



THE INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE CASE OF MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, THAILAND, AND SINGAPORE

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Abstract:

Homelessness is a chronic issue in almost nearly every nation globally whether in underdeveloped, developing or advanced countries. In Southeast Asia, homelessness is rife due to various reasons, where poverty is notably one of the most prominent factors. This conceptual paper reviews past literature focusing on the issue of homelessness in selected countries in Southeast Asia namely, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand. The issue of poverty and homelessness has been a long-standing issue across the continent. The increase in homelessness due to poverty increases the challenge of reintegrating homeless individuals into society as most are denied the opportunity of permanent shelter. Living on the streets also implies that most of them are heavily dependent on support from both the government and society. This review of past literature reveals that homelessness and poverty are mutual, interdependent phenomenon that occurs simultaneously. All four countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore) demonstrated that poverty is a significant trigger for the issue of homelessness, whereby most individuals are forced to live on the streets due to the vicious cycle of poverty. This review also significantly provides an overview on the issue of homelessness and poverty in the selected Southeast Asian countries,

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addressing the gap of limited research on the area of homelessness collectively in the region.

Keywords:

Homelessness, Poverty, Southeast Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore.

Introduction

Homelessness is a longstanding issue in almost every country regardless of the nations' status of being underdeveloped, developing, or advanced. At the societal level, factors contributing to homelessness can range from poverty to drug abuse, mental illness, ageing, and being disabled, etc. This conceptual paper discusses homelessness in selected countries in the Southeast Asian region, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. The situation in these four countries potentially reflects the general overview of the homelessness phenomenon in the Southeast Asia region. All four selected countries consist of the population with different sociodemographic features, geographical landscapes, population rate gaps as well as sociocultural and sociopolitical standings. Homelessness is a complicated societal issue with different features, depending on the context of location (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009). When it comes to poverty forcing the population on the streets, migration is a crucial contributory factor. Almost every country faces the issue of homeless migration which is often concentrated in urban areas due to factors such as job opportunities.

The threat of homelessness is sometimes invisible can involve individuals staying at abandoned construction sites to those living with family or friends and even those who are couch surfing. There is little difference between homelessness and people living in a fluctuating situation where they stay in temporary 'residence' (e.g., living with family or friends) or shelters as most of them eventually return end up on the streets. Homelessness can also include those who live in housing that does not meet health and safety standards (e.g., lack of kitchen facilities and toilets alongside inadequate electrical heating and ventilation systems). These situations heighten the risk of physical, mental and emotional health. Increasing urbanization and fast growth of the nation are significant contributory factors to the issue of homelessness. Urbanization in cities will undoubtedly improve the region, benefitting the development of job markets and infrastructure. Urbanization and job opportunities in large cities trigger migration and thereby, exacerbating the issue of homelessness. Being the centre of communities urbanized regions attract homeless individuals as their primary aim is to obtain a higher-paying job. The influx of migration into metropolitan regions increases the restriction of employment possibilities, resulting in unemployed homeless individuals living in poverty.

This paper aims to establish the existence between poverty and homelessness since individuals suffering from poverty are more likely to become homeless where demographic groups that are more prone to poverty are also most likely to end up on the streets in the near future. However, most studies often limit the scope of homelessness to individuals who are already on the streets owing to methodological and financial limitations. In understanding the nature and causes of poverty, there are two popular sentiments that are polar opposites. On the one hand, poverty is often seen as a result of people failing to accomplish what is required to live a good life whilst the opposing viewpoint is that poverty is mainly caused by economic and societal inequity. Depending on the situation, these factors affect some populations more than others, but most developing nations lack proper statistics on the issue of homelessness. Thus, this

review article attempts to synthesize previous Southeast Asian countries research on homelessness in a bid to reframe the issue, encouraging the audience to consider more systematic research in the future. Furthermore, this review also attempts to add to the body of knowledge in social work by providing insights into the issue of homelessness problems in Southeast Asian developing nations where every country should undertake a comprehensive census of homeless individuals.

Due to the significant differences in who and what can be described as homeless or homelessness, there first must be a proper definition for individuals experiencing the issue which is not the case in most countries. Governments and NGOs require assistance in conducting a proper census and determining the number of homeless people in the country. The existing typology of homelessness by Western scholars may be unsuitable to examine the situation in developing countries, thereby, a new definition of homelessness should be developed. However, it is important to note that a single definition of homelessness may not be sufficient to explain the issue for all developing countries. A one-size-fits-all definition is deemed insufficient and incapable of discussing homelessness in Southeast Asian countries. Thus, the discussion of this concept paper will also involve poverty, a trigger factor to homelessness in a bid to provide insight into the homelessness that is happening in Southeast Asia.

