

Understanding Homelessness in Malaysia: Effects and Solutions

Edwin Michael^{*}, Teh Boon Teck²

^{1&2}Department of Journalism, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman Kampar Campus, Malaysia

^{*}(edwinm@utar.edu.my) Email of the corresponding author

(Received: 25 March 2023, Accepted: 10 March 2023)

(2nd International Conference on Engineering, Natural and Social Sciences ICENSOS 2023, April 4 - 6, 2023)

ATIF/REFERENCE: Michael, E., & Teck, T. B. (2023). Understanding Homelessness in Malaysia: Effects and Solutions. *International Journal of Advanced Natural Sciences and Engineering Researches*, 7(3), 178-187.

Abstract – Homelessness is an emotive term that conjures up images of people sleeping on the side of the road, collecting food, and being dangerous and dirty. Aside from these negative stereotypes, there is no clear understanding of the homeless and their situation. We've all seen homeless people, whether they're begging for alms in the market, sleeping on the sidewalk, or knocking on car windows for money. Their presence may elicit mixed emotions, but once they are out of sight, we forget about them. The presence of homeless people in Malaysia, or at least in Kuala Lumpur, has become a habit in the city's poor areas. If they do not make any noise, we are unaware of their presence. The group has recently attracted the attention of authorities and non-governmental organizations. There is no recent data on the homeless population in Malaysia, but it can be assumed that this number is growing due to the ongoing pandemic. There has clearly been a lack of research on this homeless population. Due to a lack of data, the Department of Statistics Malaysia stated that it was difficult to present the number of homeless people through the census in 2010. This paper examines the impact of homeless people on the country and the government's response to it.

Keywords – Homelessness, Malaysia, Effects, Solutions

I. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, homelessness is treated under vagrancy law, which has been in effect since the 19th century (Rusenko, 2017). The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and *Desa Bina Diri* (DBD) classify the homeless as needy and impoverished where according to the Destitute Persons Act 1977, any individual who is found begging at any public places where it could cause discomfort and inconvenience to the surrounding community or otherwise found creating disturbance and trouble (Azahar, 2021). Since the 1880s, in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur or KL has been a vital public and private center as well as a crucible for economic and urban development. Here, the extent of homelessness – and government attention to it – has changed with economic and

developmental upheavals on a regular basis (Rusenko, 2017). According to Rusenko (2014), homelessness is a problem in society that reflects the extent of human insecurity, whether that insecurity is caused by flaws in the economy, family structure, labor supply, shifting climate and environment, or institutional structures.

In Malaysia, during the Movement Control Order or MCO 1.0 in April 2020, roughly 800 homeless persons in Kuala Lumpur were placed in temporary shelters to avoid the spread of Covid-19 infections (Azahar, 2021). Seeing that the Covid-19 pandemic is still going on, it is not a shock that the rate of homelessness has spiked again. Homelessness is not an issue seen solely in Malaysia but around the world. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, there are at least 100 million homeless persons

worldwide (Aizuddin et al, 2019). In a survey done by Yale University in 2017, it found that among the developed countries, the country that recorded the highest percentage of homelessness is in New Zealand followed by Czech Republic and Republic. According to 2020 statistical data, it stated that Japan is the only country in the world with 0% homeless population rate. The difference between countries may be explained by the culture and stigma surrounding homelessness (Japan views homelessness as being an inconvenience to others and even those who are homeless are embarrassed of themselves, etc) and the initiatives used by their government to control this issue. Causes of Homelessness in Malaysia

Unemployment, poor and low earnings, and old age without family members are the top three causes of homelessness in Malaysia, according to the survey conducted by the Department of Social Welfare (JKM) in 2010 (Azahar, 2021). Additionally, the economic stress of the increasing price on housing, especially in urbanized working areas also places a factor in contributing towards homelessness, as people are unable to afford the high rental and monthly payment. The homeless people having very low to no income at all are needing help from other sources (Aizuddin et al, 2019). It also stated that most unemployment is due to the lack of education background of the individuals as based on a study, the majority of homeless people in KL only managed to study until Form five.

As a consequence of low income and unemployment, the extent of low earnings leads to low saving in the EPF. According to the news reported by Nuradzimmah Daim dated 2021 in New Straits Times, it stated that based on the minimum target of EPF savings an individual in Malaysia needs to reach by the age of 55, only 3% of Malaysians can afford to retire. This is because there is a drop in EPF savings especially among the low-income group (bottom 40) where there is a 60% drop in the median savings whereas among the medium 40 category, there is a 17% drop in the median savings. Therefore, the homeless who are in old age are not able to use their EPF savings due to the low income job when they were still working.

