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Local council's response to street homelessness in Welkom

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CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS.

This chapter will attempt to define the problem of street homelessness within South Africa's socio-economic context, for the purpose of understanding its nature, and its root causes in Welkom. It will therefore look at the structural causes, and the characteristics of personal explanations of homelessness.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Who are the homeless people living and sleeping rough in public places? The literature review on the subject of homelessness has shown that no agreement exists on what constitutes homelessness. This has resulted in several definitions of homelessness, with a sub-category of street homelessness (the focus of this study) playing a dominant role in public perceptions, and defining homelessness (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*). Homeless street people are those people who hustle every day begging, sleeping, and living on the streets, for survival (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). A street person therefore, is that "dweller in the street that has not even a lair in the slums which they can call their own" (*Collins and Fisher, 1993, p. ix*).

'Street' in this regard, refers to open abodes used as 'homes' by the homeless people. These include places such as the pavements, streets, gutters, benches, railway stations, bus terminals, parks, and bridges (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994, Olufemi, 1997*). To protect themselves against the elements, the homeless street people use materials such as papers, cardboards and plastic sheets to wrap themselves in. Their lifestyle has become the culture of urban landscapes, that inspires neither public action nor empathy, but condemnation (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*).

Homelessness is considered as a continuum of a housing problem that characterizes some people, considered as literally roofless or houseless - without a place to lay their heads. These people include the regular street sleepers, the newly-arrived migrants, and the

victims of human and natural catastrophes (such as the tsunami of 2004, fire, floods, volcanic eruptions, landslides, domestic, and political violence, etc.) These people are defined as people without a voice, expression, dignity or self-determination in the decisions that affect them (*Bramley, 1988 cited in Olufemi, 1997, Liddiard and Hutson, 1994, Olufemi, 1998).*

The term 'homeless' simply means lack of a 'home'. A 'home' is defined as a socially constructed concept that is connected to family, e.g. parental, marital and ancestral homes with attributes such as warmth, comfort, stability, security, privacy and identity (*Olufemi, 2002*). Thus a 'home' has a more substantial meaning as compared to a 'house'. A 'house' is generally taken to be synonymous with a dwelling, or a physical structure, whereas a 'home' is not. A 'home' implies a set of social relations, or a set of activities within a physical structure, whereas a 'house' does not (Olufemi, 1997). Some homeless people perceive a house as a garrison or permanent structure, where one is sheltered from the elements, rodents, harassment and insecurity. It is a four walled-building with several rooms, including toilet, bath and kitchen (*Olufemi, 1997*). Thus the definition of 'houselessness' is fairly straightforward as it clearly means mere lack of physical shelter (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994, P.29).*

A 'home' however, is an ideological construction emanating from people's emotions in connection with the experience of their surroundings. Consequently, a 'home' cannot be adequately conceived in taxonomic generalization. Thus the homeless street people have, in this regard, a 'home', because the cultural environment in which they exist could be defined as 'home' (*Olufemi, 1997*). The homeless street people have a sense of a home, once accepted and adopted by the experienced 'street godfathers'. In this regard, the homeless street people may as well deny their state of homelessness (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*). This does not mean that they have a home in the strict sense of the term, because their home, is simply an ideological construct. The problem of an ideologically constructed home is that it reduces the meaning of a home to mere feelings and experiences, which works to alienate a home from other cognitive and intellectual attributes it constitutes (*Olufemi, 1997*).

A real home should therefore demonstrate a decent environment, within which humanity is celebrated. This definition is tantamount to what Glasser (*1994*) identified as adequate housing. Adequate housing should provide affordable shelter, with basic services, within a conducive environment. This includes not only protection from the elements, but also guarantees security from intruders, and availability of social and economic opportunities (*Turner 1988: 187 cited in Glasser, 1994*). In addition, adequate housing should provide security against the dangers of fire and structural collapse, and thereby offer the residents the joy of adequate space and a sense of privacy (*Glasser, 1994*). A home understood within this context would mean that homelessness is the climax of poor housing conditions that is characterized by a lack of emotional and physical well-being, warmth, comfort, stability, security, and identity. Homelessness perpetuates estranged social relations and an absence of control and privacy (*Austerberry and Watson, 1986 cited in Olufemi, 1997*).