Interpreting the Notions of Poverty and Homelessness

Conceptualizing Poverty

Poverty is a universal issue involving rural and urban communities and is considered a chronic societal problem. Poverty can be classified into relative poverty and absolute poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a person's lack of financial and material resources, such as food, clothes, and shelter. It also describes a scenario in which a person or a family cannot fulfil basic necessities (Norzita & Siti, 2014; Khalid, 2016). This type of inequality is measured using a coefficient based on the distribution of gross monthly household income. On the other hand, relative poverty is largely observed and understood in the context of income inequality between groups. Socio-economic conditions are closely related to poverty, a condition where a person lacks the resources to obtain different types of services or experiences and therefore cannot fully participate in various social activities in the community where they reside (Saunders, 2005).

Conceptually, (Suharto, 2005) explains that poverty is caused by four factors, related to the following aspects: 1. Individual factors: Poor people are caused by behaviour, choices, or the inability to live out their lives, 2. Social factors: The state of the social environment causes a person to become poor, 3. Cultural factors: Cultural stereotypes such as laziness, fatalism, or socializing with friends, lack of entrepreneurial spirit, and lack of respect for work ethic are believed to cause poverty and 4. Structural factors: Unfair and insensitive structure or system causes a person or a group of people to become poor. Overall, poverty involves financial hardship and the lack of access to fundamental needs and opportunities to engage as a member of society be it education, purchasing power, training in paid or social employment, as well as health. Current evidence from across the globe views homelessness as one of the most severe forms of poverty.

Perceiving Homelessness

The notion of homelessness must be thoroughly elucidated required before discussing the demographic profile of homelessness. With the substantial increase in the number of homeless individuals recently, the demographics of the homeless community have also changed significantly. According to surveys conducted over the past three decades, the growing homeless population has become more varied in age, gender, ethnicity, and family structure (Grant, Gracy, Goldsmith, Shapiro & Redlener 2013). Consequently, there are various social interpretations of the homelessness concept. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2004), two categories of homelessness are widely recognized namely: 1) absolute homelessness i.e., individuals who do not have access to a physical shelter where they may sleep in temporary shelters or on the streets that are considered non-human habitats; and 2) relative homelessness i.e., homeless individuals living in residential quarters and places that do not meet basic living requirements where they may be less protected from the weather, have limited access to clean water, sanitation, and safety.

On the other hand, Smith (2000) proposed three categories of homelessness (in Yildirim & Yildirim 2014): 1) episodic homelessness i.e., people who may remain homeless over time, live below the poverty line and run the risk of becoming homeless on an ongoing basis. These individuals are considered serially homeless who live without a home or shelter for an extended period; 2) temporary homeless i.e., a person who has been recently homeless where they considered themselves as part of the “normal” society. Individuals in this category of homelessness often indicate high levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, alcohol abuse, and use of illicit substances. Despite their, they have the initiative and drive to get a house, job, and maintain social status; and 3) chronic homelessness i.e., individuals who have been homeless over a prolonged period or do so recurrently for the long-term. They accept life on the street and are very sceptical of communicating with others in society.

More recent research by Hanson-Easey, Every, Tehan, Richardson, and Krackowizer (2016) described homelessness as 1) primary homelessness i.e., individuals who are living on the streets; 2) secondary homelessness i.e., individuals who move between temporary shelters, including a friend's/ family home and temporary/ emergency accommodation; and 3) tertiary homelessness i.e., individuals living in private boarding houses without a private bathroom and/or adequate security and safety. These proposed concepts are often interpreted and measured differently (Gaetz 2004). In this article, the researchers claim that the legal definition of homelessness varies from country to country or between different jurisdictions in the same country or region. Research in the United States (Gabbard, Snyder, Muh, Chadha, May & Jagers 2007) contend that homeless people include individuals who sleep in public or private places that are not designed like home. This matter becomes even more complicated when there is a lack of accurate consensus resulting in urban management agencies accounting for known homeless populations only (Caves 2005). Most statistics often fail to reflect the actual number of homeless individuals in a community or country. Existing forms of intervention and assistance seem inefficient and futile as they do not fulfil the needs of the community which prompt appropriate social work interventions and practices to be implemented.

