

THE CASE OF HOMELESSNESS IN FOUR SELECT CITIES IN MINDANAO: ITS CAUSES, RISKS, AND EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness is the condition and social category of people having no regular house or dwelling because they cannot afford, pay for, or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing. The study shows that the factors associated with homelessness in the four regions of Mindanao are: causes of homelessness such as poverty, no education, legal/criminal problem, mental/health problem, leaders' attitude, unemployment, and no public assistance; while risk factors are increase criminal cases, vehicular accident, bitten by animals, eviction, and sexual abuse. And the effect factors are: stress, health problem, lack of self-sufficiency skills and juvenile arrest. Every cause, risk or effect of homelessness among Mindanao homeless individuals are not only the factor that contributed to the corresponding category on the causes, risks and effects. The study used of qualitative and quantitative methods to identify the factors which are causes of, risks in and effects of homelessness.

Keywords: Attitudes, causes, effects, homelessness, risks

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Introduction

There are images that never leave the mind. They get impaled in the memory. Images of the slaughter of the innocent and defenseless and the displacement of civilian populations in war time – e.g., people fleeing their homes for safety, fear and despair written on their faces – make melancholy exhibits, as do images of the wretched and miserable existence of dregs of humanity, that human flotsam known as the homeless. It is a problem that individuals with a social conscience, and in whom the milk of human kindness has not curdled, cannot ignore.

Homelessness (UK: sleeping rough), United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Federal Definition of Homeless" Title 42, Chapter 119, Subchapter I.", is the condition and social category of people who do not have a regular house or dwelling because they cannot afford, pay for, or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing, or they lack, "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence". According to the report of United Nation Commission on Human Settlement, the number of homeless people worldwide is estimated to be between 100 million and one billion^[1].

In the Philippines, a total population of 93 million people is dispersed across thousands of islands, of which forty percent live in slums as reported by the Homeless International^[2]. It is not surprising at all that these areas are characterized by limited access to basic services, lack of legal land tenure, and insecure shelter generally on the least appealing plots of land. A high percentage of Filipino slum dwellers live in areas where they are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters, such as along shorelines, around dumpsites, under bridges and on hillsides^[3].

One of the most characteristic and consistent human behaviors over thousands of years is that humans build shelters. Homes offer protection from the elements and from a variety of health hazards, and provide basic amenities such as a secure place to eat and sleep, to keep one's possessions, to raise a family, and be part of a community. Housing is a basic human need, as explicitly stated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, par. 1*. Yet, the UN Human Development Report notes that more than one billion people—one-quarter of the world's population—live without shelter, or in unhealthy and unacceptable conditions^[4]. Over 100

million people around the world have no shelter whatsoever. The health consequences of this level of homelessness are profound.

In Mindanao, the archipelago's most abundantly endowed island, factors on homelessness with respect to causes, risk and effects are existent. In addition to being more sparsely populated than other areas, due to which it earned the status of 'frontier', the island is so comparatively fertile that it has been dubbed the "Rice Bowl"^[5]. It is thus paradoxical that in the midst of natural plenitude, there should be so much want and squalor. Some of the most depressed areas in the country are found in Mindanao.

Hewitt observed that homelessness, much like any other complex problem, does not have one particular cause^[6]. However, there are a number of factors which, when piled on deep enough, often result in homelessness. Knowing these contributing factors and seeing how they interact may give a keen observer a better understanding of this social phenomenon.

This study took interest on the problem due to all those reports on homelessness and facts already on. The problem of homelessness is amorphous, protean, and humongous. It invites further exploration and plumbing of its depths or complexities, hence, this study.

Materials and Methods

The four selected cities from the 4 regions in Mindanao were considered as the sampling site of this study with four hundred (400) homeless respondents distributed as follow: 100 from Pagadian City (Region 9), 100 from Iligan (Region 10), another 100 from Cotabato City (Region 12), and also 100 from Lamitan, Basilan (ARMM).