If homelessness means the absence of the above-mentioned attributes, then, homelessness is the climax of a lifelong series of crises, mixed opportunities, and gradual disconnectedness from supportive relationships and institutions (*Bassuk, 1984 cited in Olufemi, 1997).* Homelessness is, therefore, an alienation from the society. It is simply a lack of belonging. This defines the homeless street people, as simply street sleepers or mobile squatters, without a home or house (*Abrams, 1966 cited in Olufemi, 1997*). They are literally roofless, without a roof above their heads (*UNCHS, 1996*) and as Robertson put it, these people exist at the mercy of God (*Robertson et al. 1984 cited in Olufemi, 1997).* They are seen as living a state referred to by many, as vagrancy and delinquency, which is a reflection of criminality; negativism; rejection; and exclusion (*Olufemi, 2002; Makumule, 1997).* Why do people become homeless? We investigate that, next.

THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

There are different reasons for people becoming homeless. In most cases, these people cannot afford payments for housing. People with little education; lack the capacity for skilled jobs that would earn them enough money. Consequently, without high income (or

any income at all), people drift into poverty. Poor people do not have the economic capacity to respond to escalated housing costs, despite the desire to own a home (*Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 1994*). Thus the problem of homelessness should be analyzed within the existing socio-economic and political frameworks because their perceptions influence its definition and explanation. Equally influenced by economic and political perceptions, is the kind of policy to implement, to alleviate the problem of both the defined and non-defined homeless population (*Austerberry and Watson, 1986 cited in Olufemi, 1997).*

Some people other than the poor are homeless. Violent homes pose high risks of physical and emotional; mental and spiritual violence, which could easily make their members homeless. Teenage runaways often find their abode on the streets. Criminals, the mentally deranged, illegal immigrants, and migrant workers, alcohol and drug addicts, and people with disabilities, who cannot work, may live on the streets. Hunger also causes people to wander from home, to look for food elsewhere; and in the process they may end up homeless. Whenever natural forces such as the tsunami of 2004 strike, there are thousands of people left homeless, and in need of emergency food, and shelter (*Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 1994*). Apparently, none of us is immune to socio-economic, political, or natural misfortune that could at any point in time declare its victims homeless. The fact that homelessness is caused by various factors, makes it quite apparent that homeless people and their state of homelessness cannot be defined in homogeneous terms (*Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 1994, Olufemi, 1997).*

Despite homelessness being pervasive, there are no statistics about homeless people. The absence of reliable statistics about the homeless people, and their situation of homelessness, makes it difficult to understand, define, interpret, and address the problem adequately and coherently. Nobody in South Africa seems to know the exact number of homeless people, their housing needs, nor the urgent response needed by the government to address the issue. Whatever the statistics, it remains a matter of estimations, because it is alleged that the homeless people are always in transit, with no fixed address, where one may contact them for census. The assumption that the nomadic life of the homeless people makes it impossible to establish their population is problematic, because it ignores

the reasons for their mobility. The problem is not peculiar to South Africa, but the whole world, since a few countries take census of their homeless people (*Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 1994, Liddiard and Hutson, 1994).*

Having discussed several causes for homelessness, I now venture to look at the most critical causes responsible for the phenomenon of homelessness in general, and street homelessness in particular. We have seen that the causes of homelessness are as varied as are the needs of the homeless street people. These causes range from the structural causes of the Apartheid legacy, through to post-apartheid uncoordinated planning, and lack of coherent socio-economic policies and programmes, housing and labour markets and the inefficient benefit system. These issues are closely linked with unrealistic and inequitable distribution of the national resources and wealth, which creates adverse consequences on street homelessness (*Olufemi, 1997*). Other causes are demographic changes, and personal behaviour, among others. We examine these causes in detail, next.

Apartheid and Post-apartheid Policies

The pattern of housing provision under colonial and Apartheid rule in South Africa, has contributed hugely to the current housing backlog in the country. The Apartheid legacy of separated economic policies, in collaboration with mass demolitions of slums, is the cause of South Africa's unattainable housing problems. The apartheid policy was characterized by limited affordable urban housing for the poor, and especially the Africans, who to date, have remained the most disadvantaged group of community (*Olufemi, 1997*), despite the Democratic government's commitment to deliver massive housing.

