ANALYSING PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC CRISES AND HOMELESSNESS -- THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WELFARE INTERVENTIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

There is a singular and most pressing need to examine factors that contribute towards both homelessness and economic instability, a reflexive relationship that results in consequences directly affecting the other entity, alongside the creation of negative externalities for other sectors of society and economy. There is a need for a study of the same alongside a critical view of the failed government schemes and protocols to remedy this situation. This failure of state-response, only when understand with respect to its many flaws which this paper only touches upon in a basic manner, can be truly remedied in a way such that the applied solutions are lasting, pervasive across different regions and demographics, and effective. This paper thus assesses the correlations and relationships between economic crisis situations and the incidence of homelessness, using an economic, social and political lens towards viewing the case of homeless in India -- chosen due to its large-scale occurrence, incidence and more. The paper will also view the potential causes for such homelessness, including the more obvious causes such as expensive housing, lack of government response, and unemployment, but also other more hidden and indirect causes such as the complexities of seasonal employment and the lack of statistics on matriculation from government high schools.

Keywords: Economic Crisis, Homelessness, Housing Policies, Social Welfare

INTRODUCTION

The number of people living in slums, unplanned and disorganized temporary *kaccha* settlements in India has more than doubled over the last decade, currently exceeding the population of Britain with respect to size. More than 78 million people live in slums, a vast number that is, by itself, possibly a conservative estimate. Another equally conservative estimate is the Census 2011 which stated there to be about 1.8 million homeless people, who don't even possess the basic shelter that those in slums achieve. It is further estimated that India has the largest number

of homeless street children in the world, far beyond those reported by official censuses. The Census of India 2011 defines 'houseless household' as, 'households who do not live in buildings or census houses but live in the open on roadside, pavements, in hume pipes, under flyovers and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms, etc.' It is also estimated by think-tanks and NGOs in India that at least (if not more than) 1 percent of the population of India is homeless. Based on this, it can be extrapolated that the population of the urban homeless is at least 3 million. In the capital city of Delhi alone, at any given point, civil society estimates place the number of homeless at around 150,000 - 200,000, of which at least 10,000 are women (Ghosh, 2019).

Primarily, the number of homeless people is not a matter purely of the economy or of the wealth of governments, as seen in the case of Ireland, but rather a matter of effective social welfare interventions, particularly since homelessness correlates with the heightened state of vulnerability of economies following the onset of crisis situations (Zufferey & Yu, 2017). There is a singular and most pressing need to examine factors that contribute towards both homelessness and economic instability, a reflexive relationship that results in consequences directly affecting the other entity, alongside the creation of negative externalities for other sectors of society and economy.

There is a need for a study of the same alongside a critical view of the failed government schemes and protocols to remedy this situation (Zufferey & Yu, 2017). This failure of state-response, only when understand with respect to its many flaws which this paper only touches upon in a basic manner, can be truly remedied in a way such that the applied solutions are lasting, pervasive across different regions and demographics, and effective (Ghosh, 2019). This paper thus assesses the correlations and relationships between economic crisis situations and the incidence of homelessness, using an economic, social and political lens towards viewing the case of homeless in India -- chosen due to its large-scale occurrence, incidence and more. The paper will also view the potential causes for such homelessness, including the more obvious causes such as expensive housing, lack of government response, and unemployment, but also other more hidden and indirect causes such as the complexities of seasonal employment and the lack of statistics on matriculation from government high schools.

BACKGROUND

The first thing that is to be noted while studying the occurrence of homelessness in India is the lack of statistical reliability (Zufferey & Yu, 2017). Multiple organizations, including government organizations, have given differing claims of the numbers even in urban regions such as the capital city, New Delhi (Zufferey & Yu, 2017). For instance, while the Census of

2011 counted 46,724 homeless individuals in Delhi, the Indo-Global Social Service Society counted them to be 88,410, and another organization called the Delhi Development Authority counted them to be 150,000 (Zufferey & Yu, 2017). Counting more accurate claims, one finds that there are more than 3 million women and men who are technically homeless in New Delhi -- the equivalent of around30 electoral districts in Canada, and also meaning that a family of four members at any point has an average of five homeless generations in India (Kaur & Pathak, 2016).

Further, there is a need to understand the potential causes behind the same, and the established causes. There is a lack of housing -- of nearly 18..8 million in the country -- despite the increase of houses from 52.06 million to 78.48 million as reported by the 2001 census (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Kaur & Pathak, 2016). While considering other causes, such as the wealth of a nation, one can see that India ranks as the 124th wealthiest country in the world in 2003, and in India, there is a rampant incidence of poverty, with over 90 million earning under $1 USD per day, below the global poverty threshold (Ghosh, 2019). There is thus seen an inability of the Government of India to tackle urban homelessness, something which may be influenced by both domestic circumstances as well as international relations and shifting priorities of changing ruling parties (Gandhi, 2015; Ghosh, 2019). The trouble statistic is that the number of people living in slums, as defined earlier, in India, has more than doubled in the past decade, with the phenomenon of slums going so far as to attract tourism on a regular basis, inspired by films such as Slumdog Millionaire.

