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THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN KOLKATA

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THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN KOLKATA

ABSTRACT:

The problem of homelessness is an acute problem among developing countries like India, and it even becomes worse in some of the big cities such as Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai. The large-scale migration from rural to urban areas searching for jobs to meet their basic needs is the primary reason behind homelessness in these big cities. Homelessness impacts socioeconomic, living, and daily activities and is thought of as a significant roadblock for society and its overall development. The challenges encountered by the needy can be addressed effectively if they are provided with requisite information on jobs, public utilities like- portable water, sanitation, health, and shelter homes. In this respect, a detailed study was conducted to identify the homeless people's information needs and develop a policy framework in regards to the public library services on homeless people. Hence, in this study, various literatures were reviewed to identify and understand the problem, present condition, and the information need of the homeless people. This objective was achieved by adopting a descriptive research methodology and a survey technique was followed which starts with the preparation of a schedule of questions. The schedule was administered on a sample of 397 homeless people in different localities of Kolkata Metropolis. This study's findings suggest that most homeless people reside in the different areas of Kolkata on the footpath without a secured living place. The study sums up with proposed suggestions to bring homeless people into mainstream society.

KEYWORDS: Information Needs, Homeless People, Vulnerability, Public Harassment, Public Libraries, Information Professionals, Slums, and Urban Poverty.

INTRODUCTION:

In developing countries like India, economic growth is accompanied by large scale urbanization. According to the UN (2008) report, in low- and middle-income countries from 2010, there will be urban growth, and migration of population will happen to urban centres. This finding was corroborated by Jinadu (2015), where he found that the world population was on an increasing spree especially in urban centers. Being a developing country, many cities in India including Kolkata are experiencing increase rural to urban migration leading to a spurt in informal settlements as well as many migrants face homelessness. Homelessness is a scenario where people are deprived of one of the basic needs i.e., shelter. According to the 2001 census, it is estimated that there are at least 1.94 million homeless people in India out of

the 1.16 million lived in villages, and only 0.78 million who lived in cities and towns. Homeless are not just those who are living on the roadside, but also people staying pavements, Hume pipes, under staircases, temples, platforms, outside of railway station, parks, bus stations, outside shops, factories, under bridges, place of worship, under the footbridge of the roadside, in a hostel, living in the accommodation of pay in guest, living in a squat, or living temporarily with friends or relatives because they have nowhere else to go and the like.

The indigent socioeconomic condition of homeless people hardly supports the fulfillment of their basic minimum requirements. This can be attributable to different reasons that may be political, born in a deprived family, economical, educational, communication gap, identity, intentional, natural hazards, migration, etc. According to Akinluyi, M. L., & Adedokun, A. (2014), homelessness is the absence of connectedness. Although, different private organizations, NGOs (non-government organizations), CSOs (civil society organizations), and public libraries are engaged in various activities aimed at addressing the vulnerable condition of homeless people. However, homeless people lack awareness and they have negative intension. In such a situation, to some extent, a remedy policy may be framed by the public libraries to bridge the communication gap among the homeless people. Hence, a detailed study is necessary to understand the information need and basic requirements of the homeless people as well as the role of public libraries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the basic needs of human being, housing is one of them where people live and grows. However, with the increase in population, and in search of livelihood people start migrating to urban centres. As per the study conducted by Aluko, (2004); Akinluyi & Akingbohunge, (2012) more than 1 billion people which is one-fourth of the world's population are living without shelter or in unhealthy conditions. According to Human Development Report (1997), homelessness was the root cause of profound health consequences. Similarly, Philisie Starling Washington (2011), in his study found that the homeless youth generally encountered problems related to health, high-risk harmful sexual behaviors, drug abuse, violence, and victimization. He also highlighted that homelessness among youth is a pressing issue in the United States and other countries. While Falguni Dey and Kannya Kumari Majumder (2015) highlighted the status of the infrastructure and amenities of the pavement dwellers and examined the intensity of problems associated with their daily life. As per their finding information source would play an important role to deliver the right information to the asylum seekers. On the other hand, Adekanmbi, O. F. (2019), in his article had given the

focus on the immigrant's source of information; investigate their information needs and requirements and barriers to obtaining information.

