



World Scientific News

An International Scientific Journal

WSN 101 (2018) 192-204

EISSN 2392-2192

Challenges and social issues of homeless people in Kochchikade Region, Colombo District in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness is not a single person's personal issue nor does it affect people in a same way. Every nations are facing the same crisis of homelessness and poverty. The situation led by several circumstances. This research explores to identify the causes and challenges faced by the homeless people. The society recognizes them as minor ability folk and refuse them from care and support. The objective of this research is to find out the challenges and social issues of the people who don't have a permanent shelter to live. In accordance with the findings, homeless people are widely having personal troubles and social abandon. The whole community should take part to support the people who have been isolated from the society. Proper progress can be made through government to care the needy community. According to one of the sayings that a single person cannot change someone's destiny but, a group of people can.

Keywords: Challenge, Homelessness, Issues, Society

1. INTRODUCTION

The present world is facing various types of problems which leads to several issues. Homelessness is a modern burdensome suffer. Modernization and urbanization are ruling the world constantly causing homelessness and they also cause ecosystem changes in landfilling, wetland reclamation and so on. Homelessness describe the situation of an individual or family

without stable, permanent, appropriate housing or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systematic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioral or physical challenges, or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

People not owning or renting their own place of residence, but who are referred to casual or temporary accommodation and those who are living temporarily with relatives, friends or other they know considered to be homeless. Homelessness is a major problem in developing and under-developed countries. Government and other non-government organization should focus on providing basic needs and material for the helpless people to get back together. The City of Colombo and the Kochchikade area are safe, healthy and sustainable communities offering a good place to work, live and education. At the same time, our communities, like many Sri Lankan cities and towns, are facing a wide range of serious social concerns, which interact to increase the risks of homelessness. The current population of the City of Colombo is 752,993.

The Kochchikade represents 9,339 individuals. The Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) defines homelessness as:

- Living on the street
- Staying overnight in a temporary shelter
- Staying in places not meant for human habitation
- Moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by strangers, friends or family

We can further define homelessness into **three** categories that include,

1. **Absolute homelessness** – those individuals who are sleeping outside, in a public place or in an emergency shelter
2. **The hidden homeless** – those who are staying with family or friends temporarily
3. **At risk of homelessness** – those individuals who are inadequately housed or whose life circumstances can “tip” them over into homelessness for such known consequences of personal decisions, trauma, and events outside of one's personal control.

Issues and problems are anonymous among homeless people. Multiple reason cause for the homelessness and it leads to the poverty, contagious illness, decline in development and many more problems. The people who are abandoned face critical problems such as,

- Unaffordable Housing
- No Income
- Less community support
- Unemployment
- Harassments
- Illness/ Diseases

Drug and liquor addictive young people spotted due to the homelessness in Colombo city. That is a major concern which leads to numerous problems at present and in the future.

Mental illness and physical disabilities force the homeless people to live in streets. The focus on attitudes towards homeless people is different. Different personality and attitude of those people, always remain as such a burden to the society. They have the challenges with enumeration. Some homeless who are on the road make troubles to the passing by people. The mentally disabled people always being under threaten to the community. These are the identified specific problems in the study area.

2. STUDY AREA

Colombo District is the capital of Sri Lanka. It is the second most populated district in Sri Lanka. It situated in the wet zone and have much more industrial activities and urbanization. Western province contains high number of immigrants. The city has a safe, healthy and sustainable communities offering a good environment to work, live and play. At the same time the city and community facing a widespread concern, which interact to increase the risk of homelessness. Colombo District has twelve Divisional secretariat divisions. Each of them has a huge dense of population more than anywhere in Sri Lanka. The density of population lead to some poor to be homeless and unaffordability. The following table shows the divisional secretariat divisions of Colombo district.

