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Degrees of destitution: A typology of homelessness in developing countries

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Abstract

There is an ongoing attempt to develop a globally acceptable definition of homelessness.

Whether such a definition is broad and inclusive of squatters, and those living in particularly poor quality housing, or narrowly focused on street homelessness, it is likely to include a large population. Therefore, we are left with a need to develop criteria for identifying, allocating and prioritising appropriate support.

Drawing on a study of homelessness in nine developing countries, this paper presents a new categorisation or typology of homelessness, based on choice and opportunity. It highlights the way in which homeless people, living in identical shelter situation, and for ostensibly similar reasons, might require different responses to support them out of homelessness. This paper does not seek to debate the definition of homelessness but to stimulate discussion on finding a way to identify and prioritise the needs of those included within any given definition.

Key words: Homelessness, Developing countries, Choice, Opportunity

Introduction

At its most extreme, homelessness manifests itself as destitution. In countries such as the UK, where the vast majority of people are not only housed, but housed adequately, to be without even a roof or place to sleep is a clear indication of crisis. Street homelessness also signifies unemployment, which in turn, perpetuates the homeless state. However, even in the West, this most visible form of homelessness is complex and sometimes misjudged. In developing countries, the situation and circumstances of the roofless are even more complex. It has become evident that, in developing countries and to a lesser degree in the UK, different forms of homelessness, including absolute rooflessness or street homelessness, can involve a degree of choice. It can even represent an element of personal control over one's situation. Certainly, even amongst street homeless people, we can observe differing degrees of destitution, for example between those perpetual rough sleepers and those for whom sleeping rough is a temporary and brief experience.

During a study of homelessness in nine developing countries¹, carried out by CARDO at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, this complexity of street homelessness began to emerge. It also became apparent that there are no typologies of homelessness developed specifically for developing countries. Moreover, those developed for the West, for example by FEANTSA (1999), Copper (1995) or Daly (1994) are inappropriate to describe homelessness in many developing countries.

This paper attempts to describe some of the complexity of homelessness in developing countries and develop a categorisation or typology of homelessness based

¹ Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Ghana, Peru, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

on the degree of choice the homeless person or household can exercise over their situation, and the level of opportunity the homelessness affords them to improve their longer term situation. That is to say that why someone is homeless and how they perceive their homelessness, is as important as a basis for policy and intervention, as how that homelessness manifests itself. Understanding the reasons why people become homeless and the degree of choice they may have exercised over their situation, enables decisions to be made about the degree and type of support they need. As Neale (1997) suggests it is not necessary to begin by eradicating all homelessness in order to bring about improvements to homeless people's lives.

The paper begins with a discussion of the empirical study and its methodology. It continues with a brief overview of how homelessness is perceived in the West and some of the current typologies, developed predominantly for the West. It then discusses findings from the study, which indicate three categories of homelessness based on the degree of choice involved and level of opportunity, either to escape homelessness or to improve ones living situation through homelessness. Finally some suggestions are made for the type of interventions needed for the different groups.

About the empirical study

The research, which was funded by DFID, was carried out between April 2001 and May 2003, by the Centre for Architectural Research and Development Overseas (CARDO). The nine countries involved were selected for a number of reasons. First, they presented a range of housing and homelessness situation and degrees of poverty. Whilst the mass of the population in all nine countries is poor, the social marginalisation of the poor differs, for example between Bangladesh, where poverty

is all pervasive and South Africa where it is concentrated predominantly amongst the black population. Secondly, they gave a range of different cultural experiences and understanding of housing and homelessness. For example, cultures around property ownership differ greatly between China, where private ownership is just re-emerging and Zimbabwe, where anyone who does not own their own house is considered as homeless. China also offered the opportunity to explore the effects of new population mobility and an emerging market economy on housing and homelessness. Thirdly, they presented a range of institutional situations and welfare regimes. For example, South Africa has a well established pensions policy and some degree of welfare, whilst most others have virtually no welfare support at all. Fourthly, for logistical purposes, they were all countries in which CARDO had good connections and could employ country based researchers whose work they were familiar with. Finally, they were all countries in which DFID had research interests.

The work was managed by a team of experienced researchers in the field from Newcastle. A researcher was commissioned in each of the nine countries to undertake the study according to a detailed specification. The specification detailed seven main areas of investigation².

