

UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS: INSIGHTS FROM LAGOS METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the causes of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, with a view to providing evidence-based policy insights that can inform inclusive urban policy and planning interventions. Data were sourced from both the homeless persons and residents living within a 500-metre radius of identified homeless clusters. Convenience sampling was employed to select 188 homeless persons across major markets, motor parks, beaches and transport terminals in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs). On the other hand, systematic sampling was adopted to select 144 residents, drawing from 10% of buildings within the 500-meter radius of each identified homeless clusters. Primary data were collected through questionnaire administration, while secondary data on, number of buildings and maps were obtained from GIS and Cooperative Information Network. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and narrative analysis techniques. Findings revealed that 36.7% of the sampled homeless person identified unemployment as the primary cause of their homelessness. From the residents' perspectives, 78.9% of the residents attributed homelessness mainly to poverty. The study concluded that the occurrence of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis cannot be attributed to a single factor, it is driven by a combination socio-economic, psycho-social and structural factors. Therefore, addressing homelessness in Lagos demands holistic strategies that extends beyond provision of immediate shelter but also tackle the systemic inequalities and social determinants that perpetuate housing instability.

Keywords: Homelessness, Causes, Homeless Persons, Residents, Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, homelessness represents a critical and growing urban challenge (1). It is a phenomenon that reflects deep-rooted structural issues within cities and societies. More often than not, it is associated with housing deprivation, however, the phenomenon encompasses a broader set of social, economic, and policy-related dimensions (2). In many developing nations, including Nigeria, rapid urban expansion has intensified the pressures on infrastructure, social services, and affordable housing, thus creating conditions where homelessness flourishes (3). The concept of homelessness transcends the absence of a physical dwelling. Although, various definitions of homelessness exist, however, these definitions also highlight the intersection of homelessness with issues of marginalization, social exclusion, and inadequate policy response. (4) avers that it refers

to a situation where individuals or families lack permanent, safe, and dignified accommodation. (5) noted that it represents a situation where people may live in informal settlements, overcrowded or substandard structures, on the streets, or in temporary shelters. As stated by (6), it is a situation where an individual, group of individuals or family resort to living under the bridge, in abandoned or dilapidated buildings, public places, motor parks and other make-shift apartments not owned by them and not originally designed and fit for human habitation. The inability to meet rising housing demands, combined with poverty, unemployment, rural-urban migration, and insufficient urban planning, has pushed many into unstable living conditions.

In Nigeria, particularly Lagos Metropolis, the prevalence of homelessness is alarming (7). Lagos, a major economic hub faces acute housing shortages and high living costs, which have led to the proliferation of informal dwellings and the occupation of public spaces by displaced populations. The displaced often rely on informal income-generating activities such as street trading, waste collection, cart pushing and prostitution, among others to survive. These living conditions not only expose them to health and safety risks but also strain public infrastructure and services. Despite the prevalence of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, the issue remains inadequately addressed in urban policy and planning frameworks. Furthermore, insufficient data, lack of targeted social protection, and ineffective housing policies also contribute to the persistence of the phenomenon. While in recent years, some governmental and non-governmental efforts have sought to provide temporary relief in form of emergency shelters and housing schemes, however, these responses often lack long-term sustainability and inclusivity. Furthermore, the voices and lived experiences of homeless individuals are frequently missing in policy dialogues, resulting in interventions that fail to address root causes.

Understanding homelessness in Lagos Metropolis and Nigeria at large requires a nuanced and multidimensional approach that extends beyond the absence of shelter. Specifically, there is the need to examine the economic, institutional, and structural barriers that perpetuate it. Accordingly, this study explores the underlying causes of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria, with the aim of providing evidence-based responses that can inform inclusive urban policy and planning interventions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Causes of Homelessness

According to the (8), the causes of homelessness across the globe are as a result of multiple and diverse factors. These factors include institutional failings, systemic flaws, structural factors, personal situations or a combination of these. Similarly, (9) also noted poverty, shortage of affordable housing, forced eviction, unemployment & underemployment and disaster as some of the causes of homelessness. Others include mental disorder, domestic violence and health difficulties. Each of the identified causes are briefly discussed below.