Previously Sugata Bag and Suman Seth (2016) explore in their paper is that the standard of living of slum-dwellers in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Delhi, the three largest cities in India, as well as to conduct a comparative study on how the slum-level and household-level characteristics are associated with the slum-dwellers' standard of living within cities and across cities. The standards of living of the slum-dwellers are depending on the monetary and non-monetary approach by using per-capita consumption expenditures. Gali Yemini Halevi (2007) stated in his article that the information need of homeless people in New York City visiting public libraries across the city, the type of public services do homeless people seek in New York City public libraries, and current services offered to homeless people in public libraries across New York City.

After that, it is stated in Namita Paul and D Dhanuraj (2016), the article is that the governmental support helpful in improving the lives of the homeless? Who are the other stakeholders and what are their roles? How much can they support in resolving the issue? If so, then why did the housing market fail to address the increasing demand for housing in Indian cities? Moreover, a study through the years shows that the participation of the private sector in housing the urban poor has been limited. Recent schemes by the government invite the involvement of private players, but there has not been a significant increase in private participation. Kerala has around two lakh homeless people. Over the last decade, there has been a significant rise in the number of migrant labourers, most of them circulatory migrants, in Kerala. The Central and State Governments had taken various initiatives to address the issue but none made a significant difference. Why did these initiatives fail in improving the housing conditions for the urban poor? To understand the problems in housing straight from the beneficiaries and stakeholders, case studies and interviews were conducted in Kochi, Kerala. A few foreign housing models have also been discussed in the paper. IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to People Experiencing Homelessness is that the needs of people experiencing homelessness, as well as ways in which libraries meet those needs. Guidelines are there regarding library policy and services.

In the above context, the primary objective of this study was to identify the basic information needs of homeless people and barriers to receiving such information. In addition to this, the level of awareness about the source of information is also determined.

METHODOLOGY:

In this work, a descriptive method has been adapted to study the information need of homeless people. This study was conducted in Kolkata Metropolis in West Bengal and data were collected on a schedule through the interview method. The sampling method adopted here was snowball sampling since it will assist the researcher in getting information of other respondents in the study area. The actual sample size was 382, calculated according to the online sample size calculator (<https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>) with the 95% confidence level is applied and the confidence interval is 50% based on the total homeless population i.e., 69798 according to the 2011 census. However, 401 homeless respondents were surveyed and after scrutinizing the collected data 397 were taken for further analysis. The survey work was performed in February and March 2019. After the completion of the data collection work, collected data were tabulated and statistical analysis was performed.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The following table and chart are prepared to base on the primary data.

Table-1: Socioeconomic Characteristics

Variable	Freq.	%	Variable	Freq.	%
Age			Monthly Income		
Less than 18 Years	8	2.0	Less than ₹1,000	19	4.8
18 – 27 Years	87	21.9	1,000 – 2,000	87	21.9
28–37 Years	107	27.0	2,000 – 3,000	79	19.9
38 – 47 Years	126	31.7	3,000 – 5,000	164	41.3
48 – 57 Years	38	9.6	5,000 and Above	48	12.1
More than 58 years	31	7.8	Source of Income		
Gender			Part-time Job	6	1.5
Male	252	63.5	Own Shop	29	7.3
Female	145	36.5	Rag Pickers	54	13.6
Marital Status			Daily Labourers	94	23.7
Married	326	82.1	Old Cloth Sellers	4	1.0
Unmarried	37	9.3	Laundry	2	0.5
Separated	34	8.6	Rickshaw Puller	95	23.9
Education Level			Vegetable Vendor	12	3.0
Illiterate	225	56.7	Hawkers	25	6.3
Under Metric	153	38.5	Sweepers	11	2.8
Intermediate	17	4.3	Beggars	40	10.1
Graduate	2	0.5	Maid Servant	25	6.3

Author Field Survey 2019

The results of Table-1 show that majority of homeless people (31.7%) fall within the age category of 38-47 years followed by 27% in the age group of 28-37 years and 21.9% in 18-27 years. Thus, around 80% of homeless have an average age of 33 years. Again homeless male (63.5%) dominates in gender-wise distribution. Furthermore, cross-tabulation between age

and gender as shown in Figure-1, depicts that percentage of female homeless was higher than male homeless in the age category Less than 18 years, 18-27 years, 48-57 years, and more than 58 years. On the other hand, the percentage of male homeless was more than female in the age group 28-37 years and 38-47 years. Hence, it implies that male people of their active age who migrate to Kolkata for employment remain homeless.