Impacts of Homelessness on the Individual

Homeless individuals are at higher risk of contracting physical illness where 85% of homeless

people reported that they have chronic health problems such as diabetes, asthma and bronchitis. In a study on homeless people, it was found that 1 out of 5 of the respondents has infectious disease such as HIV (Aizuddin et al, 2019). The high number in percentage is alarming as it does not only affect the homeless people but it could be spread to others as well when it is not taken care of with other infectious diseases such as the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the Malaysian government offering low-cost health facilities, the homeless underutilized the services provided.

In addition, these individuals are also at a higher risk of developing mental illnesses, especially those who are suffering from substance use disorder. According to Aizuddin et al (2019), there are studies that show youth who are involved in drug cases are homeless. Studies have found that addiction and schizophrenia are prevalent in homelessness (Ahmad Yani et al, 2016). This issue may stem from the fact that the homeless are not getting appropriate support for their problem and sickness that originates from family as well as societal problems (Mohd Rom et al, 2022).

Internationally and domestically, there are several common stigmas surrounding homeless people, and one of the most common ones is 'why don't they just get a job?'. Despite unemployment being a major cause of homelessness, many people who are homeless do have jobs, but these wages are insufficient for them to sustain a home, as they need it for other necessities such as food and transport. Additionally, most homeless individuals suffer from personal problems, ranging from domestic violence to mental health issues, and this may hinder or prevent them from maintaining their work performance, and lead to them either quitting or being fired. Some do not have sufficient educational background to get a proper job, and some are even underage and would be working illegally. It is important to understand that there is a story behind every homeless individual, and it would be rash to just assume that they are 'lazy' and jobless.

According to Rusenko & Loh (2017), people who beg are criminalized by others as they are perceived as being connected with crime syndicates and seen as corrupt, thus framing begging as an offense that can attack the security of cities and people. They are perceived as aggressive and a threat to the society they are in by the community.

However, the reality is that most homeless people have the same chances of being a criminal just like any other person. They are mostly trying to work on themselves and improve their personal issues, yet are criminalized by others as they do not look 'normal or approachable'.

Another major reason towards the criminalization of homeless people is that they are perceived as dirty and unclean. Humans naturally migrate away and show signs of dislike towards stuff that are not 'pure and clean', which is linked to many other social issues such as colorism, racism and the exploitation of purity in women. Nonetheless, those who are homeless do keep themselves sanitary through accessing public toilets and showers. And even those who do seem disheveled or unclean are mostly suffering with mental illnesses such as depression or personality disorders, which leads them to lack the motivation to take care of themselves, including taking showers and brushing their teeth. Due to the stigma in Malaysia, the homelessness has always been viewed with negative perception. The lack of importance placed on the homelessness issue in Malaysia may result in more stigmatization and discrimination by the society towards the homeless which could then lead to ignorance to the issue of homelessness. To some extent, it may affect the country's development as there will be more poverty which then leads to the failure in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of No Poverty and Sustainable Cities and Communities. Therefore, both the government and NGOs especially the government needs to provide full support and aid to the NGOs in order to curb the issue of homelessness. Current and proposed initiatives will be discussed in the later chapters of this study.

II. EFFECTS OF HOMELESS IN MALAYSIA

Impacts Towards Society

The homeless are a part of society in a way that how the homeless are treated and handled can reflect on a country's economy and society. To address the impact of the homelessness, we need to address how homeless people are treated and handled. The way homeless is tackled in some societies will determine the severity and lasting impact on them. Many governmental initiatives and NGOs are established

with the purpose of tackling homelessness. However, we need to see why it is important to tackle homeless as its impact on society as a whole can affect the economical and societal well-being of a country. The impact of homelessness can be seen with the economy, public safety, public health, children and mortality rate.