The mechanization of the white-owned farms, contributed to massive unemployment, underemployment, retrenchment, eradication of labour tenancy, and poverty (*Crankshaw and Hart, 1990).* Equally problematic, was the government's decision to embark on massive development of the homelands, e.g. the Transkei, Ciskei, Boputhatswana, etc. Consequently, the government relaxed to construct, and provide urban housing. These,

together with the selling of the public rental housing, contributed to the current chaotic housing situation in the country (*Watson and McCarthy, 1998*). Unfortunately, the Democratic government has not been able to escape the very Apartheid legacy of spatial segregation it sought to abolish. The national housing policy adopted, is the kind that furthers this legacy. Housing delivery occurs on serviced sites, provided on the periphery of the urban land that is unsuitable for socio-economic development, and sustainability (Huchzermeyer, 2001).

The current patterns of land acquisition, access to economic opportunities, social, health and recreational benefits remain informed by history. This is reflected in the absence of a formal and adequate programme to address rapid delivery of urban land, for housing. This has today, as in history, resulted in enormous land invasion, rapid mushrooming of informal settlements, and an increase in homelessness (*Berriford, 1998*). Lack of coordinated policies correlating with the reality on the ground, exacerbates the housing situation of the homeless street people in particular, and homelessness in general.

The National Housing Policy has nothing in it for street homelessness. There is no policy, or legislation directed towards the acknowledgement of the problem, and its interventions (*Olufemi, 1997*). The exclusion of the homeless street people from the 'officially' defined priority groups by the local authority for housing, is indeed problematic. Moreover, the right to the buy-housing-scheme that empowers the council tenants to purchase homes from the local authority (often at low prices) is equally problematic. Although the owner-occupation sector, has been growing steadily in South Africa, because of high entry costs, it is quite an unrealistic option for street people, who suffer massive joblessness (*Watson and McCarthy, 1998*). While we acknowledge the government's efforts towards the housing of homeless people, we regret that the housing delivery for the category of homeless street people (simply roofless), has been discriminative and marginal (*Hendler, 1988*).

It is clear that many aspects of the housing policy, have contributed to the pervasiveness of the problem of homelessness. The legislation and policy frameworks directed towards

the homeless people are normally repressive, as opposed to protective or supportive (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). The homeless people are referred to as a generation of vagrants and delinquents. As we may all know, vagrancy and delinquency are tantamount to criminal activities. This provides sufficient reasons for the authorities, to provide these people with housing opportunities, but to arrest them. In short, the authority has no time to waste with the welfare of the so-called 'lost generation' of homeless people. Thus, the government's response to the problem of homelessness, not only exacerbates it, but also reinforces negative values about the problem (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). The vilification the homeless people banishes the problem of homelessness into the oblivion. The end result of this is the postponement of housing provisioning for the homeless people. We examine the housing situation, next.

The Housing Situation in South Africa

The spectacle homelessness presents, is a clear indication that the housing market is incapable of providing adequate and appropriate housing at affordable prices, for homeless people (*Rossi, 1989 cited in Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*). Currently, South Africa is second after Hong Kong, with the highest rate of housing prices in the world, with an average housing price of R100, 000 (*Forum July 7, 2004*). Escalated housing prices, mortgage interests, coupled with lack of employment to provide the street people with income to compete on housing market, leaves them without any buying potential (*Lowry, 1991, Collins and Fisher, 1993).*

Turner argues that the gentrification, commodification, and landlordism of housing; inaccessible bank loans, and redlining of areas considered unproductive; and the escalated prices of the construction materials, are some of the obstacles for the developers to deliver housing. According to him, the delivered products become too expensive for the urban poor to afford (*Turner, 1986*). Hendler argues, in this regard, that the government's policy to deliver housing, through private developers, exacerbates the problem of affordability for the homeless people, who suffer massive unemployment (*Hendler, 1988*). This explains, why homelessness remains pervasive in South Africa in

general, and Welkom in particular (*Daily Sun September 3, 2004; Wright and Lam, 1987 and Marcuse, 1990 cited in Liddiard and Hutson, 1994).*

The concept of 'progressive realization' has failed because the capital subsidy, which was considered as the 'cornerstone' of the housing policy in South Africa, is conditional. Its disputed amount has continued the delays in the delivery of housing for the poor (*Huchzermeyer, 2001*). Moreover, the bank-government joint venture to provide the bank services for the low-income people through the mortgage loans, has been unsuccessful. The government's commitment to provide financial alternatives through the creation of the National Housing Financial Corporation (NHFC), has not served the interests of the poor (*Huchzermeyer, 2001, Watson and McCarthy, 1998*).