The work included conducting a local literature review, trawling secondary sources for statistical data and undertaking interviews with homeless people and representatives of government and non government organisations. Specific case

² The main areas of investigation were: housing theory; current housing supply characteristics; current definitions of homelessness; what the median household would regard as unacceptable shelter; appropriateness of western typologies; numbers of people involved in types of homelessness; systemic causes of homelessness, isolation or exclusion of homeless people; characteristics of homeless people; street children, typologies of street children; causes of street child phenomena; conditions of living; responses to homelessness; actors and agents. Within each of these sub sections were explored in detail.

studies of 'typical' homeless households were sought through interview and oral testimony. It was the emerging diversity amongst these 'typical' households, which led to the development of the proposed typology.

Because of the practical differences between the nine countries, it was not possible to be over prescriptive about how many interviews should be conducted or precisely how empirical data should be collected. For example, the researcher in Zimbabwe experienced considerable difficulties and danger in interviewing homeless farm workers who had fled their homes when President Mugabi's 'War Veterans' reclaimed white owned farmsteads.

The availability of data varied very widely between countries. There are a number of reasons for this. First, availability of data is likely to be influenced by the 'service statistics paradox', in that, those countries with a willingness to acknowledge homelessness, and to establish services for homeless people, are more likely to be able to locate and count them and thus, will have more accurate (and higher) figures (FEANTSA 1999). Secondly, definitions varied widely and were non-existent in some countries. The lack of definitions is probably due, in part, to the politically sensitive nature of homelessness. Where housing is seen as a basic right of citizenship, to acknowledge homelessness is to acknowledge a failure of the government to support citizens or that the social system is failing (Jacobs et al 1999). The lack of 'official' definition was complicated further by cultural differences in relation to homelessness. For example, the Ghanaian language does not even have a word for homelessness, as 'home', in its broadest sense, is related to family and

kinship. Therefore, only those people without any family anywhere, however, remote, could be homeless.

Each researcher submitted a draft which was reviewed and returned for verification or further explanation and completion. The author visited the researchers in six of the countries to gain a more detailed understanding, to meet homeless people and assure the quality of the research. It was not deemed necessary to visit the remaining 3 countries as one team member had extensive experience of them and the initial reports were comprehensive.

The direct empirical data, including quotes and oral testimonies, was collected by the author whilst visiting the countries, or by the in-country researchers for their reports. Where data was collected by the author, the in-country researchers acted as interpreters and, where necessary, transcribed and translated discussions and offered contextual information. The use of this data is discussed further in a later section.

Current thoughts on homelessness

This paper is not intended as a debate on theoretical or political approaches to homelessness in the West. However, it is useful to begin by reviewing our understanding of the changing nature of homelessness in developed countries. It is useful in particular because, what we see in developing countries, where welfare safety-nets have never existed, may be an extreme manifestation of the 'new homelessness' emerging in developed countries. Thus, developing countries might offer a stark warning of things to come in the West.

From the mid 1970s to the late 1990s, at a political level, the causes of homelessness were increasingly associated with personal 'pathology' (Jacobs *et al* 1999). What Neale (1997) termed the 'agency' explanation, placed the responsibility for homelessness on the homeless person. It located causes of homelessness either in their inadequacy, for example, learning difficulty or mental health problems, or in their behaviour, such as drinking or drug abuse. Only since the arrival of social exclusion as a basis for policy development has there been a return to a focus on structural causes for policy purposes. The 'agency' explanation seems to have been something of a preoccupation amongst academics, at least until the late 1990s, with 10 times the number of reports on homelessness with a focus on mental illness than with a focus on poverty or housing (Julia and Hartnett 1999).

However, increasingly dominant in the theoretical debates around homelessness has been a 'structural' view (Neale 1997, Kennet and Marsh 1999). The nature of the perceived structural causes is open for debate. Whether they are a result of the failure of the housing market to provide adequate, affordable housing, or underpinned by wider, global economic factors, remains unclear.

The fiscal crisis affecting local, national and global economies has brought about major structural changes with resulting reshaping of welfare policies, ostensibly in an unavoidable attempt to curb public spending (Foster and Plowden 1996). These structural changes have led to a weakening of the welfare support system in many developing countries and an increased risk of poverty and homelessness for the mass of the population (Kennett and Marsh 1999). This new, increased risk for the *mass* of

the population in developed and transitional countries begins to hint at the situation in developing countries, where, in general, such welfare safety nets have never existed.

Whilst this risk potentially affects most people, it does not affect them constantly or equally. As Forrest (1999) notes *'there is a continuum of security and insecurity in terms of factors such as employment, income, family life and social networks.'* One could argue that such a continuum always existed. What is new is the degree to which many more households find themselves moving, both backwards and forwards, along it as the social networks and welfare regimes, which once kept them static, decay.