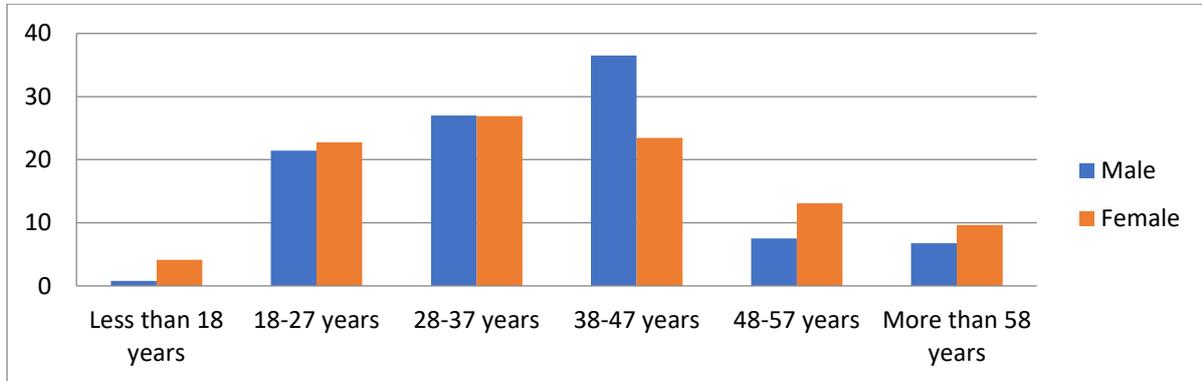


Figure-1: Cross analysis between Age and Gender

Apart from age and gender information, the marital status of homeless people was also identified. The study revealed that 82.1% of the respondents were married, while 17.9% constituted respondents belonging to unmarried and separated due to divorce or death of husband or wife category. Furthering these findings the cross-analysis of marital status and gender was provided in Figure-2. It was observed from the below figure that the homelessness among married male and female were higher than other two categories. However, the percentage of female homeless was higher in the separated category because of divorce or widow.

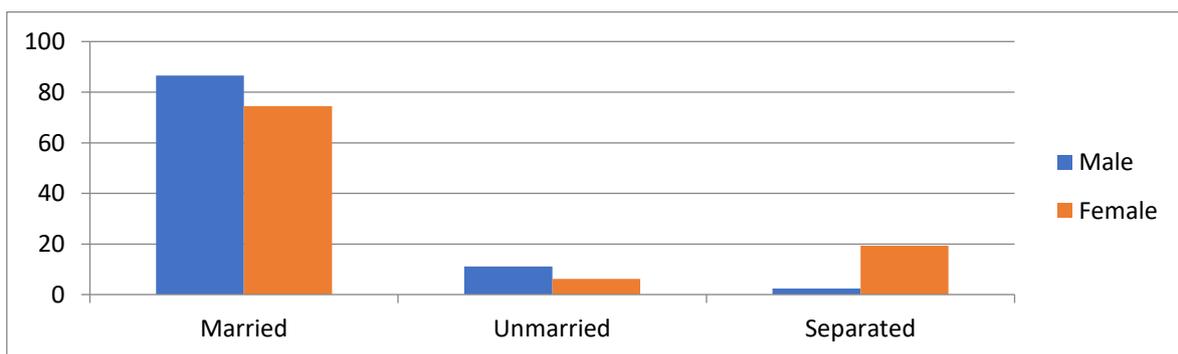


Figure-2: Cross analysis between marital status and Gender

From the data, it is found that the majority of respondents (56.7%) were illiterate, while 38.5% were under metric. Hence, it can be said that illiteracy and lower education might be a major cause for migration to Kolkata leading to homelessness.