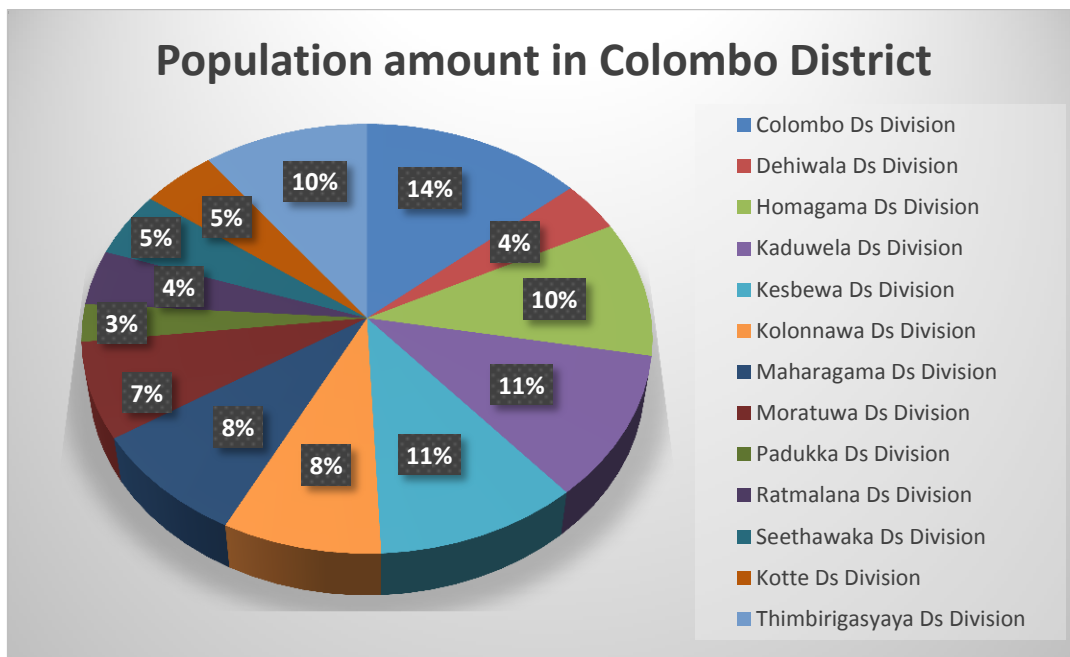


Chart 1. DS Division of Colombo District

According to the above table, it's obvious to declare the most populated region is Colombo DS Division (14% of Population among the other DS division). The reason for the population is vary from one Divisional secretariat division (DSD) to the other. Colombo has almost every industrial activities and most of the main branches of companies located in the main city. Therefore it is having more immigrants rather than native people. Pull factors are

contributing highly for the immigration of people. Some parts of Colombo are famous for the residence, industrialization, white color jobs, markets and education. On behalf of the people's perspective they choose their location. Since the residence and accommodation are expensive in Colombo most of the immigrants are ended up in the roads until they find a proper job or place to stay. Most of them are youngsters.

Colombo DSD has 34 Grama Niladhari Divisions (GND). Although every GND are having high amount of population Kochchikade north and south are the most populated regions among other GN Divisions. Most of the people who lives in Colombo prefer to stay and buy their residences in kochchikade as it has less expensive housing and friendly environment. Thus, helpless citizens of the nations, homeless and beggars are everywhere in the city. Since the city is very famous for the residential, much denser housing could be visible. It has more public places such as Textiles shops, Grounds, Worship places, Banks, Food centers, etc. The homeless people could be noticeable in such places more often.