Impacts on the Economy

The economical cost of homelessness is substantially high. Providing resources to take care of homelessness costs taxpayers millions and the stigmatization of the homeless drives people away from certain places, thus driving investors and developers away. In terms of cost, homelessness in a country can rake up a substantial amount of resources to manage. A report in Canada found that in 2013 homelessness cost the economy \$7.05 billion annually (Gaetz et al., 2013). Of which includes community support and establishing emergency centers. However, it found that the high cost is additional because of the homeless involvement with healthcare, emergency service and the criminal justice system. Garrett D. G. (2012) argued that by overcoming homelessness, it will save taxpayer money in the account of healthcare and emergency services. Homelessness may also impact the neighbourhood and town that they are under. An article based in the United States of America stated that business owners stated that customers deter from coming to an area as there is a presence of homelessness, as reports state that it is a matter of mess such as trash and shopping cart lying around (Gallivan, 2018). Another article based in the United States of America states that homelessness affects the tourism in San Francisco as it leaves a negative impression on the place (Baran, 2018). Overall, the homelessness problems will inevitably cost the government a large sum of money while also making it hard for local businesses to thrive in their neighbourhood, even if those that are homeless did not intend this to happen, but the ramification of their presence is a liability in the overall economy and its growth for the society.

Impacts on Public Safety

Homeless has a connection with public safety, morality, and harmony. Homeless people are stigmatized as being drug addicts and linked with

crime. Moreso, Rusenko & Loh, (2017) argued that beggars are criminalized by others, seen connected to crime syndicates and being corrupt, thus framed begging as an offense that hinders the safety of citizens. Many are concerned that public safety such as thefts and vandalism will occur if homelessness is present, with many connecting property crime and homeless encampment (Kaste, 2022). This goes in line with Donley (2008) stating that the perception of the homeless as dangerous are split in half, one half found them dangerous, and the other do not. Nilsson (2020) explained that the homeless faced a higher likelihood and risk of crime victimization which leads to deaths, risk of mental illness and themselves being the perpetrator of violence. Many see the homeless as dangerous for their own public safety and concern, although cases show that the homeless have a higher risk of being victims of crimes. However, an argument can be made that because they are victims of crime, then they are more likely to experience mental illness and being perpetrator of violence, thus many may think they are justified in their perception. In essence, while the homeless' safety are at risk, in the large scale the prevalence of homelessness fuels society's concern on their own safety, morality and harmony as the homeless are tied with crimes whether they are seen as the victims or the perpetrator.

Impacts on Public Health and Sanitization

Homelessness may give way to worsening public health and sanitization. Sleet & Francescutti (2021) pointed out that homelessness is closely knit with the declination of both physical and mental health. Serious conditions that usually follow homelessness include tuberculosis, drug addiction and human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV). HIV was found in 1 out of 5 of the respondents in a study in Malaysia (Aizuddin et al., 2019). This situation is worrying as the infectious disease of the homeless may spread to the public. Report shows that in the United States of America that 226,000 people are homeless without shelter meaning that they may be found in public spaces such as the streets and parks. Furthermore, research indicated that because of difficulties such as financial constraint and lack of adherence (Raoult & Brougui, 2001), the homeless are highly likely to not be cured of infection nor the tools to take care of their illness or hygiene. Furthermore, the sanitation of a settlement may worsen. Homeless

encampments relate to water pollution, with rivers containing feces and urine (Verbyla et al. 2021) may pose health and sanitation risk. The problem with diseases and sanitization will impact the overall public health of an area, the more the homeless population grows as such the worse the public health falls.

Impacts on the Next Generation

Homeless has a severe impact on children's overall health and development. Aspects that may have severe effects on children include physical, mental, behavioural and functional development and wellbeing (Gultekin et al., 2020; Dabeda et al., 2018). With homelessness as with adults, children are more susceptible to disease and infections that may impact them short-term such as the coronavirus disease and long-term such as asthma. These diseases may impact the mortality rate of homeless children. Because of a lack of resources, homeless children are likely to be affected with malnutrition and thus growth delay may be present (Kulik et al., 2011). Mental problems on the other hand can commonly take form in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and abnormally high amount of stress for a child, with this it may lead to suicidal ideation. Furthermore, behavioural factor such as addictions and sexual risk behaviour is highly prevalent among street youths. Children growing up are vulnerable to functional problems that may stem from developmental delays including linguistic, cognitive and physical that may affect their integration into society (Dabeda et al., 2018). An aspect that entrapped homeless children is the cycle of poverty of which can be transferred within generations (Cheng et al., 2016). It is founded because of social disadvantages and lack of resources have made it difficult for a child and their family to escape poverty. As previously mentioned, homelessness affects the health and developmental of a child, when these affects take form into their adulthood and manifest themselves long-term, it is hard for children growing up to integrate themselves into society as they are limited by opportunities and society. Overall, if homelessness is not tackled then the overall wellbeing and health of children by and large will decline as the cycle of poverty affects more generations of families, thus the growth and problems of the homeless population will certainly snowball out of proportion.