Just as households are subjected to the risk of homelessness differently, they also experience and perceive their place on the risk continuum differently. Even at the extreme end of the continuum, different households experience homelessness differently, depending on a range of factors, not least whether they see themselves as being in an upwards or downwards trajectory. Here again, there is a stark similarity to the situation in developing countries, where, as we shall see in a later section, homelessness can be a positive part of a housing career.

Given that our increased understanding of 'new homelessness' in the West shows it to be not dissimilar in some ways to homelessness in developing countries, one might expect Western typologies to be useful in defining and describing homelessness. However, they are limited in their usefulness.

Limitations of existing typologies of homelessness

One key reason for developing a typology of homelessness is to assist governments and NGOs in allocating limited resources and to support homeless people to improve their dwelling situation. Currently, no typology exists specifically for developing countries. There are, however, a number of typologies of homelessness developed for the West and it is valuable to consider their limitations for a developing countries context.

For example, FEANTSA (1999) suggests a typology based on a combination of high or low quality and security. However, any categorisation using the concept of low quality or security would include the vast majority of the developing world's population and would offer little differentiation between their individual circumstances and stress. It would not help to differentiate the potentially greater needs of street sleepers, without any form of shelter, from those of the millions of squatters around the world. Even within the category of shelterless street sleepers, it would not assist us to priorities those without any form of alternative, from those who have access to accommodation elsewhere.

Cooper (1995) offers us degrees of homelessness again based on accommodation or shelter. The worst degree, 'absolute homelessness' includes those living on the streets, under bridges and in deserted buildings. Again, this would include many hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people in developing countries. Whilst a focus on absolute homelessness would prioritise the worst cases, it lacks an understanding of the cultural context within which people experience their homeless state. Moreover, Coopers third degree – inadequate housing, would, like FEANTSA

(1999), certainly include millions of squatters and be of little use in developing interventions or apportioning resources.

Hertzberg (1992), discussing homelessness in the United States, begins to categorise homeless people by how they perceive their homelessness and what they want for the future. This typology offers three groups of people, 'teeterers', 'resistors' and 'accommodators', defined by their characteristics, their perceptions of their homelessness and the length of time they have been homeless. It suggests that 'resistors' are fighting against homelessness, 'teeterers' are ambivalent to it and 'accommodators' have accepted it.

However, the length of time each group is homeless, and the places they are most likely to stay are inappropriate for developing countries. Hertzberg suggests that 'resistors', those people who are fighting against homelessness are only homeless for a brief period- 2-4 years - and that their condition is not of their choosing. She considers that many are recovering alcoholic. Conversely, we found many short term homeless people have chosen homelessness as a means of improving their more permanent living conditions.

Moreover, the characteristics of homeless people in developing countries are vastly different to the characteristics Hertzberg ascribes to her three categories. For example, there was little indication of personal inadequacy or family dysfunction being related to longer periods of homelessness amongst the people in our study.

Developing a new typology for developing countries

We turn now to consider three categories of homelessness based on the degree of choice the homeless person might exercise, and their potential for improving the situation. These categories have developed out of the elements of the original study which looked at the characteristics of homeless people and the causes of their homelessness.

Throughout the field work homeless people were asked for their stories, including the processes which had led to their homelessness. The stories were analysed for what drove the household or individual into homelessness, and their opportunities to return to their original homes. For example, did they still have a dwelling they related to as home in another location, how often did they return to it and when did they perceive they would return permanently? The resulting picture was supported by data from those working with homeless people.

Where data was collected by the author, the in-country researchers acted as interpreters and offered contextual information with which to develop lines of questioning. For example, rural Indian families traditionally arrange marriages for their daughters with families from neighbouring villages. The author would not have considered asking homeless households of rural migrants in Delhi, how they arranged marriages for their daughters, if they were no longer living in a village situation. However, this question was suggested by the in-country researchers. In turn, this prompted a number of similar socio-cultural questions to be asked which uncovered new strategies for the continuation of social traditions, which themselves may support the development of home in a homeless situation (see section on survival homelessness). It was this line of investigation which first began to hint at the

proposed typology, as it became clear that people were experiencing, and ascribing meaning to, similar situations in very different ways.

Homelessness as a supplementation strategy

We have called our first category of homelessness ‘supplementation homelessness’.

Supplementation homelessness develops when people, often lone men, leave their village homes in search of employment in the city. In this respect, the origin of their homelessness, economic migration, is similar to that of many homeless people.

However, for a number of reasons, it is possible for the supplementation homeless person, by sleeping rough and not spending on housing, to send money home to supplement his rural livelihood. In a number of cases, the people interviewed made a conscious choice to move from home and remain on the streets, even though they could return home, or house themselves better in the city, if they chose to. For example, one young taxi driver in Delhi commented that he had spent the first 12 months of his stay sleeping on the floor of the police station, which he was allowed to do because his uncle was a senior police officer. When asked if he could not afford to rent a room he replied that he could but preferred to save the money to buy a piece of land when he returned to his village.