Researchers found that the term homelessness, its definition and classification are not used homogeneously as there seem to be a variety of classifications and definitions of homelessness. The variations exist partly due to the differences between countries in terms of social preparation levels in managing homelessness within the country. Thus, the general definition of homelessness may be described as the risk of an individual or a group of individuals without

proper shelter. The unwarranted general perceptions that revolve around homeless individuals include unemployed, drunkards, criminals, mentally ill or inadequate personal resources. In developing countries, homelessness can be attributed to the failure of housing supply systems in meeting the needs of a rapidly growing urban population.

The Interdependence Between Poverty And Homelessness

Poverty is a universal issue that often gets public attention. Poverty does not only refer to rural communities but is also faced by urban communities (Tipple, & Speak, 2006). Poverty is still seen as a major social issue today. Poverty may be classified into two types: relative and absolute. Absolute poverty refers to a person's lack of financial resources and fundamental needs like food, clothes, and shelter. Absolute poverty also refers to a condition in which a person or a family cannot fulfil necessities like food, clothes, and protection to live in a minimum and acceptable way (Norzitaa & Siti, 2014; Kartini Aboo, 2016). In contrast, relative poverty is observed based on the context of income inequality between groups (Siti Hadijah & Roslan, 2011). It links and contrasts the income gap between the two groups where those with low incomes are considered poor, and those with higher incomes are considered rich. This income gap is measured using the coefficient based on the distribution of gross monthly household income, linking poverty and homelessness.

Being homeless is usually due to a series of unresolved problems that piles on over time. It takes a single trigger to push a person or a family out on the street (Speak, & Tipple, 2006). While many believe that homeless individuals end up where they are because of alcohol, drug, or gambling addiction or simply poor money management skills, the truth is much more complex. An important factor to consider is the mental or emotional impulse that triggers homelessness and insecurity. Many people become homeless because their parents, friends or relatives cannot or do not want to accommodate them, risking them being rejected by the public as well (Speak, 2018). This form of rejection and ultimately ostracization can make them feel isolated and marginalized. Bearing these feelings, most of them resort to substance abuse where most of them develop their addiction after becoming homeless. Being homeless is a traumatic experience, making them a most vulnerable group as they become a target of public discrimination and are treated unfairly as if being homeless is a crime.

Accommodation often consumes a majority of one's income, resulting in a person's inability to obtain housing. Insufficient governmental support contributes to the rising cases of poverty and homelessness. The government's failure to provide adequate public assistance forces individuals to choose the street as a last resort for shelter. Those suffering from illness or physical severe disability often end up homeless often as they cannot afford to pay their medical treatment fees. In this case, homelessness harms both physical health and mental well-being. Physically, homeless individuals suffer from health issues such as obesity, stroke, and cancer.

The Issue Of Homelessness In Selected Southeast Asian Countries

This paper involves a discussion on the issue of homelessness that occurs in four Southeast Asian countries namely, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore. This selection of countries was made based on the significant pattern displayed by these nations on the issues of homelessness and poverty. Despite the different landscapes and socio-demographics of these four nations in terms of population distribution, geography, country size, race, religion, socio-politics, poverty remains the main factor in inducing the issue of homelessness. The focus of

this review on these four countries demonstrates a clearer understanding of how poverty and homelessness are interrelated.

Homeless Scenario In Malaysia

In Malaysia, the number of homeless people is increasing alarmingly. In 2015 alone, there were 1527 homeless people in Malaysia (Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah, 2017). This figure is greater if the unreported homeless individuals are included. The attempts by the Malaysian government to reduce the proportion of homeless persons in Malaysia seem to be failing where in recent years, doctors, academics, administrators, and politicians have focused on homelessness as a significant public health concern (Tsai, O'Toole & Kearney, 2017). However, the issue remains a complex subject in the literature particularly in terms of addressing the needs of high-risk individuals (Tsai et al., 2017). This complex social phenomenon defies basic definitions and simple solutions (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2014). While the actual number of homeless people at any given time in different countries remains unconfirmed, it is undeniable that such numbers have increased drastically in recent years (Vandentorren & Chauvin, 2018). Factors contributing to homelessness in Malaysia is a product of interaction between individual histories (e.g., poverty, drug abuse, family problems, suffering from physical illness, loneliness, mental illness) and structural causes/social due to lack of low-cost housing facilities, lack of employment opportunities, low skill levels, unemployment and lack of social welfare policies (Shinn, 2010). A study conducted by Nurul Mahfuzah, Nur Zakirah, Nur Fatini, Ammar Faidhi, Siti Munira, Mohd Shahril and Nor Aini (2016) found that among leading factors that cause individuals to become homeless are family problems, job loss, poverty, disability, residency and problems attitude.