Poverty: in most emerging countries of the world, poverty is perhaps the most contributing factor to homelessness. (9) noted that people become impoverished as a result of falling employment prospects, reduction of wages for lower-level workers as well as declining social benefits and financing for rental housing. The state of poverty is a result of a lack of access to basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter, which is exacerbated by a sense of helplessness, vulnerability, and powerlessness.

Shortage of Affordable Housing: it is important to note that as cities witness urban growth, availability of affordable housing does not keep pace. This is particularly true in nations such as India, Russia, U.S.A, and particularly Nigeria where the rate of population increase in urban centers has surpassed the supply of housing (10, 11). Affordability extends beyond rent to living expenses such as those for utilities, energy use, transportation and security. For instance, despite recent efforts to raise the minimum wage, few families and individuals in Nigeria are able to afford moderate housing on a full minimum wage. The irony is that, even with the minimum wage, the wages/salaries are not enough to take home.

Forced Eviction: forced evictions may occur for many reasons. These include failure to pay rent, illegal occupancy and activity, destruction of property, lease violation and expiration. Due to one or a combination of the aforementioned factors, it is possible for persons who are typically sheltered to experience homelessness for a period of time. People such as tenants and family members whose access to housing depends on their relationship with the house owner are those mostly at risk of eviction. In some cases, however, there are forced evictions where a group of people or community or tribe are violently evicted and relocated to another place (12). In some others, people are forcibly evicted without alternative relocation. A typical example is the case of Takwa Bay and other Island Community Residents in Lagos that were forcefully evicted (13). Of course, not every eviction leads to homelessness, and not every evicted individual ends up on the streets or temporary shelters. People with access to alternative options, emergency savings or relatives who can help during this transition may not experience homelessness.

Unemployment and Underemployment: this also account greatly for the spate of homelessness across the world. It has led to a large number of people becoming homeless in recent times. It is another major reason for homelessness across the world. While people may be employed, their income may not be adequate to afford decent and adequate housing, more or less allowing the accumulation of savings. Thus, allowing people to live from pay-check to pay-check (14). In some cases, when an individual is unemployed, certain basic needs cannot be met and the most obvious is the affordability of adequate housing.

Disaster: the occurrence of disaster in different nations of the world is another major cause of homelessness. Some developing countries have been impacted greatly by severe environmental disasters such as floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and the effects of climate change than other countries, causing the displacement of people as well as the destruction of homes and loss of life. Wars and political upheaval in many

parts of the world are destroying both cities and rural communities, thus rendering countless people homeless. According to (15), about sixty million people are displaced globally. In Nigeria, the acts of the Boko Haram insurgency have resulted in over 650,000 Nigerians fleeing their homes and becoming internally displaced, with an additional 70,000 now living as refugees in neighbouring countries (16).

Mental Illness: this is also another contributing factor to homelessness. The society at large does not fully understand the construct of mental health. More so, it has been reported by (17) that the institution to handle mental health challenges is inadequate and unsupported by the government and private sector. Furthermore, the difficulty of accessing regular health care, the prevalence of cycle triggers, and the increased difficulty of maintaining stable employment while experiencing an episode makes people with mental illnesses vulnerable to chronic homelessness (18). Therefore, individuals with mental illness are left homeless and uncared for on the streets. What makes this situation more complicated is the introduction of synthetic drugs and the unpreparedness of political leaders to deal with the adverse effects of increased drug use among the young population (19).

Domestic Violence: in recent times, domestic violence has accounted greatly for the spate of homelessness around the world. Domestic violence comes in many forms from and to people. It can be physical, psychological, sexual, and also verbal. Considerable evidence suggests that domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness, particularly among women (20, 21). Women with no other means of support than their abusive spouses are often forced to choose between abuse or homelessness (22, 23). Although, leaving the home to avoid domestic violence is a solution to one problem, however, the lack of employment and affordable housing subsequently results in a state of vulnerability and victimization (24). In addition, (25) reiterated that the majority of women living on the streets might have at some point in their lives experienced domestic, sexual or physical violence, and while living rough, there is the likelihood the experience will repeat itself.