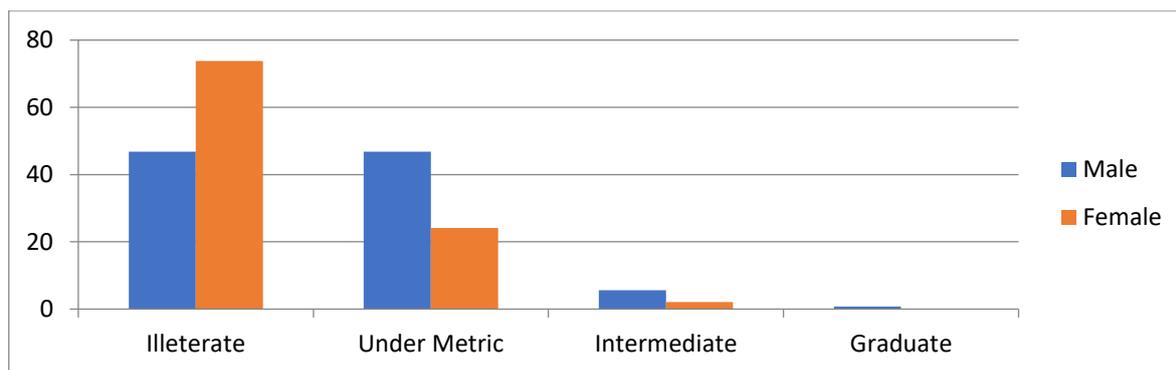


Figure-3: Cross analysis between education and Gender

The cross-analysis between education and gender implies that the percentage of illiterate female homeless were more than illiterate males. On the other hand, the percentage of under metric male homeless exceeds female counterpart. As observed, illiteracy and low education were a cause of homelessness along with influencing the income of respondents. Hence it was necessary to understand the level and source of income.

As per the data presented in Table-1, 41.3% of respondents' monthly income was within ₹3,000 to ₹5,000, while 21.9% earns ₹1,000 to ₹2,000 and only 4.8% of respondents' earn less than ₹1,000. The cross-analysis of monthly income and age presented in figure-4 shows that with an increase in age up to 37 years respondents able to earn ₹5,000 and above, after that it starts declining. Hence, respondents at their active age were able to earn more. However, the source of earning plays a vital role in the determination of the level of earning.