What is acceptable accommodation is dependent not only on price but also on season and dignity. For example, whilst there is a need for more good quality night shelters in all our nine countries it was also noted that, in Delhi, some shelters have closed because they were not being “used optimally” (Times of India, 27 October 2001).

Night shelters are not filled to capacity in the summer months but homeless people say this is because “the night shelter are too dirty for humans to live in” (The Pioneer,

28 September 2001). One homeless man points out, “We prefer sleeping on the pavement. The night shelters are full of bed bugs, the blankets are stinking, and worse, one has to pay for this filthy facility” (Menon, 2001).

In Cochabamba, Bolivia a shelter was built for target migrants for the Alto Plano, providing an education project for their children. It closed because the migrants saw no reason to limit their children’s earning potential by sending them to the project, even though it also provided free accommodation. It may be that the balance could be tipped in favour of using night shelters if the other barriers were removed.

Street girls from the northern regions of Ghana are preoccupied with raising money to prepare for marriage (Korboe, 1996). They are drawn to the streets in southern Ghana, especially Kumasi, Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, with the hope of raising money to acquire cloth, storage bins, cooking utensils and other basic household items that will enhance their eligibility for marriage back at home. It is not that they are without homes, rather, they chose to live and sleep rough in order to supplement their trousseau. This phenomenon, of temporary urban homelessness to supplement the more permanent housing and living, particularly in rural areas, is common in all our nine countries.

It is estimated that there were nearly 1.5 million surplus rural labourers in China in the early 1980s (Wang, 1996). While rationing controlled access to basic supplies and mobility was restricted, people were trapped in rural poverty.

With the opening up of the market economy, and the lifting of some restriction on moving around the country, came an increase in what is known as the ‘floating’

population, those people who have left their original place of residence, where their household registration or *Hukou* is located. The majority of housing in China is still allocated by the employer and associated with the workplace. However, because jobs in state and collective industries and institutions are only available to local residents with local *Hukou*, the ‘floating population’ are not entitled to them, and thus, they are limited in their access to workplace allocated housing. As they cannot afford to rent or buy on the private housing market they are restricted to ‘aggregated villages’, designed especially for them, as shown in figure 1.

Many of these Chinese ‘floating’ people fall into our category of supplementary homelessness as they form few relationships with local people (Ke et al, 2001) and maintain close links to their areas of origin. These links manifest themselves in frequent home visits, possession of farmland at home, remittance of money to the original household and an intention to return to their place of origin. Ironically, although unemployment is a major cause of homelessness in China, the unemployment rate amongst the floating population in urban areas is lower than amongst the local urban population.

Add photo and caption 1

On the streets of major cities, such as Delhi, Dhaka or Cairo live thousands of people, sometimes alone but increasingly in family units. They live without any shelter from the elements or under makeshift shelter of cardboard or plastic sheeting, or in doorways and stairwells. Many have deliberately abandoned or left their homes, either temporarily or permanently, in search of work (Dupont 1998).

Figure 2 shows a roadside camp in Bangalore, which houses construction workers. The elevated road they are working on can be seen in the background. We would also class many of the workers here as ‘supplementation homeless’, in that their work on the site is a way of them supplementing their rural livelihoods. Several were working to earn money for a specific event, such as a sister’s wedding, or to buy extra land or cattle. They maintained a strong connection to their villages and viewed their homeless period as temporary, even though they had lived in the camp, following the work, for several years. They did not regard themselves as being disconnected from their homes or their social networks.

How often do you go home to the village?

When I want to, for festivals and harvest about 2 months between

Do you still have a home there, and family?

Yes,... my house is pukka (well constructed, permanent and made of rendered brick) and my mother and sisters are there

Male construction worker

Add photo and caption 2

In the cases, of Bolivia and Peru the homeless period has become set in the culture of some rural people. Every year entire families migrate from the rural parts of the Alto Plano to cities and large towns to trade and hawk goods on the streets. During the time they are there, they are quite literally shelterless and live out on the streets, generally with no protection at all from the elements. They are target migrants who choose or tolerate homelessness during their sojourns in the city. Whilst most of these people might be considered ‘supplementation homeless’, others, those whose

rural livelihoods were marginal to begin with, do not return to their homes and become part of our second category - survival homeless.

Homelessness as a survival strategy

The origins of this second category of homelessness, 'survival homelessness', are often the same as our first category, supplementation, in that many survival homeless people have migrated in search of employment. The roadside camp shown in figure 1 housed both supplementary homeless and survival homeless people in identical conditions.

