaoburji* and *Ichra* were relatively safe areas for homeless people. Only labor class took shelter at these places. It was observed during data collection that there are different categories of homeless people according to their earning capacity. Some homeless people can afford to purchase food items and other necessary items from some hotels and nearby shops. They are not totally dependent on free food distributed at shrines. However, some well-off people distribute free food at these places.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Doyle (2003) conducted a study on the capacity of community agencies in Metro Halifax in delivering services to homeless persons. The focus of the study was to make needs assessment of social housing services sector capacity. The study was based on interviews with 20 out of 48 organizations on the community action on homelessness network organization list. After data analysis six priority themes were identified. First, there was a service need for mental health patients. Second, need was for affordable housing. Third, need was for change in policy regarding homelessness. Fourth, sustainability of funding. Fifth, sustainability and coordination in networking and lastly it was suggested to create public awareness. It was also suggested to develop close working relationship with government sector, exchange information and raise public awareness.

Conlin and Chiristy-Ann (1993) pointed out some areas to improve the conditions of homeless youth. They also mentioned some difficulties due to lack of some specific services and supports. The findings of the study suggested that there is a need of emergency shelters for homeless youth and alternative semi-independent housing. It was also suggested to reorganize financial assistance to cover youth of different ages and parental home locations. They pointed out the need of training for service providers including government officials because without proper training services cannot be provided properly.

The study also suggested prevention of criminal behavior including drug and alcohol use. Provision of educational program was recommended to help youth to learn and to identify at-risk students inside the school system and provision of appropriate care for them. This report also emphasized on more coordination between different service providers and clearly fixes the responsibility for homeless youth.

The above mentioned research is relevant to the present study. In Pakistan the situation is more worsening regarding homeless youth because there is no organized mechanism to look after this marginal group of society. There is lack of financial assistance and virtually no educational programs for homeless youth. These homeless people have no restriction on their activities. They used public places to sleep and some criminals were also detected among the homeless. Working on this suggestion the situation in Pakistan can also be improved.

Fitzgerald (1998) conducted a study on the relationship between education and literacy, youth development and homelessness. He used focus group discussion and interviews for data collection. The findings of the research suggested that there is a need of development of a resource center to provide assistance to homeless people. The researcher also suggested the need of regular staff training through the development of education career and transition services. It was further recommended to establish an advisory committee composed of representatives from relevant government agencies. This research further described the

experiences of the homeless youth who utilize services. The researcher also highlighted the challenges faced by service providers with literacy, alternative education, upgrading and career preparation programs for youth.

The above mentioned research is relevant to the present research as the focus of the present research is also finding the experiences of homeless people. In Pakistan, the situation can be improved through establishment of some advisory boards and education institutes for training and rehabilitation of homeless people.

Hughes et al. (2004) conducted a study to assess the mental health needs of youth who access the services of an organization providing a continuum of services to homeless and at-risk youth. They used a demographic questionnaire and functional scale and a self reporting questionnaire. Sixty youth participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 24 years. Findings of the study showed that participants reported different levels of satisfaction with specific services but 84 % of the youth reported being satisfied with the services they had used. The youth shelter nurse was the most frequently accessed service within the youth shelter and the emergency was the most frequently used service outside the youth shelter.

It was further observed that some of the youth maintain regular contact with their family. Eighty eight percent of participants reported having had contact with their family in the past 6 months, and some had on a weekly basis. However, it could not be determined whether family contact was supportive or non-supportive. Youth was highly transient but did seek help for health-related needs; relying largely on emergency services. Interestingly it was observed that many youth were hopeful and had conventional aspirations.

Karabanow and Hopkins (2004) conducted a pilot study to assess health interventions with street youth in Halifax. The researchers used qualitative study to explore the experiences and perceptions of street youth related to health services in Halifax. Health service providers were also asked for their experiences working with street youth. The study included semi-structured, qualitative interviews with approximately 15 street youth and 12 service providers. Street youth participants also completed a brief questionnaire that highlighted their perceptions of their own health status.