The effect of homelessness on a society without it being addressed will likely snowball into a high mortality rate. The accumulated problems that follow homelessness without minimizing or acknowledging the factors and outcomes of homelessness will lower the life expectancy of a society and an increase in death rate. Seares et al., (2020) founded that the homeless have a four times higher mortality rate when compared to the general population while Romaszko et al., (2017) founded that the average life span of the homeless was 17.5 shorter than the general population. The most common cause of death for the homeless in Poland were circulatory system diseases such as tuberculosis (Romaszko et al., 2017). While in the Netherlands founded that the most common cause of death for the homeless is suicide or murder (Slockers et al., 2018). Epidemics such as the COVID-19 pandemic has made it deadly for those living without a home as they may be forced to share cramped and vulnerable shelters or living in the streets (Peri et al., 2020). The homeless vulnerability to diseases may spread wildly among themselves or towards the public. The various problems that affect an individual homeless person make them susceptible to physical and mental illness. The outcome of an increase in mortality rate will cost the government a large amount of resources, the workforce will be diminished, and the economic growth will dwindle. The effect of homelessness on society is devastating if not handled properly as it hurts the economy, threatens public safety, tarnishes public health and harms children. All of this can factor into the mortality rate that not only affects the homeless but may lead to a downfall for society in general.

III. HELPING HOMELESSNESS IN MALAYSIA

The government and non-government organizations have put out an abundance of initiative to address the homelessness in Malaysia with many to establish primary in providing shelter and to restore those suffering homelessness back to society. This includes the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) and National Welfare Foundation (NWF) (Li, 2018).

The Destitute Persons Act 1977

The main policy that the Malaysian Government applied to the whole country on homelessness will

be The Destitute Persons Act 1977 which is an act to provide for the care and rehabilitation of destitute people and for the control of vagrancy (Rusenko & Loh, 2017). It is said to be based on the British Law established in 1824 and replaced the Vagrants Act in 1977. Homeless are to be given the order to stay at the welfare homes for up to three years where they can be cared for, controlled and disciplined. Escape from the welfare homes can be illegal which will be considered as an offense under this act and imprisonment up to three months (Rusenko, 2015).

Ops Qaseh

Ops Qaseh, which was introduced in 2014 under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD). It plays as a channel for placement of the homeless into shelters and aims to eliminate the action of begging which is caused the most by vagrancy. It is to place homeless people in Desa Bina Diri (DBD) temporarily (Mohd Adib & Ahmad, 2018). The aim of Ops Qaseh is to assist the homeless and to help them through the provision of assistance and aid. Since it is in collaboration with Desa Bina Diri (DBD), they are implemented and available in DBD centers in Mersing, Jerantut, Kota Kinabalu and Sungai Buloh.

Desa Bina Diri

Desa Bina Diri (DBD) is established by the Department of Social Welfare to provide protection, care and recovery plans for the homeless (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2017). Throughout the recovery plan, they can have a better image on how the society works out and to increase their adaptability in the society. They will also be given a chance to train themselves with skills and techniques equipped. The entry requirements are that they need to be a Malaysian citizen aged between 18-59 years old, with no family, income and disease. Desa Bina Diri is available in Johor, Pahang, Sarawak, Sabah and Selangor. There's cooperation between Ops Qaseh and DBD in which the homeless who are saved by Ops Qaseh will be placed in DBD for at least six months before transferring into the Department of Social Welfare, National Anti- Drug Agency (NADA) and so on (Shagar, 2014). However, there are also cases of Ops Qaseh and Desa Bina Diri (DBD) where they are rescued and given a second home throughout their life, helping them in their interest and daily

essentials (Alwi, 2019). Overall, it is effective for those who need a shelter as a sense of satisfaction in themselves but it is not effective for those who need freedom to fulfill their internal needs.

