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FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AS DETERMINANTS OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN LAGOS METROPOLIS

By

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Abstract

Homelessness among families is tremendously destructive and exacts enormous human, social and economic costs. This study examined the family structure and social support as determinants of family homelessness in Lagos metropolis. The study adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type. 154 participants took part in this study made up of 89 males and 65 females. Their ages ranged from 31-58years with mean of 42years and standard deviation 2.14. One survey instrument was adopted in this study – Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) and Family Structure Scale (FSS) was developed. The hypotheses stated for this study were tested using simple regression analysis. The findings revealed that family structure does not predict family homelessness with $\beta=.034$ and $t=.438$. The second null hypothesis as presented in tables 4 and 5 revealed that social support significantly predict family homelessness with $\beta=.280$ and $t=.3.6$. It was concluded that among family members, social support can help buffer the negative impacts of poverty and economic hardship which are known to have resulted to family homelessness. It was recommended among others that). In Africa there used to be a strong tie among the family members but exposure to the Western world and imbibing their culture has affected the structure and bond that bind the family together.

Keywords: *Family Homelessness, Social Support, Family Structure*

Introduction

Homelessness is a situation referring to a social class of people without a regular house or dwelling place because they cannot afford or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing, or lack, "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (Gardiner and Cairns, 2002). An individual is homeless when he or she has nowhere to live to meet his basic needs in terms of provision for self in the real sense of living. Having a home is not just a simple question of having shelter; it's about the attributes that make up a true home and giving the individual a sense of satisfaction.

Since the homeless, including the families, are poor, it is frequently assumed that lack of material resources is a primary explanation for this social problem; lack of material resources is often linked to limited human capital and the decline in wage returns among less skilled workers. For example, the influx of families to Lagos in search of greener pasture from neighbouring cities and rural areas overstretch the limited housing facilities available. This has left families with no other option than to hang around friends and survive under harsh condition of homelessness. These characteristics alone, however, do not help explain why most poor families do not become homeless and why other poor families that experience homelessness are able to remove themselves from this situation. This frequently leads to the assumption that perhaps it is the combination of poverty within the context of a sudden crisis brought on by the pattern of family structure or social support available that pushes families into shelters or life on the streets.

The homelessness experience of most families is somewhat different from that of single men and women. Because children are involved, families that become homeless rarely live on the streets. If they have a housing crisis, they may first double up in the homes of friends or families. If this strategy fails, mothers will sometimes foster their children to family or friends. The mothers may live on the street or enter a shelter, alone; once they enter this homeless system, most families' stay will be relatively brief. The majority (60%) of families that become homeless finds housing within six months and does not become homeless again (Wood, 1999).

Family Homelessness

Every night, thousands of families are homeless in Nigeria. These families may not be seen standing on street corners, they are hidden— living in their cars, in religious campgrounds, in shelters, or, if they are lucky, in dilapidated motels or short term apartments. The fact that they are unseen should not make us believe that the problem of homelessness among families is somehow less critical or severe than it is for the single adults or children whom we do see on the streets.

Homelessness among families is tremendously destructive and exacts enormous human, social and economic costs. Parents and children alike suffer negative mental and physical health consequences. Families can be torn asunder, with fathers living on the streets, mothers in shelters, and children in foster care or with relatives. And, accompanied as it is by increased utilization of public resources such as shelter, hospitals, child welfare services, and mental health treatment, allowing families to become homeless exacts a substantial public cost.

Family homelessness is caused by the combined effects of lack of affordable housing, extreme poverty, decreasing government supports, changing demographics of the family, the challenges of raising children alone, domestic violence, and fractured social supports. As the gap between housing costs and

income continues to widen and housing foreclosures increase, more and more families are at risk of homelessness. For extremely poor families and those with vulnerabilities or little safety net, even a seemingly minor event can trigger a catastrophic outcome and catapult a family onto the streets.

Family homelessness is a complicated, systemic, and widespread problem. But it is a problem with solutions. We must understand the nature of family homelessness, what families' experience of homelessness is, and what interventions have been successful in ending their homelessness.

Family Homelessness in Lagos Metropolis

Lagos functioned as the political and administrative capital of Nigeria from the time the Northern and Southern provinces of Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914, through political independence in 1960, until the federal capital moved to Abuja in 1990. During this period it acquired leadership among Nigerian cities in terms of economic and social activities, particularly in manufacturing, trade, other services, and, most recently, finance, banking, insurance and telecommunication. Despite the downturn in economic activities at the national level, metropolitan Lagos is still the premier manufacturing city not only in Nigeria, but also at a regional scale, for the west coast of Africa. It is the most important seaport, both in Nigeria and on the west coast of Africa, with substantial import and export trade both nationally and internationally. Metropolitan Lagos is the most important node for telecommunications and the most accessible city in Nigeria by land, air, and sea. It has thus attracted to itself the largest concentration of multinational corporations in Nigeria. It has become not only a West African regional centre but also a focus of international interaction at continental and to some extent at the world scale.