Health Crisis: homelessness can be life-threatening. This is because living on the streets hastens the decline of one's health as well as increase in hospitalization and in some cases death. (26) established that regardless of borders, cultures and geography, a chronically homeless individual has a higher chance to die than their housed counterparts. (27), affirms that life on the streets makes the healthy become sick and the sick become sicker.

Thus, the adverse effects of homelessness on both mental as well as physical health have shown that it can trigger relapses in detrimental behaviour, such as substance use and abuse.

From the foregoing, it is evident that homelessness is caused by varying factors. While many of the identified causes have been documented in both the global north and global south, their manifestations and impacts are often shaped by socio-political realities. Therefore, this study examines the extent to which the incidence of homelessness in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria is occasioned by these identified factors.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. The study area is situated between latitude $6^{\circ} 22'$ and $6^{\circ} 52'$ N and longitude $2^{\circ} 42'$ and $3^{\circ} 42'$ E. Making up Lagos Metropolis is 16 of the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Lagos State. It is bordered in the Northern and Eastern regions by Ogun State, in the West by the Republic of Benin, and in the south by the Atlantic coastline (Figure 1). The metropolis is witnessing increase in population and development possibilities, accompanied by physical and political expansion. All of which have brought about several challenges of various forms and varying levels. One of these problems is the shortage of adequate and affordable housing. As noted by (28), the influx of people into cities particularly Lagos in search of “greener pasture”, without assurance of where to live also accounts greatly for the spread of homelessness.