Figure 1. Map of Mindanao Showing the Locales of the Study.

It made use of qualitative and quantitative methods to answer its research questions, however, it leans much on the Qualitative in describing the characteristics of homeless respondents and in identifying the factors which are causes of, risks in and effects of homelessness. Only in the test of hypotheses that the correlation method was used to test the relationships between the factors on the risks in and effects of homelessness and the ANOVA to test variations between factors that cause homelessness.

The Barangay observation guide was served as a guide in observing the homeless individuals in the four selected cities of Mindanao. It was designed to capture the causes, risks and effects of homelessness. And the questionnaire-interview guide for the homeless residents composed of perceived causes, identified risks in and effects of homelessness. The selection of the respondents was carried out so that the sample includes men and women, younger and older people, and representatives of ethnic and other minority groups.

Results and Discussion

Homeless persons can be male or female, individuals or members of family groups. They can be unaccompanied youth, the elderly, people with physical, mental or developmental disabilities, and/or persons with addiction disorders. There are, however, basic demographic data which can create a picture of what statistically a homeless family or individual looks like.

Perceived Causes of Homelessness

Table 1 shows the perceived causes of homelessness across the four regions in Mindanao and the corresponding P-value of each cause. The four sites presented an equal number of respondents and different major cause of homelessness. The variables that showsignificant correlation on the cause of homelessness are: lack of sufficient income, no education, substance/drug abuse, legal/criminal problem, unemployment, leader's attitude, no public assistance, sexual abuse and mental/health problem. Lack of sufficient income was found to be the highest (17.33%) cause of homelessness in Region IX (Pagadian City), substance/drug abuse (29.33%) in Region X (Iligan), evacuation/eviction (23.33%) in Region XII (Cotabato) and no education (18%) in ARMM (Lamitan, Basilan).

Table 1. Rank distribution of homeless residents' perceived causes of homelessness.

Variable	Region IX	Region X	Region XII	ARMM	P-value	Remarks
Lack of sufficient income(no income-low income)	52	45	37	39	1.56633E-05	Significant
No education (not finished primary education)	42	10	42	53	2.97055E-05	Significant
Substance or drug abuse (drugs caused people to go astray)	41	88	8	0	3.19293E-05	Significant
Legal or criminal problem (escaped from danger of crimes/ escaped from crime committed)	42	25	21	48	2.97055E-05	Significant
Sexual abuse(raped)	1	45	8	4	0.391002219	Significant
Unemployment(unskilled due to poor education)	30	9	35	40	8.13528E-05	Significant
Mental or health problem						

(insanity/TB)	3	10	8	3	0.057668886	Significant
Leaders attitude(harsh treatment, stereotyping as dirt people, trash people)	29	5	45	15	9.0037E-05	Significant
No public assistance (unsympathetic attitudes, no help from the public)	32	14	10	28	6.7065E-05	Significant
Domestic violence (battered child & wives)	14	30	6	16	0.000789163	Not significant
Go with friends(influenced by friends to stay in the place)	8	9	10	11	0.004076578	Not significant
Evacuation/eviction (evacuation from war/eviction from former dwellings which are owned by others)	6	10	70	43	0.00927	Not significant

Significant (P >

0.05)

Identified Risks in Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the current crises worldwide. The principal risk factors that have been found to increase vulnerability to homelessness among the individuals are described in Table 2. Accordingly, on the P-value, among the considered variables in this study only assault, robbery, vehicular accident, bitten by animals, murder, eviction and unhealthy sexual activity/sexual abuse, were found to be significantly correlated with the risks factors in homelessness. Among the risks, eviction was the highest in region IX (Pagadian city 18.33%), Region XII (Cotabato 16%), and ARMM (Lamitan, Basilan 24.33%) while robbery and assault in Region X (Iligan 16.33%).

Table 2. Rank distribution of homeless residents identified risk factors in homelessness.