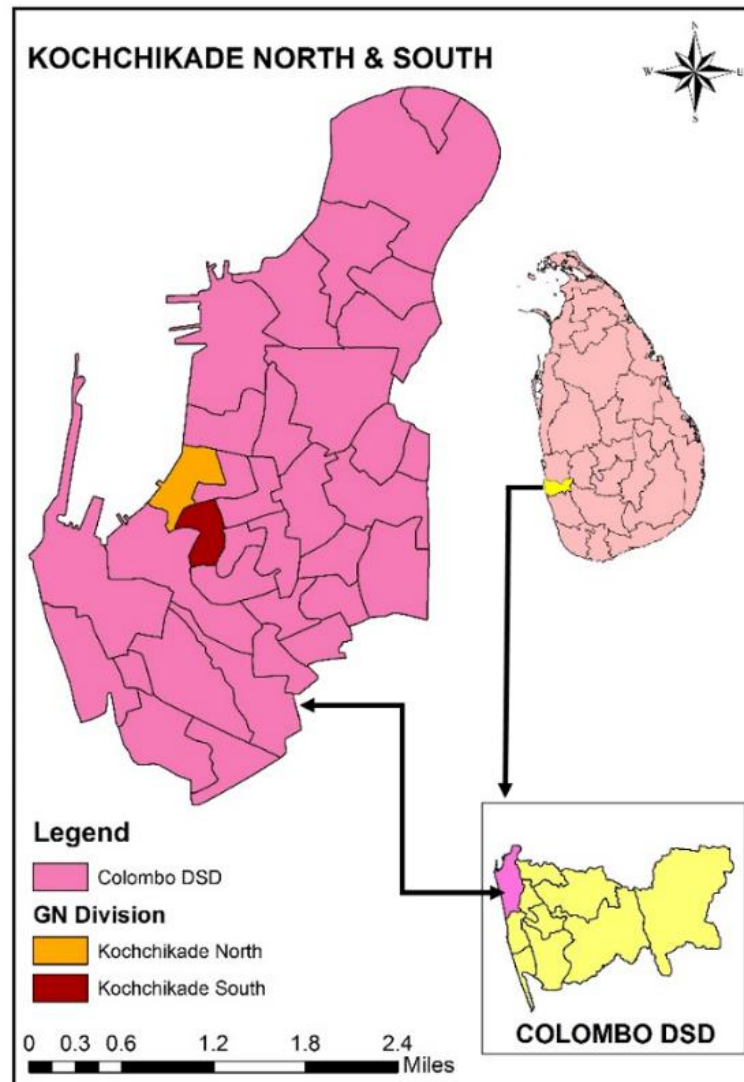


Figure 1. Study area (Kochchikade North and Kochchikade South)

3. OBJECTIVES

There is a major objective and two supportive objectives. The main objective is,

1. Identify the challenges and social issues faced by the homeless people in the study area;

and, sub objectives are,

2. To find out the direct and indirect causes behind the homelessness of people in the study area.
3. To Suggest proper solution to mitigate the abandonment and enhance the lifestyle of homeless people

With these objectives, could be able to declare to world the struggles and shortcoming of homeless people. Proper solutions and methods could explore with the findings.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To approach the objectives, actual research should be made with a suitable methodology. This research was conducted based on both primary and secondary data collection methods. For the analysis of data and map preparations MS Office and Arc GIS 10.1 have been used.

4. 1. Primary data

For the actual identification of the problem direct observation was made. Therefore, observation is one of the methods. With snow ball sampling method and random sampling method 50 homeless people were identified and interviewed. Moreover focus group discussion were held among the divisional secretariat officer, Grama Niladhari officer, community development coordinator, health and social service officer, church priest, temple Ayer and some native elders.

4. 2. Secondary data

Secondary data collected through published and unpublished sources, reports from GS division and GN division, community service center, internet sources, newspaper, books and journals.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent reports show the rapid demographic change in Kochchikade region in previous years. It occurred due to the immigrant from every part of the country generally for business, security, job and education purpose. This increase of population leads to the suffer and sorrow of the temporarily moved people to the study area. It also a reason for the increase of homeless people. Youngsters who come from far rural places normally don't have proper accommodation and money to afford housing. So, the youngsters can be seen in the road

laying at night time. Elders who come to Colombo for their treatment, end up in streets without a guardian and shelter.

5. 1. Identified challenges and issue of homeless people

The homeless people suffer more than the normal. It was Maslow's theory that an individual's most basic needs must be met before the individual will strongly desire on the next higher level of needs. There are five level of basic needs captured within Maslow's theory.

1. **Physiological;** breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing and sleep
2. **Safety and Security;** health, employment, property, family, social stability
3. **Love and Belonging;** friendship, family, intimacy, sense of connection
4. **Self Esteem;** confidence, achievement, respect of others, the need to be a unique individual
5. **Self-Actualization;** mortality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance experience purpose, meaning, and inner potential.