One of the great challenges facing metropolitan Lagos is housing (Abiodun, 1974, 1976). The considerable gap between supply and demand has found expression in the astronomical cost of rented dwellings. Overcrowding, slums, and substandard housing are expressions of this problem. The period 1979-1983 under the Jakande administration witnessed a massive housing development programme. Nevertheless, the problem persists - mostly because of rapid population growth, but also because of the introduction of the SAP in 1986 and the threefold increase in the price of petroleum fuel in 1994. The federal government housing programme for Lagos, which was launched in 1994 under the National Housing Scheme, has stalled, amongst other reasons because of the spiralling cost of building materials.

Today only the very rich construct new housing units. In response to the slower rate of new house construction, tenancy has increased and rents have increased more than fivefold since the introduction of the SAP. High densities, overcrowding, and multi-family occupancy of dwellings have long characterised Lagos and have intensified in recent years (Ayeni, 1981; Peil, 1991). Some former low-density areas near the centre of the city have been penetrated by banking, commercial, and office uses, leading to former state government order

that houses in parts of Ikoyi and Victoria Island should revert to their originally approved use. Many low-income areas were villages or peripheral settlements that have been engulfed as the city has grown. Some settlements, such as Maroko on Victoria Island, have been demolished, typically without any arrangement for resettlement, with the result that the displaced residents merely move on to already overcrowded neighbourhoods elsewhere and many of families homeless.

Today, land for development is obtained primarily through the private sector. Large landowners may in some cases rent land for the construction of temporary housing while they wait for its value to increase (Aina, 1990).

People, despite this housing problem come to Lagos Nigeria in search of jobs and better life. The last census count showed Lagos has a population of about 15 million people. And thousands more are still trooping in yearly. In fact, Lagos population growth rate is currently put at about 200,000 people per annum. Lagos Nigeria is certainly a city of dreams. Unfortunately, millions of people living in Lagos have failed to fulfill their dreams. Those who came in search of jobs soon found out that the unemployed are far greater than the jobs available.

Some who came for the purposes of business have had their dreams fulfilled. Understandably, not all who came to Lagos for business have succeeded in their business venture. That is understandable because not everyone knows and appreciates the mechanics of doing business. And for those who understand the theory of business, not all will succeed in business because theory is often different from practice. Well, the consequence is that thousands of people including families who came to Lagos in search of white collar jobs have ended up as street urchins, touts, or homeless people.

Family Structure and Social Support of Homeless Family

One way to look at families is based on structural features. Families contain varying numbers of persons who are related in particular ways, including such persons as mothers, fathers, and children. This view may be extended to include grandparents, in-laws, step-relations, and perhaps even former relatives as the case is in Nigeria. Structural definitions of family focus on the composition of its membership. They may indicate that family members are related by blood, marriage, or some other legal bond such as adoption. Sharing a household may be another structural feature. With a structural definition, the theorist is able to determine which kinds of social groups do not qualify as families and which individuals are in a particular family.

Structural definitions of family also attend to the types of relationships that create social bonds between members. Important bonds are created by communication, power, and affection, as well as the daily work and leisure performed by family members. Scientists can observe how patterns of social interaction among the members are structured, and they can specify the

various rules or principles that families use to organize their activities. Families may be structured by such characteristics as gender, age, and generation, as well as their connections to the outside world. These structures also are useful for distinguishing families from other kinds of social groups and organizations.

Changes in family structure, such as the increase in single-parent families and the decline of marriage rates, are thought to have made families more vulnerable to changing economic conditions which can lead to homelessness. That is, more families are becoming dependent on a single-wage earner, making them increasingly susceptible to severe economic hardship as a result of a job loss due to economic conditions, poor health, or some other reason. As families become more dependent on single wage earners, the role of informal support from friends and family during a crisis, as well as the potential protective effects of low-income housing subsidies, welfare, and other social welfare benefits if available, is frequently believed to mediate episodes of homelessness among families.

In particular, family homeless is found to be closely associated with female-headed households, unwed childrearing, and the economic hardships of single-mothers (Weitzman, 1989; Bassuk et al 1996). There is some debate about whether homeless families lack networks of social support, i.e. numbers of relatives and friends one can turn to for help. Some find that homeless families have few to turn to (Letiecq, Anderson and Koblinsky 1998), while others argue that these families actually have greater contact with their network, but have exhausted its resources before becoming homeless (Shinn, Knickman and Weitzman 1991 and Toohey, Shinn, and Weitzman 2004).