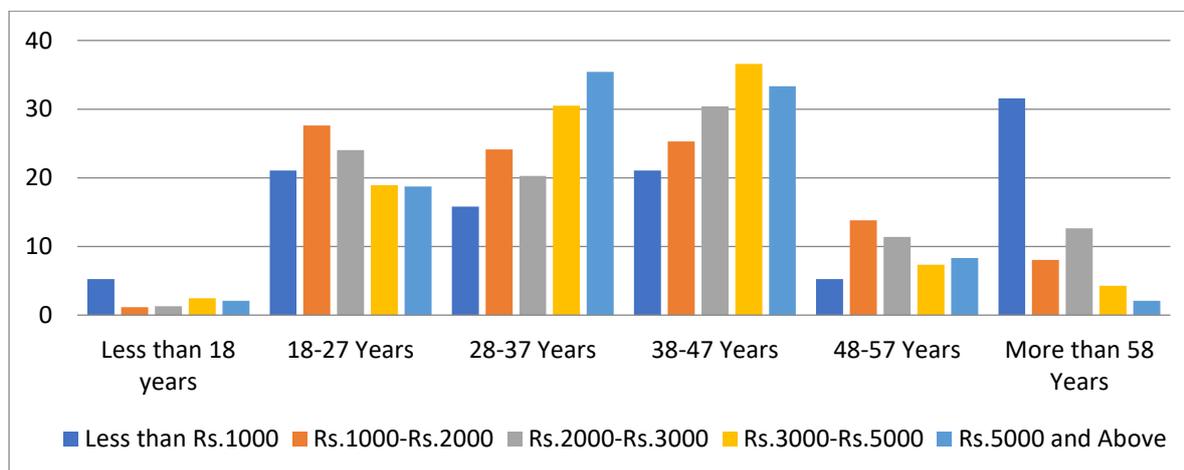


Figure-4: Cross analysis between monthly income and age

Homeless people don't have a permanent job; therefore they are working on a daily wage basis and were the reason for variation in their monthly income. As per the table-1 around 87.9% of the respondent's earnings were below ₹5,000. Thus, they couldn't manage their daily life with such minimum earning, so all the family members were forced to work for

extra income by engaging themselves in different works. In this situation, they need to receive proper job related information.

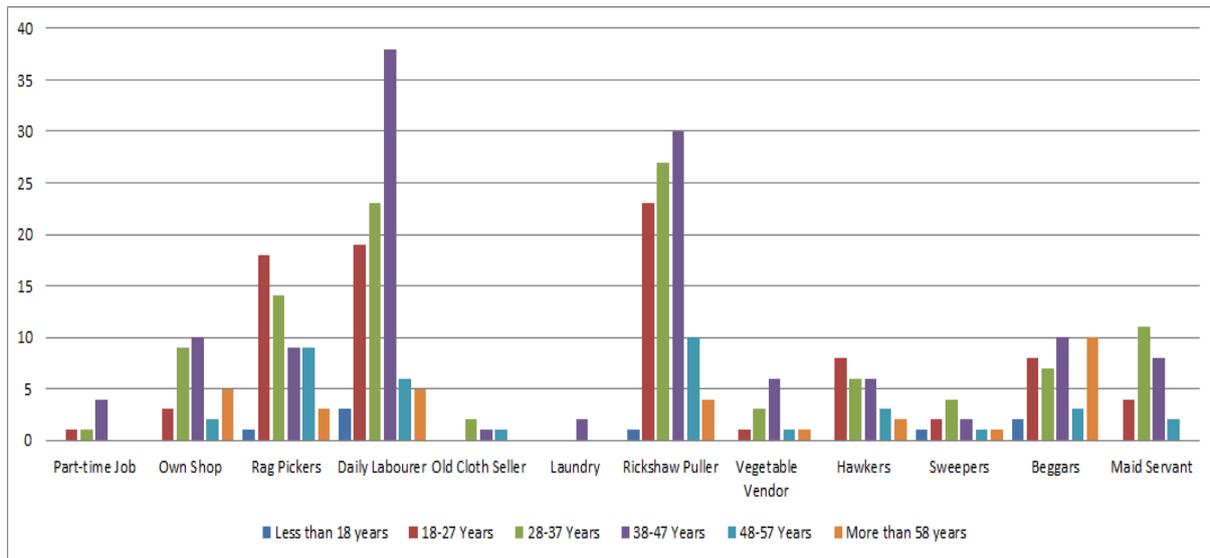


Figure-5: Cross analysis between occupation and age

The occupation status of the Homeless People was provided in the Figure-5 vis-a-vis, age group. In this study more than 50% of the homeless people working in the age group between 28-37 and 38-47 years. Around 50% of them are doing daily labourer and rickshaw puller jobs. Less than 10% of the homeless people have their own shop. So the result shows that homeless people need job-related information to earn more and support their families. In this context, identification proof of each homeless people is highly essential to receive government support. Hence, in this study data were collected and presented in table-2 on possession of ID proof based on their gender.

Table-2: Identification Proof

	Single ID	Multiple ID	No ID	Total	Chi-Square
Male	66 (60.55%)	140 (67.31%)	46 (57.5%)	252	2.952, df = 2, p-value = 0.229 Greater than 0.05
Female	43 (39.45%)	68 (32.69%)	34 (42.5%)	145	
	109	208	80	397	

Author Field Survey 2019

It is described that 52.4% of homeless people of Kolkata held multiple ID cards, while 20.15% did not have any ID proof. On the other hand, 27.46% of respondents have either ration card or voter ID/Aadhar card, etc. Those who didn't possess any ID card need to know the actual procedure to make it apart from this, possession of an ID card and gender dependency was determined through the Chi-square test. The chi-square value was 2.952 with degrees of freedom 2 and p-value > 0.05. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis i.e. there is no association between gender and ID card possession among homeless people.