Difficulties in accessing grants or loans by the homeless street people, means that they cannot afford accommodation, nor take up tenancy, because the landlords, who are profit-oriented, cannot render them housing services without a deposit, or advanced rental payments that may cost up to R600. Even if the deposit could be reduced to R300, the amount is still unaffordable, because even if one is hired to offer casual labour, it could take him about 6 weeks to raise R300. Furthermore, the government's use of private developers to provide housing; delivery of inadequate and unaffordable products on the urban periphery; clearance of 'unwanted' informal settlements, (e.g. Thembelihle west of Johannesburg), all highlight the government's failure to address the housing problem coherently, and in a coordinated manner (*Drakakis, 1988*).

South Africa's dramatic decline in housing stock owned by the local authorities in the recent years is, directly linked with the right to 'buy' legislation. Coupled with this, is the 'unfunded mandate'. Thus, the local authority finds it even more difficult, not only to replace the lost housing stock, but also to manage regular housing repairs and maintenance of the limited stock available (*Tomlinson, 1999*). The substantial decline in both private and rental accommodation, the dramatic growth in owner-occupation, coupled with the lack of affordable housing, has led to the high demand, and prices for

the limited housing facilities, and rental-housing stock available (*Watson and McCarthy, 1998 and Lowry, 1991).*

Lack of partnerships, empowerment and the participation of the residents in local affairs of development, continues to deny them the opportunity to influence their housing needs and priorities (*Turner, 1986*). The result of this denial is the aggravation of poor service delivery, which delays the process of housing delivery, delivers housing products on the urban periphery, or denies the poor the right to adequate housing altogether. The provision of land and tenure on the periphery of the urban areas remains the major constraint to the development and provision of adequate housing for the urban poor. The lack of capacity by the housing and policy adjustments has restricted the delivery process to technical terms, which consequently, neglects the political contributions entirely (*Huchzermeyer, 2001*).

The acuteness of the problem requires government's intervention to facilitate housing supplies and improve housing facilities *(Hardiman and Midgely, 1982)*. However, problems like the comparative claims of socio-economic and political objectives within national urbanization policies, and the claim that the developing countries are too poor to invest in housing (among other political philosophies), has negative implications for the State's provision of equality and efficiency *(Drakakis-Smith, 1988).* Although the housing situation in South Africa is different, in that the government has remained the main provider of housing, the problem of exclusive zoning has remained unresolved. Despite massive foreign and local investments in housing, major developments seem to occur almost exclusively in elite areas.

Equally problematic, is the belief by the developing nations such as South Africa, in private markets as well as Western ideas about housing and town planning, despite their unsuitability for local housing needs. The Aden legislation of 1948 that exported British colonial housing policies that dictate the nature among other externalities of housing, is such example (*Dwyer 1975 cited in Drakakis, 1988*). Although it is true that the Western housing policies and ideas promote high-rise building (skyscrapers), it would be unfair to

generalize the Western housing policies and ideas as homogeneously antisocial and unaffordable for the poor. The truth is that some of these housing policies are good and worth acknowledgement, because they encourage social and communal housing. Their importation into the Third world's housing policies would bear, I believe, positive implications.

Unfortunately, the developing nations have always opted for those Western housing policies which entrench high-rise buildings (skyscrapers). The problem with these policies resides in their restrictions of the construction of affordable residential housing, hiking up building costs and preventing the poor (or those with limited resources), to construct new homes (*Abrams 1966 cited in Drakakis, 1988).* In short, these factors do not promote the interests of the urban poor, because enormous capital is required, which causes financial burdens to the families affected (*Drakakis, 1988*). Without any source of income, these people automatically assume a state of homelessness. Let us now turn to examine the impact of labour market on housing provision for the urban poor, such as the homeless.