The majority of participants noted the numerous physical and mental health problems that accompany life on the street. It was found that street life actually enhanced the feelings of stress, anxiety and depression among street youth. The majority of the respondents also highlighted the emotional strains associated with street life. There was a profound sense of feeling of loneliness and unconnected with the rest of society. In terms of health services, all youth expressed some sort of resistance to accessing the formal health care system. The findings also suggested that organizations must play a role in linking youth to more formal health services and act as buffers between youth and the health system.

Karabanow (2004) conducted a research to explore the issues faced by homeless youth and public attitudes towards homeless youth. The findings showed that majority of the respondents described that they have no choice but to leave home because at home they often experienced sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect. The respondents also expressed their views about street life and described street life as lonely, dangerous, unhealthy and detrimental to their sense of personal identity. The majority of the respondents found government and non- government services inadequate and most desired long-term, safe and affordable places to live. The respondents also expressed that homelessness is a problem that

is getting worse. Most felt that financial cutbacks to social programs have increased the problem and they supported more funding for youth programs.

The report further recommended more need specific services, support and transitional housing. There is a need of opportunities for education and communication with the public and homeless youth. The researcher stressed that the causes of homelessness like family abuse, lack of employment and housing options for youth and insufficient support and resources for single family parents to care for their children must be addressed.

Kisely and Parker (2004) conducted a pilot study to assess the continuum of services to homeless and at-risk people. The researchers used standardized instruments and administrative data on health service usage to assess the differences in health outcomes and service use of 15 youth living in supportive housing and 30 youth with less stable housing like sleeping rough or in emergency shelters. The primary objective of the study was to define a methodology for further studies. Another objective was to assess the appropriateness of the instruments used and the feasibility of accessing the administrative data and the challenges associated with conducting longitudinal research with such transient population.

The findings showed that the control sample, participants in supportive housing were significantly more likely to describe their health as excellent. They had lower rates of substantive abuse and were less likely to agree that they had accomplished less in the past 4 weeks due to emotional problems.

Rehman and Jacqueline (2003) conducted a secondary research based on the findings of review of the literature on homelessness, addictions, mental health, and common themes raised in a series of focus group discussion and interviews with the homeless and service providers. It was reported that the most challenging or hard to house individuals continue to be neglected by the current housing models and systems. Addictions and mental health concerns can create constraints to accessing and maintaining housing. The researchers stressed the need of supporting housing model with direct linkages to community services, to meet the needs of hard to house residents.

It was found that there was an urgent need for a comprehensive approach to help those with addictions and mental health concerns. It was further suggested the need for a more integrated harm reduction approach and a continuum of supportive and affordable housing services.

### **Research Question**

The main research question of the present research was to know the socio-economic causes of homelessness. How homeless people express their experiences of being homeless.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The universe of this study was Lahore city and within the city three areas were selected to conduct in-depth interview with respondents. These areas were *Chaoburji*, *Data Darbar* and *Ichhra*. The population of this study consisted of those homeless people living in Lahore and using various public places to sleep. Purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for in-depth interviews. As the purpose of present study was to explore the issues of homelessness, so the best technique of data collection was in-depth interview with respondents. Interview guide was tool of data collection. Field work was started with some broader questions about homelessness (Jerolmack 2007). Three in-depth interviews were

conducted in pre-testing phase for development of new themes and inferences for further interviews. Questions were started generally about the issues of homelessness and then probed for more information depending upon whatever they emphasized (Jerolmack 2007). These in-depth interviews and field observations were very useful to draw some new themes and inferences for further interviews. Total 12 in-depth interviews were conducted for this research. Early observation in the field and memo writing has facilitated to create scientific text under different themes and inferences (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents**

Demographic and socio-economic profile is very important to measure social class of homeless people. It gives a holistic understanding about the characteristics of population of a specific area under study. Social class is a large group of people who rank closely to one another in wealth, power and prestige (Henslin 1997). These three elements separate people into different lifestyles; give them different chances in life, and provide them with distinct ways of looking at the self and the world (Henslin 1997).