In 2013, the number of homeless individuals in Malaysia was recorded at 1048, consisting of 730 men and 318 women. The number of individuals choosing to live as homeless increased in 2014 with a recorded total of 1496 (988 men and 481 women). The figure also increased in 2015, to 1527, including 1003 men and 524 women (Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah, 2017). According to Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah (2017), homelessness is concentrated in the regions of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Penang. However, these figures were obtained from JKM's arrests of homeless people under the *Kutu Rayau* and *Orang Papa* Act 1977. The actual number of homeless people in Malaysia is more than stipulated.

Table 1: Number of Homeless People in Malaysia (2013-2015)

Year	Number of Homeless People
2013	1048
2014	1469
2015	1527
Total	4044

Source: Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah (2017)

According to Nor Amalina, Zaliha, and Yarina (2016), these homeless consist of Malaysian citizens as well as immigrants from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. However, there are only 10% of non-citizens are on the streets of Kuala Lumpur (Nor Amalina et al., 2016). Therefore, this indicates that a majority of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur are locals. The concentration of homeless individuals is in Malaysian cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuching, and George Town (Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah, 2017). In Kuala Lumpur, the majority of them are easily sighted on

Chow Kit Street, Dang Wangi, Dataran Merdeka, Masjid Jamek and Pasar Seni. They will usually sleep on a box or mattress or cloth in a sheltered area or at the end of a shop and a closed street (Syafiq & Doris, 2018). During the day, these individuals would move about in search of food by doing various jobs.

From a sociodemographic aspect, homeless individuals in Malaysia are mostly men. Most homeless males will sleep by the shop (Alhabshi & Abdul Manan, 2012). However, there is an increase in the number of women living as homeless (Hussin, 2016). Additionally, the population consist of different ethnic groups that reflect the local socio-cultural aspects (Nor Amalia et al., 2016). This indicates that the problem of homelessness cuts across age, race and nationality. The challenge of earning a proper income indicates that they cannot meet their basic needs with a smaller amount of income. In this regard, the authors support the government's proposition of offering a minimum wage of RM 1100 per month. Mohd Suhami et al. (2016) mentioned that some individuals only earn as low as RM20 a day or RM600 a month, an income far below the poverty level of large urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur.

The efforts to assist the homeless have been initiated by agencies such as the Social Welfare Department (JKM), Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), and the *Selangor Zakat* Board (LZS). Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also involved with the goal and intention of preventing homeless people from getting involved in social problems, crime and drug abuse. *Yayasan Kebajikan Negara* has taken the initiative to build *Anjung Singgah* in Jalan Hang Lekiu, Kuala Lumpur has successfully met the needs of individuals for shelter and an opportunity to manage themselves. Additionally, NGOs also act as a channel between the public and the government in expressing needs, desires, opinions and other relevant matters. There are several Malaysian NGOs such as Soup Kitchen, *Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam* (PERTIWI), Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK), *Dapur Jalanan*, Need to Feed the Need (NFN), JOM Bekpes!, Kaseh4U, Fungates Superflow Foundation, and Food Not Bombs (Nor Amalina et al., 2018; Rafiza, Jaffary, Ahmad Sunawari & Zaizul, 2017). However, these non-profit groups lack financial resources and competent social workers to facilitate homeless individuals properly (Wong, Lee, Mohd Saiful, Muhamat Hamzah, Muhd Farid, 2014). There is growing evidence that many homeless people have many diverse and complex needs, but they are often denied from receiving social work support (Manthorpe, Corner, O'Halloran & Joly, 2015). Manthorpe et al. (2015) found that the volunteering sector had more visible social work practices in assisting homeless individuals than the public sector. This scenario is alarming since volunteers cannot be responsible entirely for the social welfare distribution efforts.

Homeless Scenario In Indonesia

In Indonesia, homelessness is often seen to go hand-in-hand with begging. Homelessness and begging are rampant in metropolitan Indonesian communities and areas. The amount of homeless, beggars, and youngsters congregating at public places, such as traffic lights, universities and residential neighbourhoods, is on the rise (Tyas & Noviyanti, 2016). Beggars are typically those who earn money by begging in public for different causes (Baktiawan, 2017). The opportunity to make money in large cities like Jakarta attracts immigrants from surrounding regions, resulting in a concentration of migrants in Kota Besar. According to the Ministry's Social Information Data Center, the number of distributions rose by 17% in the past five years (Wismoyojati, 2012). The reason for this increase is due to unemployment as well as lack of motivation and abilities (Tira, 2012). The presence of homeless individuals and beggars disrupts the larger society. When they operate on a pedestrian bridge or a store terrace,

other road users become annoyed (Syani, 2013). According to Ifni (2019), the poverty rate in Indonesia has reached 10% or 26.58 million of the total population of Indonesia. Additionally, the Asian Development Bank states that Indonesia ranks fifth among the population living below the poverty line, with Myanmar at 32.1%, followed by Laos 23.2%, the Philippines 21.6%, and Cambodia 14.0%. (Ifni, 2019).