Rumah Ehsan

Other than Desa Bina Diri, Rumah Ehsan (RE) is also established for elderlies who are left without heirs and guardians to take care of their daily activities, aged 60 and above. Elderlies living in Rumah Ehsan will be provided protection and medical care, some physiotherapy sessions for those who need, while maintaining their well-being or providing leisure activities with others. Rumah Ehsan is located in Dungun, Terengganu and Kuala Kubu Bahru, Selangor. Prior to living in Rumah Ehsan, the elderlies must fulfill the requirements that they're unable to carry out daily activities and responsibilities by themselves, diagnosed with disease and are left without heirs. They must also be certified by Government Medical Officers as destitute patients. Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK) established for elderlies aged 60 and above, with the requirements of no contagious disease, at the same time left with no heirs and guardians. They are required to be able to manage their daily activities. It is aimed to provide support and care for elderlies, similar to Rumah Ehsan which provide counselling and leisure activities, physiotherapy and medical treatment whenever needed (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2017). In some of the point, Rumah Ehsan brings more benefits and advantages to the homelessness especially for them from Islam. They are being cared for and given proper medical healthcare throughout their days in Rumah Ehsan (Hamdy & Yusof, 2018).

Anjung Singgah

Anjung Singgah was launched in April 2011 in Kuala Lumpur. It's an initial step taken by the government to reduce the issue of homelessness by providing temporary shelters. It operates under the cooperation of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCDD) and with a NGO of National Welfare Foundation (NWF). After the establishment of Anjung Singgah, Pusat Transit Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur was then implemented and fully in charge by the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). It is a three-storey accommodation which consists of 1,319 square foot area (Abd Rahman et al., 2019). Other than Kuala Lumpur, Anjung Singgah is also available in Kuching

Sarawak, Johor Bahru in Johor, Penang and Ipoh, Perak. It is said and reported by some news articles that Anjung Singgah is another effective initiative in helping the homeless by providing them a living area but doesn't limit their daily activities (Bernama, 2019; Tho, 2019).

Non-governmental Initiatives

Other than the Malaysian government, NGOs out there have raised campaigns, activities and community services to help homeless people. They act as a medium channel between government and public to voice out their needs and provide necessary assistance if needed.

Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (PERTIWI) Soup Kitchen is a NGO that allocates and assist in food aid services at various locations Kuala Lumpur (PERTIWI, 2013). They are more to provide short term rather than long term assistance. They do provide haircut services and basic medical treatments when it's needed. It's similar to PERTIWI Soup Kitchen where they are providing food aid services to the homeless on the street and urban poor people. Additionally, they're providing other services such as medical care, counselling services, provision of clothing, referrals for employment, accommodations and shelters. They also have larger coverage areas including Penang, Johor Bahru, Petaling Jaya, Bukit Bintang and others. Most of the NGOs are providing food aid services around Kuala Lumpur such as Kenchara Soup Kitchen (KSK), Dapur Jalanan, Need to Feed the Need (NFN), JOM Bekpes! Kaseh4U, Fungates Superflow, Foundation (FSF) and Food Not Bombs Kuala Lumpur (FNBKL) (Li, 2018).

Current Governmental and NGOs Initiatives on Working Towards SDG

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is said to be comparable to policies mentioned earlier. The main goal will be the 1st goal of No Poverty. As homelessness has become one of the issues in Malaysia throughout the time especially when pandemic hits, poverty is an issue all around the world. Everyone is given the same rights and opportunities to deserve assistance and help from others whenever they are not able to gain by themselves. Protection, treatments and basic living needs are provided as per all policies implemented. Cooperation and interaction between both government and NGOs are clearly seen in helping

the homelessness while achieving the 17th goal of Partnership for the Goals.

As all policies proposed by the government are to provide shelters, healthcare resources and basic living needs, the 2nd goal of Zero Hunger, 3rd goal of Good Health and Well-Being and 6th goal of Clean Water and Sanitation are connected. On the other hand, from NGOs, most of them are providing food assistance and some other services such as haircuts while they're meeting the 2nd goal of Zero Hunger and 10th goal of Reduce inequalities as well. Through the cooperation of all agents in the society, the 11th goal of Sustainable Cities and Communities is expected to be achieved.

IV. CRITIQUES OF CURRENT INITIATIVES

Many however have criticized the government's initiative towards helping the homeless. Policies such as the Destitute Persons Act 1977 have fallen out of favour while operations such Ops Qaseh have been condemned by some. The Destitute Persons Act 1977 has been criticized for its forceful nature and its addressal to the homeless and begging (Rusenko, 2015). Sounds of argument has come to Desa Bina Diri (DBD), in which people criticize them badly, even the residents in the center. They seek help and complain that they don't deserve detention. Some of them mentioned that they are placed in DBD involuntarily and they have their own job to rear themselves, just that they have aged (Boo, 2014). Historically, begging and vagrancy were considered crimes in the past, however even in present time resistance to government officers is considered a punishable offense according to the Act. With this, many have criticized the Act of forcing people into government homes even if the home provides training and shelter as they cannot refuse or risk punishable offenses for resisting government officers. The outcome of the Destitute Persons Act 1977 made way for operations such as Ops Qaseh which has been criticized for rounding up the homeless and forcing them under confinement at welfare homes. There are some sounds of criticizing the policy as some of the public misunderstand the real purpose and objective of implementing this policy. It is said that the Ops Qaseh is in actuality, eliminating the homeless's freedom for up to 6 years. According to the real-life experiences of people who have been detained in these welfare homes, they cannot leave the area