#### **Age, education and occupation**

Findings showed that the average age of the respondents was 30-45 years. Majority of the respondents were illiterate; however, some respondents passed primary level education. Only one respondent has got Matric degree. There was no significant difference in the occupation of the respondents. All were manual workers on daily wages. All were working with some builders in the city. Only one respondent said that he was also working as a loader with some transport company.

#### **Monthly income**

All respondents were earning almost the same amount per month as all belonged to the same occupation except one respondent. There was no fixed amount or salary of this homeless population. It depended on the chances of being hired by some builder. In Lahore one earns RS.300 per day as manual worker but it depends on the average working days of one's work. For a time a worker remains unemployed if he is not hired. However, it was estimated that an average person was getting almost 6000 per month.

#### **Marital status**

Majority of the respondents was married. At average all respondents have 3 to 4 children. It shows that they have responsibility to look after a reasonable number of dependents. Some respondents told that their children are school going. One respondent replied that his son is a college student. However, respondents were highly concerned about their income as they were bound to send money back to their families.

#### **Native Areas**

Since Lahore is a metropolis and provincial capital of Punjab and offers better employment opportunities, so prospective employees from all over the province comes to Lahore to earn their livelihood. As a result it has distended with a bulk of population. The purpose to know about the native area of the respondents was to get some understanding about the migration pattern of homeless population. Another objective of this question was to know the socio-

economic conditions of their native areas as to why people migrated from these areas, instead to work there. It was observed that majority of the respondents came from Okara, Kamaalia and Pakpatan. Some people were from Gujranwala, Boray Wala, and Chakwal as well.

## Reasons for Sleeping at Public Places

### Poverty and inflation

It was the most important theme in the present study because it deals with the direct experiences of homeless people about their life. Findings show different reasons behind this phenomenon. The most important reason was poverty and unaffordability of rental houses. This marginal group of people belongs to the lower socio-economic class. Their monthly income was not reasonable. They can not afford rental houses.

As one respondent replied during interview:

*Main reason of being here is poverty. Labor class uses these places to sleep because we cannot afford rental houses.*

Inflation is another reason to sleep at public places. Due to high rate of inflation people cannot afford rental houses. As they have to send money back to their families, so they cannot manage in their limited income.

One respondent argued:

*You know the inflation rate is very high. So we are bound to use these places. We can not afford rental houses. This is the reason why I use this place to sleep at night.*

Another respondent told his story as:

*I used to live in a rental house. But previous government imposed tax on factories. The owner closed the factory and I became jobless. Now I can not afford the rent so as a result I use this place to sleep.*

Another respondent replied:

*The rent of a single room apartment is 4000 in Lahore. At average I earn 4000-5000 per month. This is the reason why I use this place to sleep. If I pay 4000 as rent then how I can manage other expenses of my family.*

Another respondent replied as:

*If I use some apartment then I have to pay the rent, which I can not afford. So this is the reason why I use this park to sleep at night.*

Only one respondent said that he use this place only due to open air and pleasant environment. He also hired an apartment but due to suffocation he can not sleep there at night. So, to enjoy open air he used to sleep at public places.

### Availability of free food

Food and shelter are basic human needs. At public places homeless population has no rent or charges to pay. Another major reason to sleep there was availability of free food. As mentioned earlier that Data Darbar is famous for the shrine of great sufi saint Hazrat Ali Hajveri. Free food is available there in shape of *Lunger* (some sort of free distribution of meal by some well-off people). In front of the shrine there are so many footpaths and a small park. This place can easily provide free food and shelter, so, homeless people prefer to stay over there. Some we off people distribute free food at some other places where homeless population lives like Chaoburgi etc.

As one respondent replied:

*We can easily get food over here. So we enjoy it and then also sleep over here.*

Another respondent replied during interview:

*There is a lot of free food available and a large section of the population eats.*

### Level of Comfort

The purpose of this theme was to know the level of comfort of homeless population. To sleep at open places with out proper bed or mattress is very difficult. It was observed during field that homeless population does not use any mattress or bed. They only use a single bed sheet and in some cases even people used to sleep without any single piece of cloth. It is directly linked with the health status of a person because sufficient sleep is very important for the health. But it was observed during field that this homeless population was used to sleep without any comfort.