Labour Market

The issue of unemployment in South Africa is quite problematic, to the detriment of the unemployed and their dependents that live in abject poverty. It was estimated that 45 percent of economically active South Africans were, unemployed in 1990. This picture would improve by 20 percent, if those employed in the informal sector would be considered as people in employment. This would then leave the problem of unemployment with only 25 percent. The glamourization of the informal sector however, viewed as the alternative to the problem of unemployment, does not provide the solution, apart from the 'safety net' it offers to enable the unemployed to survive (*Cawker, 1991*). Welkom City with its homeless street people epitomizes this situation.

All homeless street adults in Welkom City represent semi-skilled and unskilled manual labour. Some of them worked for the mining industry that dominates the economy of this

city. However, given its dwindling future, other areas such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services are being explored. Unfortunately, precious mining skills have proved invaluable in other labour sectors, outside the mining industry. Hence the lack of employment, and financial support, simply means that the homeless street people cannot afford the acquisition of new skills necessary for economic advancement. Consequently, the homeless people have either little, or nothing to afford them a decent standard of living, because they cannot provide for their simple basic needs (*Boyden and Holden, 1991).* The end result is always a vicious cycle of 'no home, no job, no home'

Population increase exacerbates the unemployment problem in terms of the demand-supply equilibrium (*Cawker, 1991*). The poor people migrate from rural areas to towns and cities, hoping for a better life, buttressed with economic independence, educational and medical facilities, transport and recreational services. Unfortunately, when the population increases, everything else becomes affected either directly or indirectly, and the labour market is a sector that is directly affected. When labour floods the market, competition for jobs is heightened and wages drop, as a result of available cheap labour (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). Equally problematic, is the amount of pressure exacerted on already dwindling housing, infrastructure facilities, and employment opportunities. Assume that formal housing facilities were available to accommodate all migrants seeking jobs in cities. Would the unemployed still be accommodated? I doubt so, because the unemployed can hardly meet rental requirements. Hence the issue of affordability remains problematic (*Cawker, 1991*).

The dramatic increase in the labour supply, without corresponding employment opportunities, coupled with restricted industrial manufacturing and formal sector employment, all contribute to urban poverty. The migrants, and especially the poor, unskilled and homeless, live under unbearable conditions one would describe as brutal to humanity. Their work is intermittent, as it is dependent upon contracting companies, which work for profits. When work is available, these people experience backbreaking labour, characterized by long hours of toiling, because the labour laws and policies that regulate time and wages do not consider this class of labour (*Risjord, 1979*). Where it

does, it does so, ineffectively, because the mechanisms to enforce the law are weak. Sooner or later, people discover that the so-called, haven of all success, is a life of drudgery, poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and vulnerability (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). Due to a failure to secure employment, fear of the rural poverty, hiked urban rental facilities, and no social, or financial support, many of these people drift into homelessness *(www.unhabitat.org, 2003*).

According to Margaret Thatcher, people become homeless out of their own choice. The problem of homelessness would not arise, if people did not migrate from their homes to urban areas. While migration might be responsible for high urban population, it cannot be assumed that cessation of migration would resolve the problem of homelessness. Moreover, not all migrants are poor, unskilled, unemployed and therefore, homeless. Some people migrate because they have secured employment in towns and cities. This group of migrants is assured of housing facilities, among other benefits. Thus, it would be erroneous to define migrants as homogenous. However, it is important to understand that although demographic growth may exacerbate the problem of homelessness, reasons other than this (as already discussed) cause homelessness (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). Not all people choose to be homeless. While some may voluntarily become homeless, others become homeless because of poverty and unemployment. Coupled with little adequate and affordable housing, these people cannot meet their housing needs (*Lowry 1991*).