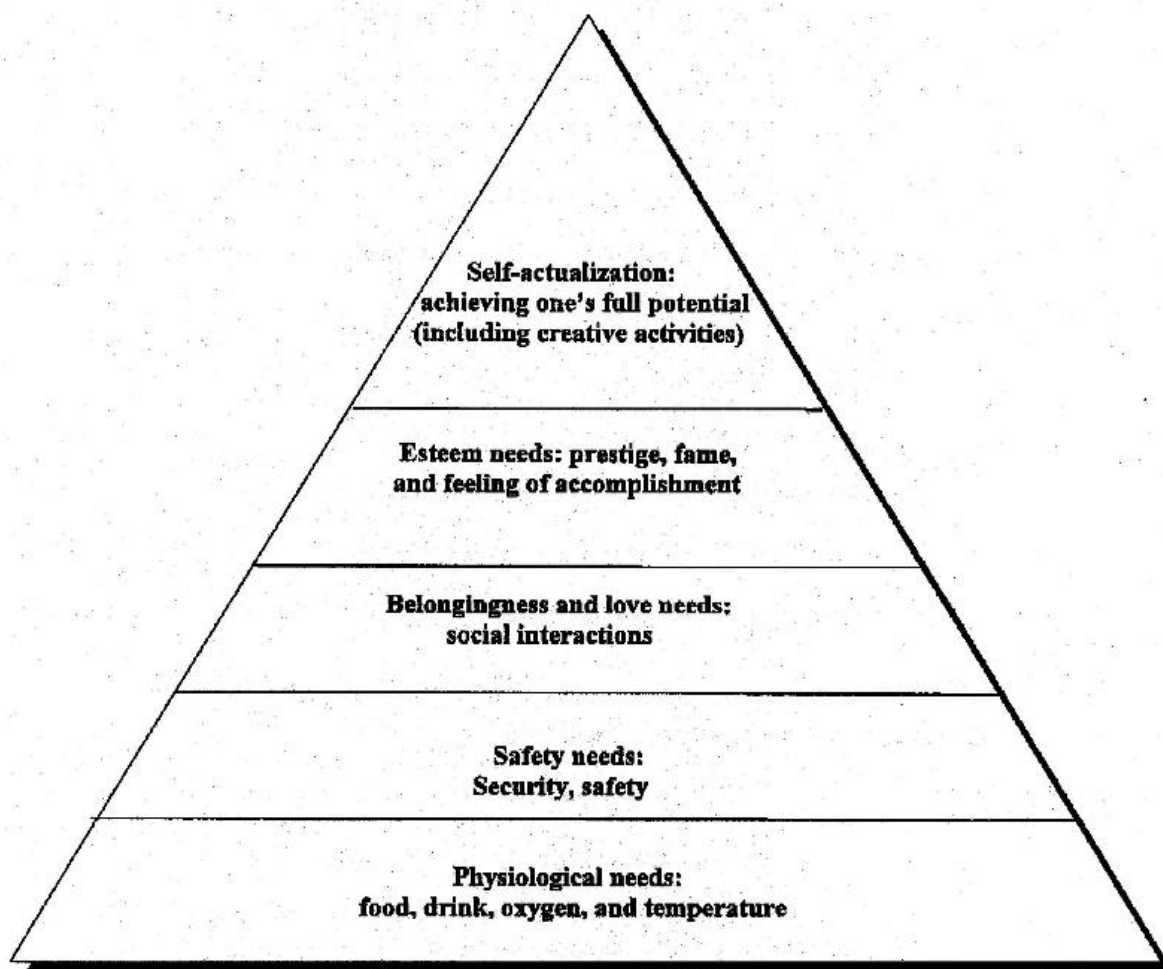


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs

The identified homeless people in the study area doesn't have any of the above basic needs. Most of them were from cities and down town areas or rural areas.



Figure 3. Identified Homeless people near to the Church (St. Anthony)

These identified homeless people suffer from multi health issues. It is considered to be a major challenge that they couldn't overcome with. Mental distress and mental illness cause them to roam around and utter different words. Skin related problems and other chronic diseases such as high pressure, diabetes and appendix are more common diseases they face.

Living without a resident make people prime targets of antisocial elements and other social related problems. The following are some identified major problems of homeless people.