Finally, low family income and low labour force participation have been found to be determinants of unstable housing situations that lead to homelessness (Wood et al 1990 and Shinn et al 1998). Community (or structural) explanations include those characteristics beyond the individual, such as lack of affordable housing, slack labour markets, welfare reform, the availability of public housing and homeless shelters, among others. In particular, studies that examines aggregate levels of homelessness for metropolitan areas such as Lagos show that lack of housing affordability is associated with higher rates of homelessness (Quigley, Raphael and Smolensky 2001 and Lee, Price-Spratlen, and Kanan 2003). Consistent with this, public housing and other low income housing subsidies have been shown to protect families from experiencing multiple homelessness spells (Bassuk et al 1997 and Wong, Culhane, and Kuhn 1997) – even though these subsidies are not well-targeted to the homeless (Early 2004 and Early 1998). Low income programmes, in general, such as welfare and other cash benefit programmes have also been found to have a protective effect against family homelessness (Salomon, Bassuk, and Brooks 1996). The study sought to explain the determinants of family homelessness in terms of family structure and social support.

Hypotheses

In this study, two null hypotheses were tested for significance level at 0.05 margin of error. They are:

1. There is no significant contribution of family structure in predicting family homelessness.
2. There is no significant contribution of social support in predicting family homelessness.

Method

Design

This study adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type. This approach was employed because the researcher had no control nor intended to manipulate any of the independent variables. The study had two independent variables; "family structure" and "social support" while the dependent variable was "family homelessness".

Sampling Procedure

154 participants took part in this study from homeless families located in religious campgrounds, under the bridges and shelters in seven locations in Lagos metropolis. These participants were made of 89 males and 65 females. Their ages ranged from 31-58years, mean of 42years and standard deviation 2.14.

Instruments

One survey instrument was adopted in this study – Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) and Family Structure Scale (FSS) was developed by the researcher to measure the structure of the participants' family and demographic variables.

Method of Data Analysis

The hypotheses stated for this study were tested using simple regression analysis.

The demographic data of the participants as presented in table 1 revealed that 89(57.8%) males and 65(42.2%) females took part in the study. The job status of the heads of the family as presented revealed that 144(93.3%) were unemployed, 8(5.2%) were self employed and 2(1.3%) public/private employees. The marital status distribution revealed that 48(31.2%) were married while 106 (68.8%) were single parents. The age distribution revealed 103 (66.9%) were between 31-40years, 15(9.7%) were between 41-50years and 36 (23.4%) were 51 years and above.

Analysis

Table 1: Demographical Data

Variations		Freq	Percent
Gender	Male	89	57.8
	Female	65	42.2
Job status	Unemployed	144	93.5
	Self Employed	8	5.2
	Public/Private Employees	2	1.3
Marital Status	Married	48	31.2
	Single Parents	106	68.8
Age	31-40years	103	66.9
	41-50years	15	9.7
	51years and above	36	23.4

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant contribution of family structure in predicting family homelessness

Table 2: Regression analysis on the contribution of family structure in predict family homelessness

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Unstandardised Coefficients		t	sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.814	.212			8.543	.000
Family Structure	.039	.088	.035		.438	.662

a Dependent Variable: homelessness

The first null hypothesis as presented in tables 2 and 3 revealed that family structure does not predict family homelessness with $\beta=.034$ and $t=.438$.

Table 3: Analysis of variance

variations	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Regression	.130	1	.130	.192	.662(a)
Residual	103.409	152	.680		
Total	103.539	153			

a Predictors: (Constant), family structure

b Dependent Variable: homelessness

In table 3 the finding revealed that there is no significant contribution of family structure in predicting family homelessness at $F_{(1,152)}=.192$, 0.05 significant level. This implies that the first null hypothesis is retained.

The second finding of this study revealed a significant contribution of social support in predicting family homelessness. Among family members, social support can help buffer the negative impacts of poverty and economic hardship which are known to have resulted to family homelessness (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, Buriel, 1990). Caplan (1974) states that the most important factors affecting the outcome of a crisis are the quality of emotional support and the actual assistance provided by individuals in one's social network. In view of that, people with fewer social relationships are at a higher risk for diverse negative outcomes including family homelessness (Berkman 1988, Cohen, 1988, House, Landis, Umberson, 1988). There exist two distinct categories of social support: functional support and structural support. Functional support refers to the quality of social support, considered as either actual or perceived assistance from others, as well as the availability of support functions such as affection (Wasserman, Stewart, Delucchi, 2001). Structural support is a quantitative measure, referring to the number of individuals within a network, as well as the number of social ties or links within that network. As such, structural support can be categorised in a variety of ways, such as employment networks and close networks, these different types of networks can be further characterized by their size and density (Letvak, 2000, Allen, 2000). In Africa there used to be a strong tie among the family members but exposure to the Western world and imbibing their culture has affected the structure and bond that bind the family together.

Implication for Homeless and Addiction Counselling

Often, incoherence and insecure states of mind may cause long-term behavioural problems. Counselling the homeless should include establishment of a safe, understanding 'space', in which the clients can begin to explore their emotions and give expression to their feelings. The counsellor needs to identify submerged problems, which can undermine and continue to damage the client. The client should be stabilised at moments of crisis, preventing spirals of decline and the repetition of circular, self-damaging patterns of behaviour.

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