Many of the homeless people in the camp had, initially, come to supplement their rural livelihood or improve their land and housing in the rural villages. Like their supplementary homeless neighbours, they generally came alone at first, intending to work and send money home to the village. However, unlike the supplementary homeless people in the same camp, the survival homeless are often unable to send enough money home to improve their village situation. In some cases it is because they have no land, or because their village land is too poor to support them, even with the added earned income from the city. The multi-dimensionality of rural poverty is so complex in developing countries that the smallest change can tip the balance between being able to cope with fluctuating fortunes and being tipped into crisis Rahman (1997).

In some cases, the deterioration of traditional livelihoods is accelerated by global economic and environmental factors. For example, in the bay of Bengal in Bangladesh, environmental changes, have been brought about in part by the building

of the Farakka Barrage on the Ganges River to support the Green Revolution in India (Kabir 1994), and the construction of costal embankments in the 1960s, to allow farmers to grow high yield crops and to offer protection from against cyclones. Coupled with the profitability of the global food market, these changes have led to a rapid increase in prawn farming (Vidal 2003). This new industry is encroaching upon a great deal of the original fertile land and destroying traditional agricultural practices. As a result, farmers are abandoning their land and rural labourers can not find work, and are forced to migrate to cities, such as Dhaka, where the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimated there to be 14,999 homeless people living on the streets in 1997.

During the time that the survival homeless live on the streets their ability to return to the village diminished, as any land or housing they have falls into even poorer condition. They also begin to feel inadequate as their idea of supplementing their rural homes dies away. Slowly they become less and less connected to their village and may return home only once a year for the village festival. Their short term response to economic crisis becomes long term, even permanent

Only for my (village) festival now. There is nothing left, the house is broken down and there is nothing for me there now

Male construction worker Bangalore.

In some instances, the cultural unacceptability of women and children living on the streets means that survival homelessness leads to the splitting up of families. For example, it was noted that in Bangladesh and Egypt, both profoundly Muslim countries, families who could no longer sustain their rural homes because of poverty would often send the women and girls to live with relatives, rather than allow them to

live on the streets in a city. This was certainly not the case in the other countries, including India, where in some cities there has been an increase in the number of families, as opposed to single men, living on the streets in recent years.

On the streets of most Indian cities live groups of people, often several families, who make their living collecting and recycling rags. Figure 3 shows one such group in Bangalore, which has developed over the last 12 years. Many people here are losing regular contact with their village homes and return only for the festival, if that. This urban entrapment repeats itself in other developing countries.

Add photograph and caption 3

Although some of the people in this group remain isolated and many settle to form new social networks. In many cases this acceptance of homelessness in the city places the survival homeless person on a new, upwards, housing trajectory. Living under makeshift shelter for many years, and having relinquished hope of returning to their villages, the group in figure 3, have formed a small community. New alliances and relationships appear to be building between groups of survival homeless people. For example, in India, those with daughters, who would normally arrange marriages with families in neighbouring rural villages at home, have to begin to think of making matches through other groups of settlers, as their standing in their village diminishes.

Their grouping together also gives homeless people a *de facto* address, which in turn gives access to NGO and government assistance. Indeed, the group pictured had recently celebrated being designated as an official 'slum'. This means that they will be given ration cards with which to access essential food stuffs, will be allowed to

vote, may eventually be provided with services, such as water and sanitation, and their small settlement may be upgraded. Whilst for many in the West housing is seen as a right of citizenship, conversely, in this context, citizenship, in the form of ration cards and voting rights, could be seen as the right of the housed.

Whilst the most obvious driving force behind survival homelessness is household economic survival, there is another form of survival which drives people to accept, even choose, situations which would be considered as homelessness in the West, that is unit or household survival. We considered migrant labourers in China to be predominantly in the 'supplementary homeless' category, because they developed few ties and networks in the urban locations and generally returned to their place of origin once the homelessness had served its purpose in improving their financial situation. However, other homeless Chinese families fall into our survival category as they are homeless for entirely different reasons.

Because of the strict 'one family child' policy in china, some couples who wish to have more children choose to leave their household registered place. The women in these "over-procreated" families are all regarded as *Sanwurenyuan*, meaning, without official identification card, because they cannot get the necessary official Temporary Living Permit for their new location without the Family Planning Certificate granted by their native neighbourhood. Their homelessness is not as a means of economic survival but rather it is linked to a desire to survive as the type of family they choose to be.