As one respondent expressed his views during interview:

*We are exhausted because of daily hard work so as a result we fall a sleep unconsciously.*

Another respondent replied:

*Sleep comes all the way even in the face of death.*

Through above mentioned theme one can easily understand the living conditions and health status of the homeless population.

### Security Issues

As law and order situation is alarming throughout the country. Shrines and other offices of security agencies are under attacks of different terrorist groups. The above mentioned theme is very important to know the views of homeless population about security situation. The researcher has divided this theme into further sub themes. This gives us holistic understanding regarding role of public, government agencies in maintenance law and order situation. It also provides us the experiences of homeless population while living under these conditions.



### **Drug addiction and theft**

During field work it was observed that there are different categories of homeless people. People living at Chaoburgi and Ichra belong to pure labor class. But among the homeless population living at Data Darbar, it was observed that some drug addicts and pocket pickers were present there. Majority of the respondents talked about the drug addicts and pocket pickers. They also reported that many time they lost their money and luggage like shoes and bed sheets etc.

As one respondent replied during interview:

*Drug addicts and pocket pickers are usually found here. We do not have anything except cigarettes.*

Another respondent expressed his views as:

*There are a lot of drug addicts and pocket pickers.*

### **Role of local Shopkeepers**

As mentioned above that due to lack of security measures homeless population is at the risk of theft and other security issues. Now they have adopted some measures by themselves to save their money. In this regard the role of local shop keepers is very significant. Homeless population deposits their money to these shopkeepers and at the time of need they return it back. Meanwhile shopkeepers use this money for their business. This is an informal system in which shopkeepers just note the name and amount of money deposited by homeless population and gives them a token.

As one respondent argued:

*If we have spare money we deposit it with the shopkeepers.*

Another respondent expressed his views as:

*We deposit our money with local shopkeepers; they give us a token and at the time of need we get back our money.*

### **Shelters in Winter**

In Lahore, there are so many public places which are being used by homeless population to stay at night. The purpose of this theme was to know some other shelters which are being used in winter season. Because in summer they can use open spaces to stay at night but during winter it is impossible to stay in open air when temperature has fallen down to -1.

As one respondent replied:

*In winter we use some shelter like parking areas or other fronts of some shops.*

### **Personal Cleanliness**

A hygienic condition plays an important role to maintain the health status of a person. It was observed during field that homeless population was living under very miserable conditions.

There is no facility of public toilets and bathroom nearby. In Pakistan mostly people use toilets and washrooms of Mosques. During interviews majority of the respondents replied that they also use Mosque for this purpose.

As one respondent argued as:

*We go to the Mosque early in the morning, offer prayers and take bath.*

Another respondent said:

*If its time of prayer we bathe in the Mosque, otherwise we are not allowed to entering the Mosque.*

### **Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is a result of social recognition in society. It is a social product. Every human being has its self respect. It was observed that people have conventional aspirations even they have no clear future strategies. As Hughes et al (2004) argued in their research on homeless youth that in spite of so many problems many youth were hopeful and have conventional aspirations. In the present research most of the respondents expressed their views about their own house or residence and they enjoy family life.

As on respondent said:

*Everybody likes to have a home and to live with family.*

### **CONCLUSION**

After field visit and data analysis it was found that due to massive urbanization in Pakistan the issue of homelessness is increasing day by day. It was also observed that there is no proper institute or mechanism dealing with this problem. No official data is available in Pakistan on the exact number of this population. This is very alarming situation because policy makers cannot make any policy without knowing the exact data of this population.

This problem of homelessness is accompanied by some other social issue like drug addiction, beggary, prostitution, theft etc. It also reflects the increasing inflation rate and shortage of affordable houses. This issue is also directly linked with the health status of homeless people. At the end it may be concluded that homelessness is becoming a vital social problem in Pakistan in near future and there is a need of public and private sector partnership to overcome this emerging social issue.

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