unless the superintendent deems you as 'ready, with a place to stay and a stable job', and leaving without consent is accountable as a criminal offense. This provides ample ground for the person in charge to harass and bully the residents, as there is no official definition or requirements allocated to deem the resident as 'ready' to go back to society.

The superintendent has the right to detain these individuals under their will; even if they acquired a job, they would still possibly be detained with the reason of it not being 'good enough'. However, it is argued that they are usually homeless as they have lost their connection with their families and left out by society. In this case, it is unfair for them to find a job and living places and if they are not able to achieve that, they will be involuntarily kept in the DBD center for years (Boo, 2014). Even NGO are criticized by the people for allegedly making the homeless lazier, more dependent and not finding jobs (Chua, 2014). Additionally, both governmental and NGO initiatives have been criticized for only providing short term solutions rather than a long term one, with worries that it will cause crime and social problems (Mohd Adib & Ahmad, 2018). This can be seen in the Destitute Persons Act 1977, where it only provides a roof over their heads, with no additional effort in helping them to stand on their feet with legal counselling, skill training, etc. How are these individuals supposed to reconnect with society when these acts only pull them away from it? In view of the effectiveness of current initiatives in alleviating the homelessness situation in Malaysia, the following solutions have been proposed and these solutions have been segregated into two categories, solutions in aiding the current homeless group and solutions in preventing and minimizing the next group of homelessness in Malaysia.

Restructuring the Implementation of DPA

As mentioned previously, the DPA act has been heavily criticized for its infringement of personal liberty and freedom of movement, in which police officers have the right to forcibly remove individuals that they deem as homeless and detain them in 'welfare homes'. Additionally, they do not actually help these people reconnect with society with training or counselling, but just provide a shelter for them. Not only will this increase their dependency on these shelters, there will be more and more mouths to feed in the shelter but with no one

leaving, constituting a heavy burden on the Malaysian economy. The DPA should be restructured as so, to alleviate the current issues surrounding it. Clear descriptions and requirements should be developed to ensure that DPA officials do not abuse their power and detain people based on the vague and broad definition of 'destitute people'. They should also be defined on what are the requirements to be categorized as a destitute person, such as the fulfillment of several requirements, for example having less than RM1000 of personal assets and with no permanent residence to reside in for a period of 6 months and above. In addition, DPA should ensure that personal liberty is maintained whilst controlling vagrancy. DPA officers should not be given the power to detain any individual they deem as destitute, but must ensure that the person they wish to detain fulfills requirements and that they are causing harm and annoyance to the public community, such as banging on car windows in the middle of a traffic to ask for money or urinating in public areas. Rather than relying on the DPA to detain homeless individuals that are causing harm, officials should base their decisions under the Penal Code and the Child Act instead. Good news is that the government has allegedly called for a restructuring of the current DPA, which will take place around July of 2022. This amendment should work towards the SDG Goal 10 of reducing inequalities nationally. It will also help in alleviating the stigma surrounding homelessness, that they are not just people who can't find jobs or criminals, or parents who warn their kids to not be; but individuals who are trying their best to continue on despite life's challenges.

Non-employment Related Counselling Services in Welfare Homes for the Homeless

Welfare homes organized by DPA for the homeless should not solely provide shelter and food towards the homeless, but also provide in house counselling and skill training, to help them reconnect with society and assist in solving the problem areas in their life. Current initiatives have been criticized for only providing counselling and training to help the homeless get a job as soon as possible. Although this does help these individuals in getting a job, it does not promise that they are able to maintain their job and their performance, as homelessness is a multifaceted issue, in which many

go homeless due to personal reasons as well, such as family or relationship issues. These non-job-related counselling services catered towards improving their mental health and regaining the strength to reconnect with society are crucial in making sure that they are able to take care of themselves independently. This aligns with the SDG goal of assuring good health and well-being, including within those who are struggling.