1. Homeless people don't have a permanent or temporary address, so they cannot receive any stuff nor important goods.
2. The homeless need to carry all their belongings with them everywhere they go, therefore they always carrying a burden physically and mentally.
3. These people have limited access to wash rooms and recreational activities. Hence they forced to live in unhygienic conditions.
4. Since they don't afford a permanent address, these people constantly moving from one place to another. Therefore this makes it difficult for others to help the people.
5. Homeless people often ill-treated by others due to their appearance and behavior. So, mentally these people broken.

Based on the interview among homeless people, the research the outcomes have been pointed out as below.

- 75% of homeless people reported physical health problems. And among them 50% said that they are having a long term health problems without proper sanitations and medicines.
- 40-50% homeless people diagnosed with mental stress and illness.
- 42% of youngsters and adults consuming alcohol and drugs.
- Half of them do not eat at least one meal a day.
- 65% of them are smokers.

5. 2. Factors contributing to the homelessness

In most situations the problem have been led by a phenomenon that couldn't be avoided. Homelessness also caused by some unavoidable factors. Different people had various type of reason for leaving the home, family and their native town or village. The below indicated factors that contributed to the homelessness have been revealed by the identified homeless people in Kochchikade north and south.

- **Chronic diseases** – The diseases such as diabetes mellitus, tuberculosis may cause more troubles to the entire family. If the guardian doesn't want to take care of the diagnosed patient they would end up in a hospital for a while and when they got discharge they have already broken inside and won't prefer to go home.
- **Family abundant** – Most of the elderly people and children left behind from their family.
- **Economic issues** – As a developing country, Sri Lanka is having numerous jobless citizen. The people who couldn't even get a simple job would end up such as jobless, penniless and unaffordable human being.
- **Diseases that cannot be cured such as cancer**
- **Mental Illness** – Few of them have been abundant due to the mental illness and half of them were being mentally stress and pressure after being abundant. Most of the homeless people are not in stabilize condition.
- **Addictive to drugs, smoking and alcohol** - This pathetic situation is widely spread all over the nation. The fundamental family problems arising due to the addiction of liquor drinking and other drug consumption. The person who affected by the issue, on his/her own wish leave the home or chased away by the family members.
- **Domestic Violence** – Mostly the women and youngsters who are under poverty often forced to choose between abusive relationship and homelessness.
- **Disabilities** – In this case, some elderly disable people can be seen in the road who are forcefully thrown to the road. But some youngsters had chosen to stay out of the family without being a burden to their family members.

In Kochchikade, accommodation rate is very high and housing affordability is very expensive. Therefore some families also being abandoned on the road due to poverty and low wages.



Figure 4. Identified Disable homeless people on the road

5. 3. Social problems of homelessness

Homelessness is a social problem in developed and urbanized cities. Hundreds of people including children, families, babies and the elderly live day after day without proper meal and sanitation. There more people who are mentally ill also roam around the city roads, which can be extremely confusing to them, and dangerous to the rest of society. These problems needs to be solved soon and should be addressed as a major crisis that is affecting whole society.