In Indonesia, homeless individuals are known by the term GEPENG which is a combination of the words *Gelandangan* (homeless) and *penggemis* (beggar). The GEPENG issue is a social problem in almost all Indonesian cities (Sri & Eny, 2017; Chairika & Husni, 2016), confirming the assumption that social problems in the country remain enormous. Zaenal et al. (2013) and Laily, Tri Marhaeni & Cahyo (2017) describe the GEMPENG street group as three groups namely 'penggemis' (beggars), 'gelandangan' (homeless) and 'orang telantar' (bedridden) or in short PGOT. According to the authors, homeless people continue to live in such a way because they are helpless and do not have the necessary living skills. Laily et al. (2017) focus on street children and beggars in Semarang which increased from 270 people to 350 people in 2013 where most of the street groups originate from outside. The emergence of these street groups in various cities can increase the burden on the government and make the scenario less pleasant for the public.

Based on data from the Data and Information Centre of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Pusdatin) in 2015, the number of homeless individuals was 18,599 and 178,262 beggars (Sri & Eni, 2017) where the number is bound to increase if data collection was done during Eid al-Fitr (Sri & Eny, 2017). The complex problem of homelessness often disturbs the surrounding community, especially in the city (Dia, 2017) since these street groups dare to act forcibly, especially when a car is stopped at the traffic light (Malihatul & Rino, 2018). Based on the data from the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the number of People with Social Welfare Problems in Indonesia reached 8,052,939 million and in 2013 reached 15,500,000 million (Malihatul & Rino, 2018). In terms of homeless people and beggars, the data obtained from PMKS reported 2,918 homeless people and 1,999 beggars in May 2014. Homeless and beggars are the types of PMKS most often identified with poverty. The actual number may be higher, given that the data collection of these homeless groups is quite difficult due to high mobility (Karnadi & Sadiman, 2014). The government has also implemented various programs and policies to assist homeless and beggars in restoring their social functions (Astrini & Getar, 2015). The role of government and society in address this problem is crucial to reduce existing social inequalities. Table 2 presents the number of homeless people and beggars in Indonesia annually.

Table 2: Number of Homeless People and Beggars by Year (2006-2012)

Year	Number of Homeless People
2006	68,648
2007	61,090
2008	60.226
2009	88.781
2010	201.140
2011	194.908
2012	178.262

Source: Chairika & Husni, (2016)

The issues of beggars and homeless persons in cities are often caused by socioeconomic inequalities as a result of modernization and urbanisation. The rural-to-urban migration is not supported by sufficient human resources, resulting in increased urban poverty (Yoel, Sriti & Dodi, 2017). According to Yoel et al. (2017), the worsening of the issue of homeless persons and beggars in Surabaya is majorly driven by poverty, resulting in increased urban population density (Yoel et al, 2017). In Indonesia, many social issues, including homelessness and begging remain unresolved (Asep, 2017). Homeless persons and beggars have always been societal issues in cities (Asep,2017). Homeless people and beggars are cut off from the city's economic, social, and political life. Due to lack of employment opportunities and poverty (Adrianus, Nur Rochaeti & Endah, 2016). This issue must be managed efficiently and rapidly to avoid social, religious, cultural, safety, health, and other repercussions. Priharyono (2008) found that homeless individuals become more confused and restless, with a mental reluctance to return to society as time passes.

Zaenal, Sangidun, and Alief (2013) studied beggars, homeless, and neglected individuals and discovered that some of them can utilize government services like rehabilitation centres. These centres have set regulations that allow them to remain for six months. They can then be reintegrated into the community and utilize the skills they learned at the rehabilitation office to survive. However, most of them end up transferring from one rehabilitation centre to another (Zaenal et al., 2013). This scenario is highly concerning as it implies that the existing support system was ineffective. The current economic crisis and numerous natural catastrophes that struck the nation may have also spurred the development of street gangs. Why do adults and adolescents end themselves on the street? Because they live on the street, they become rude, unpleasant, and lack manners. However, many think economic hardship is a deciding factor. Due to their parents' poverty, they cannot go to (Chairika & Husni, 2016). So the route was selected for activities. This causes societal issues. Without laws and supervision, these homeless individuals multiply and have no future. Free sex, drinking, and elder tyranny of adolescents are all prevalent (Chairika & Husni, 2016).