The problems of street homelessness and housing crisis of the homeless street people do not end with the structures of housing market, or personal behaviour. Rather, the problem is very much vested in their weak economic status. “Most housing problems are really problems of unemployment, poverty and inequality” which are considered to be integral aspects of homelessness and housing problems (*Donnison, 1980, p. 283 cited in Liddiard and Hutson, 1994).* Poverty is considered as both the cause and effect of street homelessness, and the marginalization of its victims. Poverty with its roots in structural factors of economic, social, cultural and political policies, and the lack of basic needs

such as food, housing, employment, education, property, clothing, security, privacy and opportunities to manage one's affairs, are the cause of homelessness (*Olufemi, 1997*).

The Benefit System

It is amazing that a country like South Africa, with its well-developed welfare system has people, still experiencing social, economic and political marginalization. Take for instance, the benefit system. Apparently, the system using its pension grants is designed to benefit only those, who enjoy the luxury of housing rights. Worse still, welfare benefits are measured and rationed. The rationalization of welfare, among other benefits, leaves the system with limited resources to guarantee equitable and efficient distribution. Despite the vulnerability, and the deserving nature of the homeless street people, they are hardly part of the beneficiaries of these minimal resources. Accessibility of welfare benefits by the urban poor would assist them with rental facilities, among other needs.

Some may argue, (and rightly so) that street children have access to the benefit system through the children's grant. While we acknowledge this fact, the truth of the matter remains that given their pupilage stage, street children have no direct right to these benefits. This leaves not the children, but parents, guardians or institutions, with the right to control these benefits. The problem with these arrangements, is the exploitation of the deserving beneficiaries by some parents, guardians or institutions. Equally problematic, is the uneven distribution of resources in Welkom City, be it by class or age. The cause of the exploitation of the deserving beneficiaries and uneven distribution of resources remains unclear. The obvious fact is that the beneficiaries are denied their right of access to welfare benefits. This leaves children (for example), without financial support to provide them with basic necessities. Consequently, they drift into the streets to fend for their survival. Since the streets are not homes, these people become homeless, living in abject poverty.

Lack of coordination amongst various government agencies, are responsible for discriminative programmes of social policy, physical planning, and service allocation

outside the housing framework of the homeless street people (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). State services for the vulnerable groups, target only abandoned infants and children in institutions such as Virginia Angel of Mercy and House of Hope; and Morning Star, which caters to HIV/AIDS orphans, among others. The common denominator among all these services, is the infants and children with special needs as the target. The older, needy children are left to fend for themselves. Consequently, they end up on the streets. Those who are institutionalized, also drift into homelessness, because they can tolerate neither their adoptive families, nor strict institutional care (*Boyden and Holden, 1991*). Even if they tolerated institutional rules, institutions have age limits beyond which those people legally cease to be their clients. The release of people by institutions without employment to provide them with financial security, a relative or friend to depend upon, or a home to provide them with necessary protection; for them the streets remain the only option. While it could be true that some people may voluntarily become homeless, it is critical that we do not become judgmental, by assuming that all homeless people are homeless circumstantially, but voluntarily.

The absence of an equitable distribution of state welfare benefits, coupled with the high rate of unemployment, implies that 'the urban poor must either create their own jobs, or work under contractual arrangements, to sustain themselves financially. Unfortunately, contractual arrangements offer no long-term security, or social benefits. Moreover, the street work, which serves as the source of income for the urban poor, is highly competitive and volatile, with neither capital nor access to credit (*Boyden and Holden, 1991, p. 7).* It becomes obvious that poor people without employment and social security cannot afford the exorbitant prices required, for either buying, or renting facilities. This leaves these people no alternative, but to drift into homelessness on the streets.

We can conclude that the explanation of street homelessness within the context of housing and labour markets and the benefit system is structural. However, reasons other than the structural, such as personal behaviour, pathology, and individual culpability (among others), are also thought to cause street homelessness. The remaining part of this chapter will therefore explore some of these characteristics, namely, individual

culpability, pathological and political models, as some of the causes of homelessness, outside structural issues.

THE PERSONAL EXPLANATION OF HOMELESSNESS

Individual Culpability

There is a widespread perception that homelessness is a matter of choice. This theory views homeless people as the cause of their housing situation. The problem of street homelessness has nothing to do with society, but the behaviour of the victims themselves, expressed in their acts of migration, drug addiction, crime, etc. Homeless people are themselves to blame for their state of homelessness, because it is their constitutional right to make an informed and responsible decision to live anywhere. The choice therefore to lead a precarious life of homelessness is irresponsible, and a violation of one's own constitutional right to live responsibly. Hence, nobody is to blame, but the decision-makers, whose wrong decisions land them in homelessness (*Makumule, 1997*).

