The Homelessness Crisis in India: Understanding the Causes and Solutions

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Abstract

A major societal problem that affects millions of people and families worldwide is homelessness. The underlying causes of homelessness are examined in this study report, including poverty, mental illness, substance addiction, and domestic violence. The report also looks at possible solutions to the issue, of homelessness, unemployment, mental health and drug misuse treatment. We can fight to create a society where everyone has access to secure housing by addressing the underlying causes of homelessness and enacting practical solutions. This study paper offers a thorough examination of the problem of homelessness, its root causes, and potential remedies, which can help communities, non-profits, and policymakers in their attempts to address the issue.

Keywords: Homelessness, Poverty, Domestic Violence, Non-profits, Policymakers.

Introduction

In social geography, each and every aspect of the society is given importance. Every section of the society has its own personal importance; we cannot separate any class or category of person from the society. Similarly, homeless people are also a very important part of the society. Being homeless, people do not consider them a part of the society and homeless people also find themselves cut off from the main stream. No concrete steps were taken by the society to bring such people into the main stream of the society, it has become a serious problem in the remote part of the world and this problem is increasing day by day in developing countries as compared to developed countries. India is also a developing country, due to increasing urbanization, industrialization and mechanization in the country and increasing generation and increasing employment rate, this problem is increasing continuously.

Meaning of Homelessness:

"Homelessness" is a term used to describe a situation in which a person is living without a secure housing arrangement, and is considered to be a particular form of poverty. Homelessness means the plight experience of people who are unable to afford decent and stable dwelling. Houses are vital to human well-being. Children and

youth benefit significantly from stable housing in economic development of a country. A reasonable quality of life is guaranteed to everyone according to the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) in article 25 (1), it also includes basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter.

The issue of homelessness is not merely local, it is a worldwide phenomenon. The problem reflects the imbalance in socioeconomic conditions and the rapid urbanization that is a feature of our society today. In developing countries, the growing number of people leads to homelessness, urbanization, industrialization, and migration for employment and India is the largest populated country in the world (According to UNFPA) followed by China. As a result, people live in slums and pipes, tents, under flyovers, along roads and railway lines, and in inadequate or dilapidated facilities with their relatives. It is one of the worst kinds of social vulnerability that exposes homeless to all kinds of deprivation and exploitation. Homelessness and migration have strong linkages. Normally poor resist migration outside their villages or habitats because of fear of unknown and lack of support system. Typically poor and marginalized migrate only when their survival is at stake. It is more of the push rather than pull factor that leads to migration of poor.

There is no single correct definition, which can explain the term homelessness given the different mix of problems that goes into the hodgepodge of issues, and depending on who is using the term. While it is true that all societies through history tend to have some people who are homeless, we have not always had the set of social problems associate with the word homelessness.

Census of India defines "homelessness" and "houseless people" as, persons who are not living in buildings or 'census houses.' A census house refers to 'a structure with roof.' Hence for measuring the extent of homelessness or determining eligibility programmes and services, the government considers those who 'live in the open on roadside, pavements, in hume pipes, under flyovers and staircases, or in the open in places of worships, *mandaps* (porch), railway platforms, etc.', as houseless people.

Census provided data of homeless people for the 1st time in 2001 and it counted 1.94 million homeless people in the country. But as per Census of India 2011 around 1.7million persons are homeless fro which 938,384 live in urban areas. Independent organisations estimate the number in India of about 2.3 million.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in India defines homelessness as a situation where an individual or family does not have a place of residence to live in, or lives in a public or private shelter not meant for human habitation, or lives with relatives/friends temporarily but without the guarantee of continued stay, or lives in a dilapidated or hazardous dwelling. This definition encompasses both visible and invisible homelessness, as it includes people who live on the streets as well as those who live in inadequate or unstable housing conditions.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and Census of India 2011 data claim that the two megacities known for their large homeless population are Mumbai and Delhi they just have 57,416 and 46,724 homeless people. But these figures are contested by many housing rights activists and organizations.

Homelessness is a complex issue that affects individuals and communities in various ways. It is often caused by a combination of factors like low Income including poverty, domestic violence, and lack of affordable housing,

racial disparity, mental health issues, unemployment and addiction. Some of the main causes of homelessness are discussed below.

Causes of homelessness:

1. **Low Income/ Poverty:** People with low incomes are those who make comparatively little money in comparison to other members of their community. In India, a sizable segment of the populace struggles to make ends meet and lives below the poverty line. According to the latest official poverty estimates released by the Government of India, based on the 2011-12 consumption expenditure survey, 21.9% of India's population was living below the poverty line. This means that around 269.7 million people in India were living below the poverty line at that time. In most of the cases it is found that people who are involved in informal sector, which includes street vendors, rag pickers, scavenging, rickshaw puller, labourers etc. with extremely low incomes, accounts for a sizable share of this society's population living below the poverty line. The exact number of homeless people in India due to poverty is not known, but it is likely to be a significant proportion of the total homeless population.