Buddy System

Next, social workers or volunteers can be recruited to talk and connect with these homelessness on a regular basis, developing a buddy system. Past research in Finland has shown that the connection and communication they have with others is turned out to be important, benefiting their mental health as they are able to talk to someone about their problems, which also makes it easier for these social workers to spot their pain points during the conversation and assist them on it. In addition, the support system established in welfare homes is better than the hierarchical relationship of supervisor to supervisor, as it makes it a horizontal relationship where both are equal and they don't feel dehumanized under a welfare system. Same as before, this also works towards Goal 3 as it benefits their mental well-being.

Joint Working Group among Ministerial Groups

Lastly, a joint collaboration between ministerial groups should be created to tackle and bring this issue to light. Without strong political power from relevant ministries, it would be difficult to develop comprehensive plans in tackling this issue, and we would be circling around square one, as the public do not see the seriousness and do not pressure the government in solving it, so solutions developed will be surface level and does not uproot the problem. Homelessness as mentioned previously is a multifaceted problem with systematic barriers to it, requiring the political influence to uproot them, and this group would be able to provide the political power to it and investigate all current cases of homelessness and reinforce their current strategies based on those. In this way, we would be able to achieve the SGD goal 17, as it suggests a partnership and collaboration among all for the betterment of the society.

Finland's Housing First Policy and Malaysia's Footsteps Behind

An honorary mention to Finland's Housing First policy should also be mentioned for its successfulness and in being a role model for other countries in tackling their homelessness issue. Their policy is characterized by providing permanent housing along with individually tailored support to each. It was crucial for them to develop affordable homes quickly to make this plan work, but they were provided with funding as it would be more expensive to let the situation continue. Fortunately, Malaysia has also incorporated this policy in their housing plans, such as Projek Perumahan Rakyat (People's Housing Projects) and Program Rumah Mesra Rakyat. Not only does it allow a chance for young adults who are fresh off the boat to have a chance to gain a personal asset, it also will benefit Malaysia's cost burden of allocating homeless people, as it allows people to be independent themselves, rather than spoon feeding them, which will ultimately lead to dependency of the government instead.

V. CONCLUSION

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue that is ever prevalent and hidden within the slums and corners of Malaysia, and they are often overlooked and stigmatized by society. In truth, they are doing their best and might be suffering from various personal issues such as domestic violence, low income and employment. This situation in Malaysia is impactful towards many aspects of our society and it's future, especially towards the new generation, health and sanitization issues as well as public safety. Steps have been taken by local authorities in an attempt to solve this issue, through policies and acts such as the Destitute Person's Act, Ops Qaseh and many more.

However, the situation continues to persist and they have also been heavily criticized for the inhumane treatment of homelessness people, as well as infringing on their personal liberty. Hence, solutions have been developed throughout this study to alleviate the current homelessness situation in Malaysia. Solutions that target the current homelessness group and in preventing the next generation of homelessness have been developed, including restructuring the implementation of DPA, providing non-employment related counselling services, providing social support through buddy systems, inclusivity in Budget 2023, tightening access to EPF funding and the creation of a joint

working ministerial group to tackle the current issue.