This theory played a central theme during the 1980's and 1990's, when the government of the United Kingdom argued against rural-urban migration of its citizens. The Conservative government explained street homelessness in terms of individual behaviour of the homeless people, themselves. The underlying message is that if homelessness is as a result of homeless people's own conduct then, the government has no the obligation in providing them with solutions. Margaret Thatcher, a former United Kingdom Prime Minister, argued that it was not the government's responsibility to provide alternative accommodation for some people, whatever their number, who choose voluntarily to leave their homes. The obvious political solution, therefore, remains that these people should return home voluntarily *(Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*).

This is not new in the public domain. A local resident of Welkom, and government official, argued that homelessness is a matter of one's choice. According to this official, people become homeless because they want to. They don't want to do anything apart

from looking for free-money. These people are not ready to work towards legitimate earnings. When given RDP houses they end up selling them for cheap; only to become street dwellers, where they seek public mercy (*Field study, 2004*). Thus, the homeless people do not want to help themselves by looking for either employment, or housing opportunities (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*). Blame can as well be shifted from the individually based model of the homeless person's conduct, to the individual families of the homeless people. Nicholas Ridley amplifies this point, when he said that the causes of homelessness are fundamentally social; arising from changing values, expectations, and the loosening of family ties" (*cited in Liddiard and Hutson, 1994, p.156).*

Clearly, Thatcher's application of an individually culpable model, in defining and interpreting homelessness, indeed removes the structural interpretation from the picture. This consequently, absolves a particular government, and / or the community of the responsibility to provide solutions to the problem. 'Blame the victim' syndrome, shifts the responsibility from society, to the individual behaviour of the victims, and their respective families, whom society holds responsible for the alleviation of the problem. As Lowry (*1991*) put it, the principle of 'blame it all on the victim', runs the risk of individualizing and personalizing the problem, rather than resolving it.

Unfortunately, such individually adopted models of explaining a social problem such as homelessness, has disastrous effects, projected into the labour market. Some school of thought has it that homeless people do not want to work and improve their lot, and therefore, none, but themselves are to blame for their precarious state of existence. Anthony Beaumont-Dark further amplifies this viewpoint, when he said more succinctly, that the government is not to blame for the deprivations of the homeless people. Rather, it is the homeless people themselves to blame for their state of depravity, because of their unpreparedness to work, or to thrive (*cited in Liddiard and Hutson 1994*).

It is imperative that we understand how personal behaviour, can contribute ultimately to the enormous problem of homelessness, or how it can affect their housing opportunities. Otherwise, blame it all on the victim's behaviour, may diminish the seriousness of the

problem, and the application of strategic interventions required at the moment (*Lowry 1991*). 'Blame the victim' syndrome is the common ailment of our times. McCormack put it most succinctly: 'blame the victim syndrome is the most serious disease we know' (*cited in Lowry, 1991, p.12*). Surely nobody in their sound mind, can choose to surrender the benefits housing offers, namely, warmth; privacy; health; security; dignity; ownership; control; and pride of which the homeless people are aware of, in favour of undignified state of homelessness. This awareness, is expressed more explicitly, as follows: "what is it like to suffer even from simple diarrhea when there are no public toilets…what is it like to recover from an amputation while struggling with alcoholism and diabetes when there isn't even a place to store one's insulin, much less a source of a diabetic diet" *(Lowry, 1991: 8)?* Thus, the problems of homelessness are too obvious, and indeed, problematic for the victims to embrace them.

From this perspective, therefore, to acknowledge street homelessness as autonomous with a life of independence by street people (*Liddiard and Hutson 1994*), indeed, distorts the meaning of homelessness, limits its consequences, and undermines the effort to address it. It is no wonder that the campaigns and crusades against homelessness have degenerated into "an obsession with individual behaviour" (*Lowry, 1991:12*). The problem with the 'blame the victim' principle is its individualization of the issue. Equally problematic, is its failure to acknowledge the constraints imposed by structural factors on individual behaviour and opportunities. Moreover, it stereotypes, labels and marginalizes the victim. Moreover, it carries with it a punitive emphasis such as vagrancy, which warrants arrest. These people need neither blame, nor special treatment. What they urgently need is not mercy, but respect for their right to housing. We discuss the political model, next.