Tuti, Rahmat, and Aminuddin (2019) focus on the issue of homeless children which is a serious issue in major towns like Makassar where street children and homeless individuals loiter around in public areas. This behaviour may cause self-harm and public disorder as they are youngsters who belong in school and therefore are at risk of being subjected to aggression, drug, alcohol, and cigarette usage, and contagious illnesses including HIV/AIDS (Tuti, Rahmat & Aminuddin, 2019). Other possible criminal involvement may include robbery, theft, and robbery. Similarly, Moh. Anif, Avid, and Rifkah, (2018) addressed the issue of street children aged 5-18 years who work or wander in the streets or public areas. They spend most of their time on the streets or in public areas such as malls, bus terminals or parks. Street kids are vulnerably exposed to illnesses and violence by peers or strangers as these kids would do anything to have a meal and live (Moh. Anif et al., 2018). According to Astrini and Getar (2015), the Jakarta government has implemented numerous remedies for the homeless and beggars. For instance, the 'Panti Sosial Bina Insani Bangun' model (Astrini & Getar, 2015) where homeless and beggars seek additional social assistance to address their issues in temporary housings.

Homeless Scenario In Thailand

The total number of homeless individuals in Thailand is unknown, although the government recently estimates there are 4,392 persons in Bangkok (Bangkok Post, 2019). In 2018, there

were 3,993 homeless individuals, where 61% of them were males. Most of them are homeless senior citizens abandoned by their family members or are either disadvantaged inmates. This proportion increases annually due to life's stresses and poverty. According to BLT (2019), Phra Nakhon district has the most homeless people while a survey by the Isarachon Foundation reported a total of 4,392 homeless people in Bangkok in the year 2019. This figure charted an increase of about 10% in the year 2018. Districts, where homelessness is rife, include Phra Nakhon (755 homeless individuals), Chatuchak (642 homeless individuals), Pathum Wan (480 homeless individuals), Samphanthawong (430 homeless individuals), and Bang Sue (364 homeless individuals as reported by BLT (2019)). These groups of homeless individuals are often alcoholics, mentally ill, and urban. The increase in the number of homeless people during the year 2013-2016 was relatively low (2.8-3.5%). After the year 2017, the rate of homelessness increased dramatically to 5.1% - 10% respectively as Thailand's economy is deteriorating. Online Manager (2020) states 2,719 people homeless individuals in Bangkok where 86% of them are men, most of them are in late 40-59 years of age who are living alone in 2020. Additionally, the Ministry of Public Health revealed 2,719 homeless people across the country, more men than women. Most of them were in Bangkok (Thai Post, 2020). Homeless individuals were also found to have a life expectancy of 60 years, lower than the average age of 75 years for Thai citizens. The five main reasons for homelessness in Thailand are: 1) family problems, 2) economic status, 3) health issues, 4) lack of societal acceptance and opportunity such as the LGBTQ group, and 5) voluntarily homeless for the love of freedom (BLT, 2019).

For survival, some of them work odd jobs to support a large population. There are also individuals who suffer mental issues and therefore, end up on the streets (Awirutworakul, Pitukthanin, Chiangchaisakulthai, Anukul & Vallibhakara, 2018). In 2015, researchers from the Chulalongkorn University and the Health Promotion Foundation of Thailand discovered up to 1500 homeless individuals without ID where 70% of them suffer from mental health issues (Chaiyong, 2021). Awirutworakul et al. (2018) interviewed 113 homeless individuals, 76% of whom had mental health issues. Children were also reported among the homeless (Issarasena, Ngernklay, Eksaengsri, & Chumnaseaw, 2020) since they bear the brunt of family feuds, missing heirs, and drug addiction. The Thailand government is enacting measures to end homelessness. One is to transport mentally ill homeless people to medical facilities where they can be safe. Meanwhile, those who do not suffer from mental illness are either deported or sheltered. At the temporary shelter, they receive job training and to help them regain their economic and social stability. The Issarachon Foundation mentions that a homeless individual brought to a shelter will be examined (2019). In collaboration with the social welfare department, NGOs and public networks, short-term courses are provided to them. Participants can then choose to work for one of the cooperating businesses or start their own enterprise. Thailand's unemployment rate and homelessness are unrelated since 40% of the homeless population work for a fixed salary. Many remain homeless owing to a lack of education, family finances, or disability (Van Valkenburg, n.d).