Other factors such as forced displacement, due to conflict, climate change, man-made environmental damage, and infrastructural development have also resulted in homelessness, due to the non-uniform implementation of rules to provide displaced people with ample compensation to seek new neighborhoods, homes, and livelihoods (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Kaur & Pathak, 2016). However, the entire implications of such displacements are highly misunderstood (Gandhi, 2015; Ghosh, 2019). There is also furthermore a high incidence of mental illness as a result of this homelessness, with India having a large number of homeless street children, with 11 million being in urban regions, to little to know robust government initiatives to provide them housing, education, and other social services that are human rights. While considering the 2008 economic crisis, one saw an increase in the rates of homelessness, specifically in developing countries (Gandhi, 2015).

DISCUSSION

The Indian situation of homelessness has different causes as previously touched upon - social, economic, due to migration, mental health, and more, where in most cases most of these factors

are reflexive, being both causes and consequences (Ghosh, 2019). An example of a local state intervention being required due to failure at the central level is the state of Kerala, where in 2019, the state government offered free flates to homeless people, a model hailed by activists as something that must be followed nationwide, by other states as well, compensating for the nationwide "Housing for All" plan, which is currently severely falling short (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Kaur & Pathak, 2016). In April, the first 145 families moved into their newly constructed flats in a 270-unit complex in Adimali town in southern India this month, a portion of the 400,000 homes that the state is building after a survey of the homeless population, overseen by the LIFE Mission, a government agency overseeing the project (Ghosh, 2019).

This is a scheme that is all the more important to be considered seeing that of the 11 million at risk people in India, who are vulnerable to being uprooted from their homes and land as authorities build highways and airports and cordon off forests, according to advocacy group Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN, 2019). It is important that the government addresses not merely the symptoms of homelessness, i.e. the homeless people themselves by building them shelters, which is the basic level of intervention required, but also to ensure that all homeless people are eventually able to move into adequate and affordable permanent housing (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Kaur & Pathak, 2016). As per the Housing the Land Rights Network, "On a 'continuum of housing rights,' shelters are the first step, with the end goal being the provision of affordable and adequate housing for all. Homeless shelters provided by the government in all cities across India, however, are insufficient and inadequate; and in many cities such as Patna, are completely uninhabitable (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Kaur & Pathak, 2016). The majority of shelters are ill-equipped, poorly located, and characterized by the lack of basic services such as drinking water, toilets and bathing facilities, electricity, clean bedding, storage space, and facilities for cooking / food distribution." (HRLN, 2019; Ghosh, 2019; Tiwari & Rao, 2016)

Following the 2008 crisis, the National Urban Livelihoods Mission of the Government of India developed a 'Scheme of Shelters for Urban Homeless' (NULM-SUH), which proposes 50 square feet per person for homeless people as shelters; however, in cities, most homeless are only given 15 square feet, often with families (Tiwari & Rao, 2016; Ghosh, 2019). The lack of adequate space also results in overcrowding and congestion, leading to adverse health impacts on shelter residents. There is also an acute shortage of shelters for women, families, women with children, working men, and shelters for people with special needs such as older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living with mental illness or HIV/AIDS, and chemically dependent persons. While positive initiatives are being proposed at the national level and through progressive orders from the High Court of Delhi and the Supreme Court of India, the approach of the central and most state governments towards homelessness continues to be piece-meal and does not adopt the human rights framework (Tiwari & Rao, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This paper, thus, has viewed multiple attributes and perspectives for considering the situation of homelessness in India from an economic perspective, further analyzing the need for interventions at the state level to make up for insufficient central response to homelessness as well as the incomplete and improper implementation of schemes to remedy the same (Tiwari & Rao, 2016). There is further a need to go beyond the basic level of attacking the most visible symptoms of homelessness, to consider the causes and structural undertones behind the manifestation of homelessness, examining education schemes, employment, schemes for migration and displacement, methods of ensuring livelihood stability, safeguarding the mental health of homeless people, looking at situations that can otherwise elicit or result in homelessness and more (Tiwari & Rao, 2016).

Through this research, we have also observed the correlation between economic crisis situations, specifically the 2008 crisis, and the larger incidence of homelessness. This is followed by a stress on more transparent census methods and research studies, as well as more readily available, updated, and accurate data resources that reflect not only the most stringent official definitions of homelessness, but go further to consider elements such as seasonal homelessness, people at risk of being homeless, and first response for people who have been. There is a need for interventions that not only tackle short-term elements, but also in a sustainable long-term manner, through the creation of strong institutions and systems that are equipped to dealing with new challenges as they arise, with changing social, political, economic, and technological scenarios, with new solutions.

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