The survival of the family or household unit as a cause of homelessness is seen in another more common way in most developing countries. Rapidly increasing land prices, and the failure of the housing supply system to keep pace with the natural increase in urban households, forces many young couples to set up home in one of the growing squatter settlements around the periphery of the cities. They do this in order to exist as an independent unit, rather than live in overcrowded conditions with friends or family.

There is a fine and debatable line between street homeless and squatters. This paper does not seek to engage in that debate and acknowledges the many differences in terms of potential, if not actual, security and the development of social networks. However, it must be emphasised that the actual physical living conditions in many squatter settlements are little better, even after considerable a time, than those experienced by some roadside dwellers.

In cities around the world the numbers of people living under makeshift shelters in squatter settlements, predominantly at the periphery of the cities is vast. In one settlement alone, San Juan de Miraflores, in Lima, Peru, there were approximately 370,000 people in 2000. The vast majority of these people live in extremely dilapidated dwellings, certainly no better than those of many of the construction workers on the roadside in Bangalore, India. Moreover, their location, on the periphery of the city, limits employment possibilities. Without legal tenure many settlers are reluctant to invest money or effort in improving the quality of their shelter. Thus, they may remain in very poor circumstances for a considerable time.

Nevertheless, as Payne (2002) points out, many people do risk investing in property

which is vulnerable to demolition by the authorities at any time. Like the rag pickers in the notified slum in Bangalore, India, they perceive themselves to be on an upwards trajectory.

Add photograph and caption 4

Both squatters' and street homeless people's actions are frequently underpinned by the same thing – a desire to survive and a, sometimes, misguided belief that the deprivation will be temporary. It is for that reason that we include some squatters in the survival homeless category.

At first glance the two groups of supplementary and survival homeless seem little different. Their locations and the conditions of their shelter are virtually the same, they do the same work for the same money. Where they differ, however, is in their connectedness to their previous lives and places of origin and their perception of their homeless situation. Whilst 'supplementary' homeless people regularly send money home, 'survival' homeless people seldom do. 'Supplementary' homeless people may return to their villages and their families quite regularly, every few months, and plan to return permanently once the money they have sent has bought more land or helped to build a new house, or paid for a wedding. 'Survival' homeless people seldom return home. The land and housing of 'supplementary' homeless people is improved by their homelessness, whilst any land or housing the 'survival' homeless group did have falls into disrepair. Supplementary homeless people invest little in their shelter, whilst the survival homeless frequently try to improve their dwellings. For this second group, over time what begins as supplementation homelessness but turns into a survival homelessness eventually becomes a new 'home' situation.

Crisis - Street homelessness as crisis management

We turn now to our third category of homelessness, which we have called 'crisis homelessness'. It could be argued that most, if not all, homelessness is a response to some form of crisis. Whilst this paper proposes that there is a degree of choice exercised in some forms of homelessness, it acknowledges that people are, ultimately, driven to make that choice by social and economic problems underpinned by a raft of changes well beyond their control. However, for the purposes of this discussion, crisis refers to personal or household crisis, brought about by family break-up, bereavement, disaster or eviction. This category could also include those people in a state of personal crisis through poor mental health or drug or alcohol abuse. Those who fall into this category have the least chance of exercising choice or control over their situation and are unlikely to experience homelessness as an opportunity or upwards trajectory.

Few developing countries have any form of support for people made homeless due to personal or household crisis. Even those made homeless as a result of natural disaster have little support. For example, in Bangladesh, one of the most disaster prone countries in the world, there is little government support even for those made homeless because of flooding, the country's most common and recurrent disaster. There have been recent attempts to develop some forms of support for the most vulnerable. For example, a form of financial support for vulnerable women was introduced in Bangladesh in September 1999, by the then ruling Awami League towards the end of its term. However, the fund is extremely limited in its scope and value (Ratan, 2001).

In Peru, the government has a programme of finance for the rebuilding of homes lost through recent earthquakes. Nevertheless, there is no support for the many thousands of people who have to leave houses so poor or dilapidated as to be dangerous, or which simply fall down around them. For example, in Lima, many people have had to leave the old city centre courtyard houses known as 'tugurios', many of which have become hugely overcrowded in recent years and are so dilapidated as to be a serious health hazard.

Add photograph and caption 5

Figure 5 shows the situation for one family who live in the remaining part of their upper floor apartment, using plastic sheeting to keep out the rain. Other apartments in the block have collapsed completely, in one case killing the occupants. As in most developing countries, people who find themselves facing personal or household crises, which so often lead to homelessness, such as the death of a spouse, unemployment or family breakdown, are left to fend for themselves.