Most homeless people are lonely elderly who lack heirs and are evicted from their families. With their health failing, and they need financial assistance (Viwatpanich, 2015). Although the act BE 2550 (53 A) states that those aged 60 and above with little or no income should be supported, the number of homeless individuals continue to soar, making it difficult for authorities to track them down. Moreover, the government also lacks personnel and experts such as psychiatrists to treat the target population (Department of Social Development and Welfare of Thailand, 2010). Financial limitations and the inability of members or employees

to handle situations are some barriers to reducing homelessness in Thailand. Due to the flaws in government planning and execution, non-governmental groups took the initiative and launch the Mirror Foundation's "Hire Me" campaign. This programme facilitates the homeless to find a job, alleviating their financial burden and inspiring them to return to the community. At least 100 people showed up for the programme where among them are cleaners in their 50s to 70s who are still fit and healthy. They go provide cleaning for homes and companies. This initiative indirectly raises society's awareness and allows homeless individuals to live regular lives. The initiative also assists the physically and psychologically sick to obtain therapy via the Mirror Foundation's programme.

Homeless Scenario In Singapore

Singapore is one of the most developed nations in Southeast Asia. With this status, many assume that homelessness may be non-existent, but homelessness is not a unique issue to this small nation. With a 5 million population and a \$65,233 per capita (World Bank, 2019), Singapore's homelessness problem seem small but still needs to be addressed, especially in the city. Approximately 1000 individuals are homeless according to Ng's (2019) research, with over 50 homeless in each district. Most homeless individuals were males and half of them are senior citizens. Unmarried men and women make up about 30% of the population. An estimated 28,200 full-time workers earn less than SGD1000, with 21% being over 60 (Glendinning, Shee, Nagpaul & Chen, 2018). This numbers clearly illustrates contributing factors of the Singapore homeless issue: unemployment, inconsistent work, and poor pay. Around 37% mentioned family issues like divorce, while 27% reported housing issues, including not paying rent or mortgages or having sold their houses. However, about 40% of these homeless population claim ownership of a home with 15% renting public apartments, whilst 11% own HDB flats. The remainder lives in hostels.

In another research, a group of volunteers surveyed several areas and found approximately 180 homeless people in 25 areas (Hui, 2017). Most of the males were over 50, and 21 of them have been homeless for over a year, and 18 persons have been homeless for over five years. According to Ng, (2019) 60% are employed whereby 50% are working full-time and 38% work part-time. The majority of them are cleaners and caregivers. According to the Ministry of Social and Family Development (2017), some homeless individuals have houses but prefer to sleep on the street because of family issues, while others do so to be close to work. This situation includes Malaysians who do not return home due to the hassle of frequent travelling. Singaporeans can be assisted by providing temporary shelter since these homeless individuals may be admitted into shelters if they meet specific requirements. Those without relatives and unable to care for themselves are classified as people in need of assistance.

Some homeless individuals can also choose to meet with a Family Service Center representative for safety. They will be evaluated in order to determine their shelter eligibility. Homeless individuals who have relatives or other family members who possess homes are deemed ineligible (MSF, 2017). The Ministry of Family and Social Development is responsible for the care of the homeless alongside NGOs. These NGOs consist of a team of volunteers who locate and provide aid to the homeless, particularly those who are regularly on the street and in need of support in terms of food and personal hygiene, etc. While the attempts to aid homeless individuals continue, some also refuse assistance due to negative experiences and prefer to live on the street. These experiences can include the need to pass rigorous assessments to be

admitted into a welfare home where they must also follow orders and no longer enjoy independence.

Revisiting The Interdependence Between Poverty and Homelessness

The pressing need to address the issue of homelessness was discussed in relation to the four nations above. The cases of homelessness are rising and linked to poverty in all four countries. There are two reasons that trigger poverty (Homeless Hub, n.d). Firstly, poverty is frequently seen as a lack of sustaining a good life independently. Economic, political, and social inequities as causes of poverty are disputed. In this sense, having a job does not guarantee shelter. This is evident in the homeless individuals who work yet live on the street in Thailand while in Indonesia donating money to begging beggars exacerbates the problem. Similarly, poor wages contribute to homelessness in Singapore while addiction, criminal records and disability are why individuals live on the streets in Malaysia. In Southeast Asia, homelessness and poverty are interrelated. Individuals living in poverty are unable to have shelter, buy food, and access health care (Speak, 2018). The difficulty in making these choices is limited due to scarce resources among them. The issue of homelessness in Southeast Asian countries often involves the problem of housing access since housing takes up the bulk of the income. Eventually, many individuals will choose not to rent and live on the streets instead.