The Political Model

The political model seems to agree with the structural interpretation of homelessness. The problem of homelessness is generally viewed from societal structures, rather than from the personal behaviour. Without doubt, the housing and labour markets are important

factors in the interpretation of homelessness. This model, interprets homelessness in the light of the individual culpability, e.g. migration, insofar as it precipitates the vulnerability of the homeless people. In this regard, the political model, disputes the perception that the individual culpability of the homeless people is responsible for their homelessness. Such perception is, according to this model, shifting the problem from the structural causes and blaming it all, on the victim (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*).

However, it would be equally problematic, and indeed, unrealistic, to absolve the homeless people of the blame of their homeless situation, and blame it all, on the societal structures. Unless a detailed analysis concerning the characteristics of the homeless people is compiled, a shift of the blame from individual culpability, to the structures of society, might be a simplistic argument to provide any practical and appropriate solution to homelessness. Moreover, this model tends to view the victims of homelessness as a powerless human product of structural causes. The danger of this viewpoint is the draconian control it imposes on the homeless people, whose autonomy is undermined. In the long run, such a perspective is debilitating, since the victim is essentially a powerless object of circumstances, and not of its own subject (*Doogan, 1988 p. 114 cited in Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*). We discuss the position of the pathological model, next.

The Pathological Model

The pathological model, views homeless people as socially inadequate, maladjusted and psychologically disturbed (*Brandon et al. 1980 cited in Makumule, 1997*). It considers homeless people to be unemployable and unhousable, rather than unemployed and unhoused. This model, like the individual culpability model, perceives homelessness in the light of the behaviour of the homeless people (*Johnson et al. 1991 cited in Makumule, 1997).* The difference, however, between the two models, is that while individual culpability apportions the victim the blame, the pathological model does not. The pathological model, therefore, views the individual conduct of the homeless person as a reflection of their pathologies, precipitated not only by societal structures, but also by factors such as mental illness, drug abuse and crime. Thus, the pathological model,

argues against the view that the problem of homelessness starts with people's behaviour. According to this model, neither the homeless people, nor their behaviour, have anything to do with their housing situation. Rather, that these people have problems responsible for their housing situation (*Liddiard and Hutson, 1994*).

Although the pathological model acknowledges the implications of the structures created by the society that characterize the lack of affordable housing, unemployment, and inequitable distribution of national wealth, its assumption that street homeless people have special needs that require special treatment and support, exacerbates their stigmatization. The danger with this kind of assumption is the general false image it creates about the homeless street people. The fact that the homeless people cannot be defined homogeneously is evidence enough, against the generalization of their treatment as pathologically in need of special treatment. While it might be true that some have pathological problems, it is equally true, that others have no such problems' except unemployment, which prevents them from having financial security as well as affordable housing facilities (*Liddiard and Hutson 1994 cited in Makumule, 1997, Lowry, 1991).* Equally problematic, is the general explanation of mental illness in terms of personal behaviour.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the definitions, the structural and theoretical causes of homelessness. Despite remarkable disagreement on the nature of homelessness that dominates the public views, definitions pointed to homelessness as a lack of adequate housing. The distinction between a home and house, and a clear meaning of adequate housing, were discussed. A structural cause of homelessness that characterizes a lack of employment, available and affordable housing, and adequate benefits, or benefits as such, was discussed. Other causes discussed included, individual culpability; pathological and political models; demographic changes, and unrealistic economic policies that replicate Apartheid legacy. During the discussion, homelessness was discovered to be a global urban phenomenon that has been in existence throughout human history. Although the

developing nations presented a spectacle of a huge population of street homelessness, it became clear that the developed world was not different. The street people tend to congregate around the cities. The existence of homeless people on the periphery of the formal labour market and their persistent nomadic life, disconnect them from society, State welfare, and basic services available. The chapter concluded on a serious note, that homelessness continued unabated, would exacerbate its uncontrolled pervasiveness.