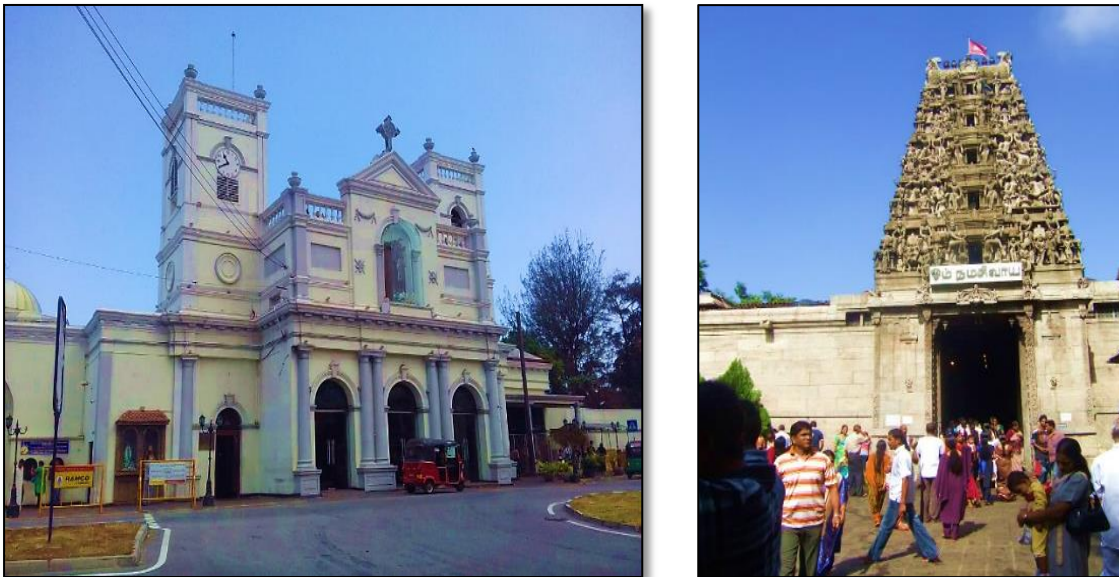


Figure 5. Worship places in Kochchikade

The homeless people mostly prefer to be in a crowded city. In this study area, most of them have been encountered around St. Anthony church and Ponnambalawaneswaram Temple. Since most of the time this surrounding area filled with population, homeless people could be able to get the attention and have some benefits. But the common and normal people considering this to be a major issue in their community.

Children and young female are frequently being abused by other homeless and normal drunken people. Children can be seen mostly near to the food stores so they could afford some food from the vendors and normal people who come for the purchase. So the owners of the food stores complain this situation as burdensome.

According to the focus group discussion, the elders of the study area say” Most of the elders are being abandoned by their children. They might be in good status but couldn’t give welfare for their parents who had faced lots of troubles while rearing them.” A social worker said that “Taking care of the children and youngsters doesn’t easy as we think. They used to live in such a carefree environment. So, take care of them in homes giving extra works for the nanny’s and social workers” . As they said, the homelessness is a major problem that cannot be cut down easily. The problem is about both human well-being, basic needs and economical fulfill.



Figure 6. Identified and interviewed homeless

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

Examining the challenges and issues of homeless people considered to be a difficult task. Since the country is a developing nation, it has its own difficulties and bottlenecks. The ability of preventing the homelessness is a daunting task. What in the research known is that there are some clearly obvious gaps in service delivery that provide opportunities for

homelessness instead of housing stability. The lack of shelter affordable, safe and health option in our community affects the number of people who are at risk of homelessness. Many individuals are discharged from hospital, mental health facilities, addiction treatment programs, jails and prison directly go to the street or emergency temporary shelters. The challenges faced by the homeless people can include mental illness, economic loss, substance abuse, and deteriorating physical health and lack of access to health care and hospitals. According to the research findings, elders are mostly being abandoned on the street due to their mental stress, family problems, lifestyle changes and physical disabilities.

The ordinary people either have more negative habits and unhealthy lifestyle but considering the homeless they are lower. These people carrying out a helpless life and unhealthy lifestyle. Most of them are diagnosed with multi types of diseases both non communicable and infectious. Their sign of progress very less rather than any other developed countries around the world.

6. 1. Recommendations

A single hand could not make noise, but more than two hands can. Therefore providing suggestion will not be enough to make a change, but stepping on the path will. Homelessness may be a beg crisis in this fringe of modern era. Not only in developing countries like Sri Lanka but also developed countries such as America, Canada, England, etc.

- ❖ Establishing Ambalama (Public rest place) would help the poor people who cannot find a house for sometimes. And the youngsters who come from rural villages for the job opportunities.
- ❖ Providing sanitary kits and tent to the homeless.
- ❖ The government should provide enough medical facilities and basic needs to the homeless people.
- ❖ Arrange counselling programs for the addictive youngsters for alcohol, drugs and smoking.
- ❖ The government should take care for the female during their maternity and the child.
- ❖ Most of the children seems to be on the road so, child care organizations could be able to take the children.
- ❖ Community programs and awareness programs needs to be held from village to city areas.

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