Homelessness is a complex social problem in which its characteristics can vary geographically (Gregory, Johnston, Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009). The empirical evidence provided in this concept paper consistently proves that poverty is a major contributing factor to the homelessness phenomenon. Poverty is seen as an obstacle to homeless individuals where several scholars mentioned that homelessness is a form of extreme poverty as homelessness occurs because of poverty (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Both poverty and homelessness can seriously affect people of all ages, races or genders in Southeast Asia, which is evident in the increasing risk of poverty and homelessness among the communities. Lack of affordable housing, low income, unemployment, and inadequate state welfare assistance are some factors contributing to poverty and homelessness problems. This affects their way of daily life as they struggle to complete their daily needs (Hothersall & Bolger, 2012).

In addition, it is true that the existence of these homeless people is due to various factors that squeeze and urge, including urban poverty (Yap, 2020). Not having enough money also makes it very difficult to participate as a member of society. Poverty also has a huge impact on a person's health and well-being (Johnsen, S & Watts, 2014). The authors found that the problem of homelessness in these Southeast Asian countries is one of the most extreme manifestations of poverty. There is national and international evidence highlighting the link between poverty and homelessness (Kolar, 2017). There is still some debate about whether homeless people and in particular those who face the most extreme deprivation and actually come from the poorest sections of society or from working-class families in general. But at the same time, there is a general consensus among stakeholders on the issue of homelessness when richer people are actually less likely to be affected. (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012a). Finally, the issue of homelessness that is happening in the country in Southeast Asia reflects on the level of poverty that is plaguing the country. The failure of people to get jobs and have sufficient income has made it difficult for them to get out of poverty. This situation causes the choice of living to be homeless as the last resort. It happens in any country regardless of backward, developing and developed countries. Thus, the problem of homelessness needs to be identified more immediately so that

governments and authorities understand the problems of those involved and can more quickly remove them from the cycle of poverty and hardship of life (Hakim, 2019).

Poverty and homelessness are mutually interconnected for as long as poverty persists, the problem of homelessness remains unresolved. Poverty does cause the end of life for the homeless individual (Tipple, & Speak, 2006; Speak, & Tipple, 2006). Poor people choosing to live on the street is a common occurrence in all countries. It's hardly unexpected that this homeless population is poor. It seems that the main cause of homelessness in Southeast Asia Countries is the lack of chances for this population to leave the streets. As a result, the gang is compelled to remain homeless. One can see the poverty in each of these nations. Homelessness is usually caused by poverty.

Therefore, the government must invest in proven solutions to tackled the issue of homelessness in their respective countries. The solutions and approaches proposed must be comprehensive and account for the integration of economic, social, religious and psychological aspects to facilitate these homeless individuals to return to their normal life and accordingly uplift their human dignity (Zaenal & Sangidu, 2013). This need for solutions is even more pressing in developing countries where homelessness is rampant. There are three major ways to deal with homelessness: 1) Prevention - trying to stop people from becoming homeless; 2) Emergency response - provide emergency support such as shelter, food and daily and temporary programs and; 3) Access to housing, lodging, and support systems - The provision of ongoing housing and support as tools to assist people out from homelessness. Housing income researchers are the solution to the problem of homelessness. At the same time, a proper stable income is a solution to poverty. Collectively, the researchers suggest to 1) increase the minimum wage and social assistance rates in each country, 2) ensure affordability and quality homeownership options in each of these nations (indirectly creating jobs throughout the process) since income and housing can form the foundations of individual and social support. In order to heal from the trauma of homelessness and break the vicious cycle of homelessness and poverty, these individuals would require physical, emotional, and social assistance.

Conclusion

Overall, this review of past literature highlights that the issue of homelessness in the four Southeast Asian countries is largely due to poverty that afflicts society. Poverty is the triggering factor to the failure of social constructs when individual members of society are forced to choose street life. A variety of common factors such as drug abuse, illness, and mental wellbeing are significant and can complicate homeless people's living conditions. The overlapping risk factors make it difficult for these homeless to break free from life on the streets. Although each of these countries demonstrated a different sociodemographic, geographical, social, economic, and political landscape, the issue of homelessness remains rampant and cannot escape the poverty plague. The need to design solutions from a practical social standpoint should be introduced to reduce the problem of homelessness in each nation. Social practices are a measure in which service providers can employ as a step towards eradicating homelessness.

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