Just as domestic violence and family breakdown are major causes of women's homelessness in the West (Charles 1994; Hague et al 1995), the same is true in developing countries. A number of authors have highlighted the degree to which family violence exists in many countries of the world, and its implications for women's homelessness (Vadera, 1997; Valentine 1989). Even without the trauma of violence, much of women's homelessness is brought about by their dependence on men. Box 1 tells the story of one woman in Bangladesh, forced to leave her home after being abandoned by her husband.

Box 1 Rita's story

Soon after the birth of her first child Rita's husband developed an extra-marital affair with one of her co-workers. While she was pregnant for a second time, her husband deserted her and had taken with him many valuables that were not bought by his income. At his desertion without a divorce, she fell into a deep crisis. A few weeks later she became homeless because she could not pay the rent.

Her present abode is a cover of polyethylene over a small stretch of footpath alongside many other street dwellers in Katobon area. She now begs as well as collects waste papers from which her daily income is Tk. 15. Even this income is irregular. This amount is insufficient to feed her two children and herself. At least Tk. 100 are required daily for bare subsistence. Her problem is that she could not again take a steady job at garment factory for there is no one to take care of her children while she is away from home.

Many countries have, in theory at least, legislation protecting a woman's rights to inherit property on her husband's death. Nevertheless, cultural traditions can mean that the husband's relatives force the widow, and her children, out of the family home. In India, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Peru, the researchers encountered women who had been made homeless through the death of their husbands. Despite having small children, they were evicted and in some cases reduced to living on the streets.

Eviction is an increasingly common cause of homelessness in developing countries, as urban land prices increase rapidly, pushed upwards by the march of globalisation. For example, Payne (2002) notes that by the mid 1990s land in Mumbai, India was some of the most expensive in the world. As prices rise illegal and informal settlements, in

cities and at their peripheries, which may have been tolerated for years, become targets for developers (Berner 2000; Berner 1997). Those living in such settlements are increasingly at risk of eviction, especially tenants and sub tenant, who are the least well protected (Durrand-Lasserve and Royston 2002; Rahman 2000). During this study, the author encountered people evicted from illegal settlements in Bangalore, India, to make way for a major IT park, occupied largely by non-Indian companies.

Forced evictions are very often violent and distressing (Agbola and Jinadu 1997). Indeed, they are such a form of emotional crisis that Freud (1963) spoke of people 'grieving' for their homes. In some cases this loss is made worse by the fact that the eviction is from a location in which the displaced person may have spent years developing a dwelling and social networks, having arrived there in a state of homelessness to begin with. In the 1990s, the then president of Peru, Fujimori, evicted large numbers of people from squatter settlements around Lima. He effectively turned households which had been part of our 'survival' category, but were on an upwards housing trajectory, in 'crisis' homeless households.

Whilst the main causes of homelessness may vary from country to country, the causes of child homelessness, and the increasing number of children living on the streets alone, are remarkably consistent internationally. The two main causes of children dislocating fully from their families are extreme poverty and abuse. The literature about street children frequently refers to children leaving home in search of a way of feeding themselves or fleeing abuse from alcoholic parents and step parents (Korboe 1996; Lusk 1992;. Bibars 1998). This was also the case for the children in all of the 9 countries of our study. In South America particularly, Copping (1998) notes that

'beatings of women and children by men within the household is considered to be pervasive'. This high incidence of abuse of children in South America is again noted by Lajoie (1998) who reports that between 75% – 80% of the street children one worker in Guatemala deals with have been physically or sexually abused. In this respect the street homelessness of many lone children can also be classed as 'crisis homeless'.

Whether they are children or adults, those in our category of 'crisis homeless' are in the worst position. They have the least control or choice over their situation and may have been pushed into it by the actions or inadequacy of others. For this group homelessness is seen, from the outset, as an additional problem, rather than part of a strategy to improve life or a solution to other problems, such as poverty, overcrowding or the need for independent accommodation.

Some of the characteristics of Hertzberg's (1992) categories can be seen in the differences between our survival and supplementary homeless groups even though, in reality, their time spent as homeless people may be similar. Our Supplementary homeless people are somewhat like Hertzberg's 'resistors', in that they view their homelessness as temporary and fully intend to return to their normal situation. However, they could not be said to be resisting homelessness in the way in which Hertzberg suggests.

Our survival homeless people equated more closely to Hertzberg's 'accommodators', in that they have learned to accept their situation, and were giving up hope of returning. However, we did not find them to have no hopes for the future, as with

Hertzberg's 'accommodators'. Quite the opposite, many have now developed entirely new hopes and plans, based on the reality of their situation. In particular, they often hope for their settlements to be regularised and upgraded, or to be allowed to vote or to receive ration or registration cards, giving them access to education and other services. Their hopes are to improve on their homeless situation and dwellings, where they are, rather than to leave that place or return to an original home.