Malaysia, although lacking in many areas, is full of warmth and kindness among the community. With the support of ministerial politicians, social workers and members of the society, each and every one of us is able to help in this situation. We can do this just by simple acts, such as treating them non judgmentally and educating our children and those surrounding us about this cause and encouraging them to do so too. It is of no doubt that homelessness will be ever present in the world, but we can do our best in helping people get off the streets and into homes that are warm and welcoming.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abd Rahman, N. A. S., Ridzuan, M. R., Manas, N. H. N., & Mohamad, W. S. S. W. (2019). Scrutinizing the rigorousness of government interventions in addressing homelessness in Malaysia. *Gading Journal for Social Sciences* (e-ISSN 2600-7568), 22(00), 73-77.
- [2] Ahmad Yani, N. M., Zahari, N. Z., Abu Samah, N. F., Mohamed Azahar, M. A., Yasin, S. M., Ahmad Saman, M. S., & Mohd Noor, N. A. (2016). Factors associated with homelessness and its medical issues among Urban Malaysians: A qualitative research. *Journal of Clinical and Health Sciences*, 1(1), 46. <https://doi.org/10.24191/jchs.v1i1.5853>
- [3] Aizuddin, A. N., Abdul Jabar, S. W., & Idris, I. B. (2019). Factors associated with health services financier among temporary sheltered homeless in urban Malaysia. *BMC Public Health*, 19(S4). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6871-5>
- [4] Alwi, S. K. (2019, April 12). Desa Bina Diri pulihkan Golongan Gelandangan. *Laman depan*. <https://www.utusanborneo.com.my/2019/04/12/desa-bina-diri-pulihkan-golongan-gelandangan>
- [5] Azahar, S. (2021, January 22). Tackling the problem of homelessness. *MalaysiaNow*. <https://www.malaysianow.com/opinion/2021/01/22/tackling-the-problem-of-homelessness/>
- [6] Bernama. (2019, April 15). Lebih 70 peratus Gelandangan Anjung singgah dapat Pekerjaan. *Sinarharian*. <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/23592/BERITA/Nasional/Lebih-70-peratus-gelandangan-Anjung-Singgah-dapat-pekerjaan>
- [7] Boo, S. -L. (2014, July 16). Homeless beg to be freed from Sungai Buloh Centre (Video): *Malay mail. Malaysia | Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2014/07/17/homeless-beg-to-be-freed-from-sungai-buloh-centre/708033>
- [8] Boo, S. L. (2014, July 4). Homeless in the city: Falling through the cracks (video): *Malay Mail. Malaysia | Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2014/07/04>

- /homeless-in-the-city-falling-through-the-cracks-video/699659
- [9] Chua, T. (2014, July 4). Feeding the homeless an issue to the gov't? Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/267683>
- [10] Hamdy, M. S., & Yusuf, M. M. (2018). Review on public long-term care services for older people in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Science Health & Technology*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjosht.v2i.49>
- [11] Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat. (2017, March 6). <https://www.jkm.gov.my/jkm/index.php?r=portal%2Fleft&id=Wm1WK115dnZkUGwvRU5MNkdtbm5zZz09>
- [12] Li, W. K. (2018). *The Homeless in Malaysia: Issues and Policy Solutions*. N.p.l: Npb.
- [13] Mohd Adib, N. A., & Ahmad, Y. (2018). How effective are the current initiatives in dealing with homelessness in Malaysia? *Journal of Administrative Science*, 15(3).
- [14] Mohd Alif, J. , Siti Hajar, A. B. A. , & Norruzeyati, C. M. N. (2020). Three major interrelated factors contributing to homelessness issue among former prisoners in Malaysia. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 9, 415–430. <https://doi.org/10.6000/1929-4409.2020.09.40>
- [15] Mohd Anwar, P. R., Nadia Hamid and Faris Fuad (2017). 1,490 gelandangan kembali bekerja. <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2017/11/347767/1490-gelandangan-kembali-bekerja>
- [16] Mohd Rom, N. A. , Yaakob, M. L. , Md. Hassan, N. , & Ramli, H. S. (2022). Mental illness due to homelessness: A qualitative case study in Melaka, Malaysia. *F1000Research*, 11, 26. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.73538.1>
- [17] PERTIWI. (2013, December 4). PERTIWI Soup Kitchen. PERTIWI: <http://pertiwi.org.my/pertiwi-soup-kitchen/>
- [18] LoyarBurok. <https://www.loyarburok.com/2014/06/18/homelessness-destitute-persons-act-dpa/>
- [19] Rusenko, R. M. (2014, June 18). Homelessness and the destitute persons act (DPA).
- [20] Rusenko, R. M., & Loh, D. Y. (2014, September). Begging, the Destitute Persons Act 1977, and punitive law: An exploratory survey. In Paper presented by the University of Malaya Seminar on Homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- [21] Rusenko, Rayna. (2015). Homelessness, Begging, and The Destitute Persons Act 1977 | Policy Paper. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.5082.8644>.
- [22] Rusenko, R. M. (2017). Imperatives of care and control in the regulation of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: 1880s to present. *Urban Studies*, 55(10), 2123–2141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017710121>
- [23] Shagar, L. K. (2014, July 2). Ops to house the homeless. *The Star*: <http://www.thestar.com.my>.
- [24] Subramaniam, P. (2014, July 7). Minister defends 'Ops qaseh', says to save vagrants from 'danger': Malay mail. *Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2014/07/07/minister-defends-ops-qaseh-says-to-save-vagrants-fromdanger/701869>
- [25] Thelwell, K. (2020, July 8). Homelessness in Malaysia: NGO and government collaboration. *Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, CMPSCI Tech. Rep. 99-02*, 1999.