However, it is the responsibility of public libraries to assist in getting ID cards for those people who need these documents.

Table-3: Sleeping at Night

	Frequency	Percentage
Friend House	2	0.5
Street, Side-walk, thatch roof	350	88.2
Car/Van	8	2
Rented House	16	4
Under Bridge	1	0.3
Railway Platform	20	5
Total	397	100

Author Field Survey 2019

The Table-3 described that 88.2% of the respondents are sleeping at night on the street, footpath, doorway, under-stairs and thatched roof whereas the minimum number of respondents i.e. 5% respondents are sleeping at the railway platform, 2% of respondents are sleeping inside the car/van, 0.50% respondents are in the friend house, 4% respondents are lives in a rented house, and 0.3% of the respondents live under the bridge/overpass. So the homeless people lack shelter related information.

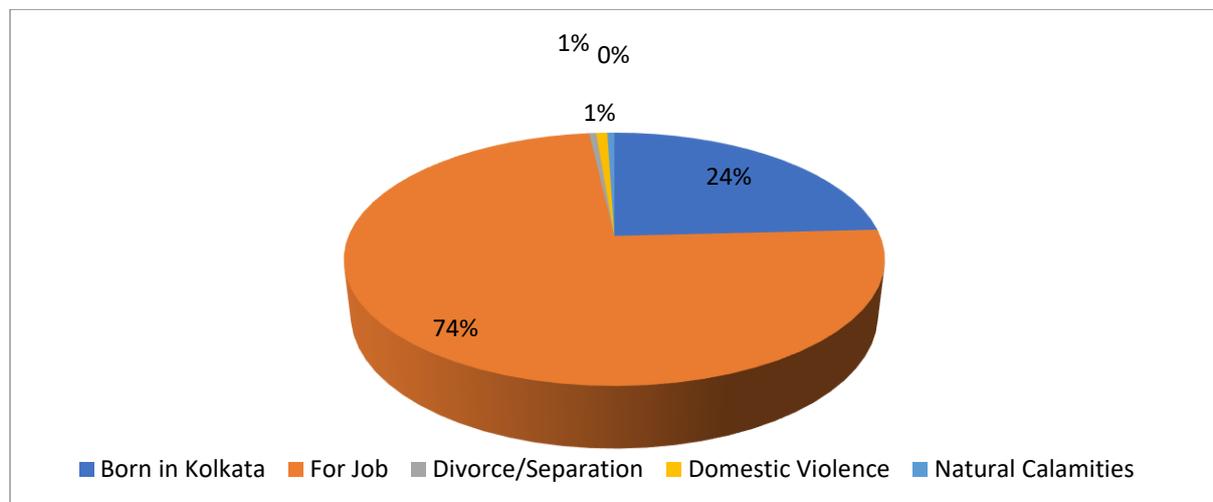


Figure-6: Causes of homelessness

The actual reason, becoming homeless is shown in Figure-6 that more than 70% of the homeless people immigrate to Kolkata for searching job and remain homeless, they want to earn money to support their families and live their life. So it's identified that the respondents need transparent information regarding the job.

Table 4: Year of living in Kolkata

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Less than one year	5	1.3	1.3	1.3
1-5 years	24	6.0	6.0	7.3
6-10 years	46	11.6	11.6	18.9
11-15 years	167	42.1	42.1	61.0
More than 15 years	155	39.0	39.0	100.0
Total	397	100.0	100.0	

Author Field Survey 2019

The respondent's status of living in Kolkata shows in Table-4 42.1% of respondents lived in Kolkata between 11-15years, and 39% of respondents live in there more than 15years. So it has been stated that most homeless people lack awareness about information such as shelter, job, education, ID proof, etc. So the awareness is being mandatory for the homeless people regarding the different parameters of better living, which help to bring them into mainstream society.