However, our category of 'crisis homeless' does not equate to Hertzberg's 'teeterers', in that they do not necessarily have significant personal barriers to stability such as mental illness or alcoholism. Rather, the causes of their homelessness are circumstantial and due largely to localised but external influences. Nor are most of them in any way accepting of their situation.

Conclusions

What we have tried to show is that there are degrees of choice in even the most abject manifestations of homelessness. This paper does not mean to imply that the choice is an easy one. Nor does it overlook the importance of global economic factors underpinning the precariousness of existing livelihoods, which ultimately leads to households having to make such choices. It accepts also, that the choices made by homeless people are conditioned by the cultural context within which homelessness is experienced. This is particularly true in the case of women and children's homelessness.

The paper does not suggest that the outcomes of choices made in the developing world can be equated to those in the West. However, it does suggest that the reasons

behind that choice are as important in determining the type and level of assistance to be offered as the conditions of homelessness itself.

For example, in the case of the supplementary homeless people, housing may not be their prime concern, for they are not intending to remain in their current situation.

What they most need is a way of improving their rural livelihoods, allowing them to return home. It may be that flexible credit, to support their household's economic plans, or to deal with a specific problem, could prevent them needing to earn extra money in the city. If they do need accommodation for their time in the city, it is most likely to be for single people and at virtually no cost. They may not need much in the way of support or advocacy services, as their homelessness is not related to personal problems or on-going crisis.

Many people within the second category of 'survival homeless' are homeless as a means of absolute economic survival. Their rural livelihoods are too poor to be salvaged. They need to establish new livelihoods, either in the city or in their rural villages. Their greatest need is for improved access to land, or economic development, which would allow them to make a living in their rural villages.

Alternatively they may need to be supported, with training, and possibly credit, to establish new livelihoods in the city. Once in the city, they may need family accommodation with a range of services such as health care, childcare, training and education.

For others of this group it is a complete failure of the housing supply system to provide adequate housing which drives them to homelessness. As new households

develop, many have no option but to establish poor dwellings in squatter settlements as a means of their household unit surviving independently. These homeless people need security of tenure, housing finance and credit to help them turn their poor and temporary dwellings into better, more permanent houses. Durrand-Lasserve and Royston (2002) and Payne (2002) discuss a range of innovative mechanisms for developing secure tenure for the urban poor. Such approaches could radically reduce the time some people must spend in unsatisfactory conditions before having enough confidence in their security to invest time and money in improving their dwellings.

The crisis homeless people frequently need a range of support to overcome difficulties such as lack of financial independence, physical and mental health issues, lack of education, low confidence and empowerment. They generally need prolonged provision of housing before they are able to support themselves. For this group, a holistic approach to assistance along the lines of that given to some homeless people in the UK may be needed. They may need immediate, temporary or long-term housing, especially if children are involved, counselling, basic skills training and ongoing support to rebuild their lives.

Legislation exists in many developing countries to protect the rights of women and children to shelter. However, ultimately a major cultural change is needed if many are not to be forced into this category of crisis homelessness by abuse, desertion and widowhood.

What is being suggested here is that 'accommodation oriented' definitions of homelessness can be misleading because the level of accommodation deprivation

which a person or household considers tolerable depends on how they perceive their homelessness and their ability to limit its duration. The same is true of definitions oriented on time, as the time a person is prepared to live in a specific situation again depends on their reasons and the degree of choice they feel they can exercise. Perhaps one of the most useful contributions to defining homelessness comes from the last few words of this quotation from Springer (2000)

*“there are as many classifications and definitions of homelessness as there are different points of views. A definition of homelessness might refer to a special housing situation, to a special minimum standard, to the duration and the frequency of a stay without shelter, to lifestyle questions, to the use of the welfare system and to the being part of a certain group of the population, to the risk of becoming houseless and to **the possibility to move or not if desired.**” (author’s emphasis)*

Whatever the eventual definition, our efforts to develop interventions might best be focused on those people with the least ability to move on from it, if desired. This would mean acknowledging that some people can cope perfectly well with, and even choose, what others would see as the most abject form of destitution.

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Photograph 1



Caption 1

An aggregated village in Shanghai for the homeless 'floating population'

Photograph 2



Caption 2

Construction workers housing, Bangalore, India

Photograph 3



Caption 3

Rag pickers housing in Bangalore, India

Photograph 4



Caption 4

Hundreds of thousands live in Dwellings constructed from straw matting in Villa El Salvador, Peru

Photograph 5



Caption 5

Dilapidated Tugurio in Lima, Peru