Variable	Region IX	Region X	Region XII	ARMM	P-value	Remarks
Assault (by Gang and other elements)	47	49	47	33	2.12065E-05	Significant
Robbery	45	49	47	44	2.4158E-05	Significant
Vehicular accident victim(hit by vehicle)	33	34	35	32	6.11639E-05	Significant
Weather hazard (heavy rain, flood)	25	45	43	37	0.000140331	Not significant

Bitten by Animals (snakes, rats)	30	24	31	14	8.13528E-05	Significant
Murder (be killed)	31	40	26	43	7.37499E-05	Significant
Eviction (be displaced due to urbanization)	55	38	48	73	1.32393E-05	Significant
Unhealthy sexual activity /sexual abuse (trade Sex , or be sexually abused and molested)	34	21	23	24	5.59349E-05	Significant

Significant (P >

0.05)

Identified Effects of Homelessness

Table 3 shows that respondents considered significant effects of homelessness like stress, health problem, substance abuse, lack of self-sufficiency skills and juvenile arrest.

Stress is the highest effect factor of homelessness among Region IX (Pagadian City, 21.30%) and Region XII (Cotabato, 18.60%) while health problem in Region X (Iligan, 21%) and ARMM (Lamitan, Basilan, 22.03%).

From the observations made, they show that homelessness has a huge effect on an individual's physical and emotional health. Homeless men and women suffer from health problems that they cannot get rid of because they have no access to medicine, food and warm housing. They also are more at risk for dependency on drugs and alcohol. They suffer from vitamin deficiencies and often do not get adequate sleep. Homeless individuals have no housing to protect them from physical violence and even rape.

Table 3. Rank distribution of identified effect factors of homelessness.

Variable	REGION IX	REGION X	REGION XII	ARMM	P-value	Remarks
Stress	64	46	56	59	8.40522E-06	Significant
Health Problem	38	61	54	63	4.00902E-05	Significant
Substance Abuse	0	30	8	27	8.14E-05	Significant
Lack of self-sufficiency Skills	31	8	12	15	7.37499E-05	Significant
Juvenile Arrest	37	41	37	33	4.34235E-05	Significant

Significant (P > 0.05)

Conclusion

Every cause, risk or effect of homelessness as perceived and identified by the Mindanao homeless individuals cannot only be the single factor that contributed to the corresponding category of factors (causes, risks and effects). Poverty which is the highest among the causes cannot be the sole cause of homelessness, as other factors such as no education, substance abuse and the like may co-exist with poverty. Eviction which was an identified risk in homelessness, born out of it some other factors, and the effects on homelessness has their impinging factors that affect homelessness. Serious attention to prevent these different factors on homelessness has the potential contribution on the upliftment of the conditions of the homeless individuals. Thus, gaining information about homeless people prior to actual conduct of data gathering must be done to capture a more complete picture on Mindanao homelessness.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are deemed necessary based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

1. The importance of community understanding of homelessness and the participatory activities could be addressed related to homelessness.
2. Community leaders could develop a cohesive spectrum of support services for families, with a focus on early intervention of homelessness, by addressing the structural factors that lead to homelessness and to help advocate to the Government for improved income support for low income earners, especially for families with teenage children.
3. Government and Non-Government Organizations could initiate linkages with organizations to improve cross-agency coordination and budget planning in the delivery of support services to reduce homelessness.
4. The government could adopt policies such as:
 - a. To increase public awareness of the impact of homelessness on the community and determination to end it;
 - b. To increase understanding of the changing nature and causes of homelessness;
 - c. To create intervention and prevention strategies to end homelessness;

- d. To advocate for the implementation of new strategies that help prevent and end homelessness;
 - e. To advocate for the creation of safe, affordable housing; and,
 - f. To help coordinate a network of supports for those in housing crisis, as well as a support network for those working with people who are homeless.
5. Future research studies could be conducted with widened coverage on some regions and great number of homeless individuals with emphasis on overall health impact of homeless individuals.

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