Table 5: Gender wise Services Availing

	Services Availing			Total
	Free Meals Receive	Free Street Showers	Free and Fresh Drinking Water	
Gender Male	168(42.32%)	55(13.85%)	29(7.3%)	252(63.47%)
Female	105(26.45%)	31(7.81%)	9(2.27%)	145(36.53%)
Total	273(68.77%)	86(21.66%)	38(9.57%)	397(100%)

Author Field Survey 2019

The table-5 indicates that more than 50% of male and female respondents receiving free meal service one time a week only Sunday. Different Ashram and Gurdwaras are organizing free meals program every day in the selected areas where ashrams reside. The percentage of street shower homeless people is minimum i.e. 21.66% respondents. There is the problem of drinking water, only the minimum i.e. 9.57% of respondents receiving fresh drinking water those who are residing beside railway junctions and institutions. Other homeless people have no other option; they as usual use municipality water which is not hygienic at par. In this case, they need an organized setup of a fresh & free water supply and sanitary system.

Table 6: Family Members wise Earning Members

		Earning Members					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
Family Member s	Less than 3	110(27.71%)	31(7.81%)	2(0.50%)	0	0	143(36.02%)
	4-6members	118(29.72%)	58(14.61%)	6(1.51%)	3(0.76%)	0	185(46.60%)
	7-9members	28(7.06%)	15(3.78%)	7(1.77%)	2(0.50%)	1(0.25%)	53(13.36%)
	10-12members	5(1.26%)	3(0.75%)	5(1.26%)	0	0	13(3.27%)
	More than 12	2(0.50%)	1(0.25%)	0	0	0	3(0.75%)
Total		263(66.25%)	108(27.20%)	20(5.04%)	5(1.26%)	1(0.25%)	397(100%)

Author Field Survey 2019

The household size and earning members of the homeless people are shown in the above table. It is a good sign that more than 80% of the respondent's household size belongs to less than three members and 4-6 members. The earning member of these household families is 1 and he/she only earning member of the 50% of households respondents. So it means that the livelihood of the respondents is very tough. In this case, the respondents need high earning related job for supporting their families. On the other side, 46.60% of respondent's family are between 4-6 members of each family, which means they need awareness program regarding birth control and education-related information.

Table 7: Identification Proof wise Received Government Schemes

		Receive Gov. Scheme			Total
		No Scheme	Only one Scheme	More than One Scheme	
Identification Proof	Ration Card	10(2.52%)	3(0.75%)	1(0.25%)	14(3.53%)
	Voter Card	3(0.76%)	1(0.25%)	0	4(1%)
	Aadhar Card	53(13.35%)	22(5.54%)	4(1%)	79(19.90%)
	Driving Licence	5(12.59%)	2(0.50%)	1(1%)	8(2%)
	Residential Certificate	4(1%)	0	0	4(1%)
	Multiple ID Card	134(34.51%)	47(11.84%)	27(6.80%)	208(52.39)
No ID Card		65(16.37%)	8(2%)	7(1.76%)	80(20.15%)
Total		274(69%)	83(20.91%)	40(10.07%)	397(100%)

Author Field Survey 2019

Nowadays ID proof is an important tool of every individual in everywhere when they want to do anything. Here 20% of the respondent they don't have any ID proof but some of them receive government scheme such as mid-day meal, 100day job scheme, etc. This study identified that around 52% of the respondent they have different ID proof in their native place but near about 30% respondent received government scheme. The result indicates that the respondents need information about different schemes those schemes are allocated to them.

FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES

Homeless people are socially, financially, mentally, politically, and environmentally more vulnerable even they are negligible from the mainstream society. The study identifies that the maximum number of homeless people belongs in the age group between 28-37 and 38-47 years and most of the earning members are in this age group.

The educational opportunity has not led to cover in the potential levels among the homeless people. The percentage of illiteracy homeless people is more than 56% (Table-1), as a result of that homeless people needs proper educational information.