2. **Unemployment:** Many people lost their jobs during the COVID 19 effect; the increase in homelessness due to unemployment is post-effect. People and families may struggle to cover the essential living costs, such as rent and electricity, without a reliable source of income. As a result, they may discover that they lack a secure place to live. Between April and July 2020, the pandemic caused the loss of approximately 18 million jobs in India, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE).

3. **Substance Abuse:** At the present time, substance addiction is turning into a severe issue everywhere in the world. One of the most significant and serious problem as it creates a chronic condition that can result in a variety of detrimental effects, such as poor physical and mental health, unemployment, and financial instability, it has a devastating and severe impact on their life. Addiction of any intoxicating substance makes it harder for people who are already battling with poverty and low income to end the cycle of homelessness. In 2017, though, a survey of Delhi's street children, conducted jointly by the Delhi government and the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, AIIMS, found that over 7,900 street children were addicted to inhalants, which give a euphoric high but can also lead to hallucinations, organ damage, and death. It also found that over 9,000 children abused alcohol, 5,600 took cannabis, and over 1,200 consumed opioids, including heroin.

4. **Domestic violence:** Domestic violence is becoming an increasingly serious issue in society. Intimate partner violence, commonly referred to as domestic violence, is a pattern of abusive behaviour employed by one spouse to dominate and control the other partner. Domestic disputes continue to arise in some aspect of society due to the shifting nature of everyday living and a lack of mental serenity. It typically affects women, and most victims of domestic abuse are compelled to abandon their homes, which increases the number of homeless people. In many situations, it has been discovered that these women spend their whole lives in temporary shelters, or road side pavements.

5. **Step Parents:** Due to deteriorating social structure and diminishing importance of relationships, family relations have become very isolated in the present times. Even the sacred bond of the society like

marriage has been made fun of in the present times, due to which the trend of remarriage has increased a lot. Due to this, step parents relationship is also increasing continuously, due to which children have to bear the burden of these changing family relationships, due to which due to lack of family harmony, many family members have to face the worrisome problem like homelessness, due to which the situation worsens and continues to escalate.

6. **Mental Illness:** One of the main factors contributing to homelessness is mental illness. Homelessness and mental illness are inextricably linked, one aggravating the other. While mental illness may cause job loss, marital problems, and ultimately homelessness, homelessness can also cause and exacerbate mental disease. Without sufficient assistance and resources, it may be difficult to stop this vicious cycle. The expense of therapy is one of the main factors in mental illness that contributes to homelessness. There is no up-to-date statistics on the number of people who are homeless due to mental illness in India. However, according to a report of 2016 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in India, it was estimated that approximately 6-7% of the Indian population suffered from some form of mental illness.

Possible Solutions:

There is no universal solution to the complicated problems of homelessness, access to mental health care, and substance abuse treatment. Here are some possibilities:

1. **Increase funding for mental health and drug misuse treatment:** More funding should be made available by governments and nonprofit organisations to offer homeless people access to inexpensive and convenient substance abuse and mental health treatment.

2. **Provide Affordable housing:** According to studies, it may be more effective to give homeless people permanent homes before treating their problems with substance abuse and mental health. In many places, the "Housing First" strategy has been effective in lowering the number of homeless people.

3. **Improve access to healthcare:** People who are homeless frequently have poor access to healthcare, which can make their problems with substance abuse and mental health worse. To increase homeless people's access to medical and mental health treatments, governments should make investments in the healthcare infrastructure.

4. **Increase public awareness:** The stigma associated with homelessness, mental illness, and drug abuse might discourage people from getting care. Governments and nonprofit organisations must to step up their public awareness initiatives to lessen stigma and motivate people to get assistance.

5. **Provide job training and education:** Offering career training and educational opportunities can assist homeless people in gaining independence and escaping poverty. Governments should fund programmes for job training and education that are especially tailored for those who are homeless to get an employment.

Conclusion:

Millions of people in the world are impacted by the problem of homelessness. There is no one single cause of homelessness, yet the causes of homelessness are frequently linked together like poverty, mental illness, and

drug misuse. To deal with the problem with the situation of homeless affordable housing is one of the best remedies for homelessness. In order to assist in employment and financial security, some job training and educational programmes can also be run. In order to assist people manage their diseases and keep stable housing, it may also require increasing access to mental health and drug abuse therapy.

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