The main occupation of the homeless people is as a rickshaw puller, daily labourer, vegetable vendors, rag picker, sweeper, coolie, maidservant, etc. they are coming from different places of India for finding job i.e. (74%) homeless people (Figure 6) and remain homeless. On the other side, most of the homeless people came to Kolkata for some un-situational reason such as domestic violence, divorce, separation, immigrants, separation from society, mental illness, alcoholism and survival from natural calamities (Figure 6).

The income level of the homeless people is also negligent whereas more than 50% of homeless people earned between Rs.3000-Rs.5000 and Rs.5000 above (Figure 4). So it is very tough for them to fulfill their basic needs and support their family by this minimum earning.

The study identifies that the maximum number of homeless people i.e., 88.2% (Table 3) are snooze at night on the street, footpath, thatched roof, under the bridge. So, the basic need of the homeless people is to avail minimum level of shelter, they also need food security, job security, government facilities, etc.

Vulnerable parameters of the homeless people and possible solutions:

	Vulnerable Condition	Possible Remedies	Action
Homeless People	Living Rough	Permanent Housing	Emergency Action
	Using alcohol/drug	Organizing awareness Program	Outdoor activities by information centre/public libraries
	Rag pickers, sweepers, a rickshaw puller, driver, coolie, etc.	Organizing a training program especially for them for a better job	The government should take initiatives
	Unable to access government facilities	Make easily accessible without any proof of existence.	The government system should be upgraded and make it easy.
	Harassment	The punishment was given to the victim	The government take necessary action about them and looks forward to

			the homeless people.
	Disease	A free health centers, hospital, the church is active on that demanding without address proof	Hospitals and other health centers should look after on it
	Food habits(unhygienic food)	Awareness programs organize food habits and give them food security.	The food distribution system should be flexible for all the needed people

CONCLUDING FRAMEWORK:

The purpose of this study is to investigate how homeless people are surviving their everyday life, what is the information need of homeless people and what type of facilities and services they need to bring themselves into mainstream society. In this connection, the public library may be able to develop a proposed framework (which is mentioned in the suggestion and recommendation part of this paper) to be aware of the different government schemes, facilities, and men to men helping systems.

The shelter is one of the basic needs of every inhabitant but homeless people are unable to avail those facilities which are allocated for them due to different reasons. Many of the respondents challenged by the theft of utensils, different diseases, they are often cheated and insulted by the authority where they work, apart from that female homeless people are bound to do the illegal work without their willingness. The homeless people including children's are often addicted by using drugs, alcohol, tobacco, gutkha, cigarette, dandruff, liquor and hence they fall into a serious disease. The government and the policymakers should critically examine the problem of homeless people and take necessary action to bring them into mainstream society to some extent.

SUGGESTIONS AND PUBLIC LIBRARY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Homeless people don't know the actual source of information meanwhile they are unaware of the information and other related facilities that are allocated to them. So the public library may be able to play an important role in providing the actual information to the homeless people regarding different information sources. The proposed public library recommendations are given below:

- ❖ Establishment and development of a regional information support centers to help the homeless people in emergency cases.
- ❖ Informing and involving Social Workers with legal regulations, training, and sufficient funds those are providing basic housing to the street people.
- ❖ Organizing 24 hours free healthcare service center to the street people.

- ❖ Provide emergency shelter accommodation to them, those who are feeling a living crisis.
- ❖ Time to time organize a pilot program with different activities for ending homelessness.
- ❖ Setting up a quick action advisory body those are fully engaged in helping the needy people.
- ❖ Set-up proper distribution policies of government schemes, which is help to direct distribution among the homeless people.
- ❖ Satisfactory cooperation between the stakeholders, organizer, and other participants for smoothly running out the activities.
- ❖ Organizing awareness program/extension services through audio-visual or over microphone regarding government facilities and other social activities such as education, job skills, political agenda, everyday news, about mainstream social life, etc.
- ❖ Organizing awareness program about person to person helping system which is help to the homeless people, when they fell into difficult situation.
- ❖ Providing educational related information to the homeless people as the homeless people are willingness to educate themselves to upgrade themselves to the mainstream society.

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