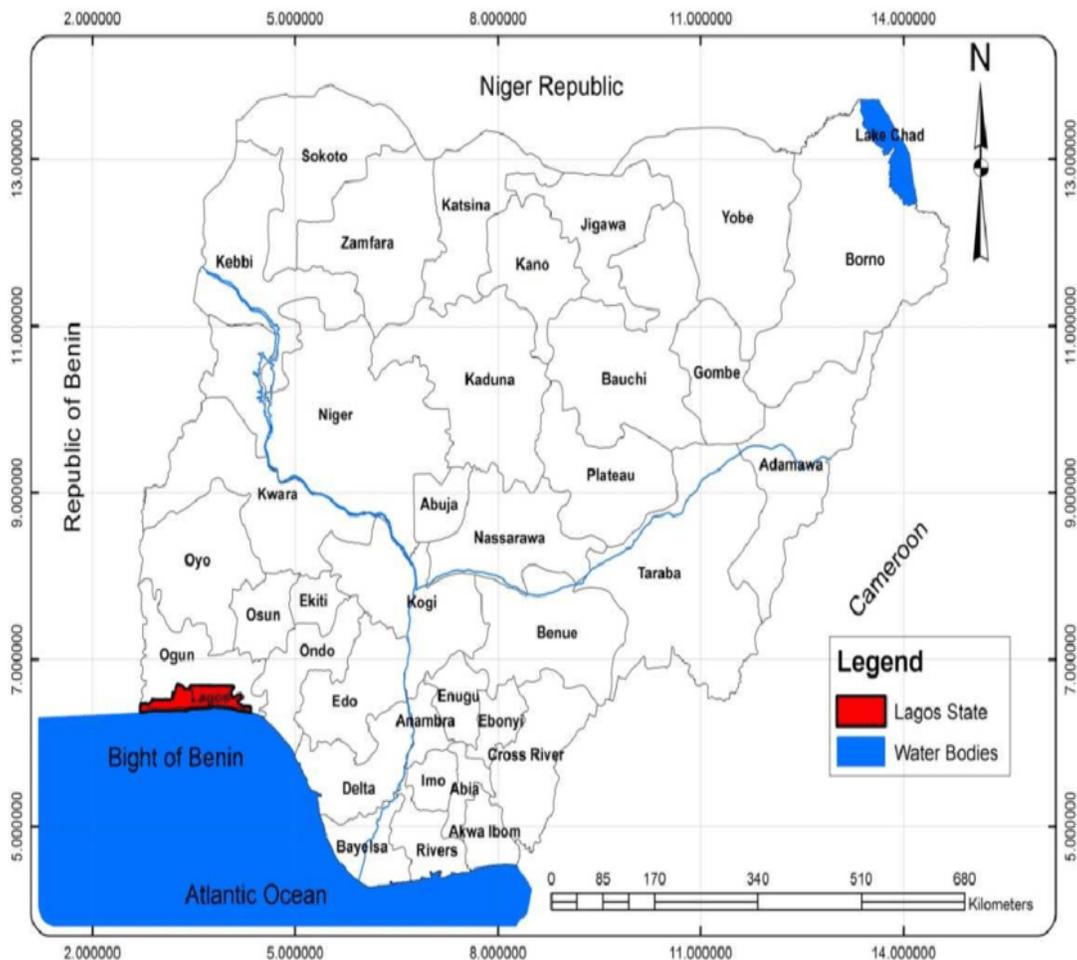


Figure 1: Lagos State in the context of Nigeria

Source: Cooperative Information Network (COPINE) (2024)

The research adopted the mixed-method approach comprising both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Information for the study were derived through a reconnaissance survey, participants' observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaire administration. The study population comprised of both the homeless persons and residents in close proximity to homeless clusters in the study area. Convenience sampling was adopted to select the homeless. With this method, homeless people were conveniently selected in major markets, motor parks, beaches and transport terminals in each of the selected LGAs. Sampled homeless persons provided much needed assistance in reaching people who were either hidden or hard to contact. The saturation point for this study was simply when there was no new information to be obtained. Using this procedure, 188 homeless persons were sampled.

To select the residents for the study, systematic sampling was adopted. Residents living within a 500m radius of the identified homeless clusters were sampled. In doing this, estimates of buildings were obtained through counting using GIS and ground trudging (see Table 1). A resident was selected in every 10th building of identified homeless clusters. In each of the selected buildings, a questionnaire was administered to a household head. A total of 144 residents were sampled. Data for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and narrative analysis.

Table 1: Estimated number of buildings in selected clusters

Densities	Selected LGAs	Selected Clusters	Estimated Number of Buildings
Low	Ojo	Iyana-Iba Motor Park	140 (14)
Medium	Ikeja	Ikeja Flyover	160 (16)
	Alimosho	Iyana-Ipaja Market	190 (19)
		Iyana-Ipaja Motor Park	145 (15)
		Iyana-Ipaja BRT Terminal	220 (22)
High	Lagos Island	Idumota Market	180 (18)
		Obalende Motor Park	142 (15)
	Mushin	Mushin Market	180 (18)
	Oshodi-Isolo	Oshodi Pedestrian Bridge	70 (7)
Total	6	9	1,427 (144)

4. RESULTS

Discussed in this section are causes of homelessness in Lagos from homeless people's perspectives and residents' standpoints. By examining these causes, policymakers and other stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and policies aimed at preventing and alleviating homelessness in Lagos, and by extension, Nigerian cities, thereby improving the well-being and stability of affected individuals and communities (29, 30, 31, 32, 33).

There is a consensus of opinion in the literature (34, 35, 36, 37) that the phenomenon of homelessness has multiple and interdependent causes, but are often related to structural, relationships, personal and institutional; including but not limited to rural-urban migration,

forced eviction, poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, substance abuse, mental health, physical and emotional abuse, economic disparities, and rising rent values. Therefore, in order to validate the causes identified in the literature, identified homeless persons were asked about their causes of their homelessness. Also, residents living in close proximity were asked to give their opinion about the possible causes of homelessness.

Causes of Homelessness: Homeless People's Perspectives

The answers provided by the sampled homeless were rather diverse set of theories and thoughts about what caused them to be caught in the web of homelessness. However, unemployment was cited by 36.7% of the participants, thereby making it the most commonly held perception about the causes of their homelessness. This is shown in Table 2. This is in line with the literature as unemployment has been documented in several studies on homelessness as underlying factor of getting homeless (34, 37, 14).

That unemployment is the major cause of homelessness was expressed by the sampled homeless in diverse ways. During interviews, the participants expressed how the inability to secure or maintain employment had a cascading effect on their ability to afford housing. They described instances were job loss or lack of stable income precipitated eviction or strained relationships with family members, ultimately leading to homelessness. For instance, a male youth staying under Oshodi pedestrian bridge (flyover) put it this way:

Losing my job was a devastating blow that eventually led to me becoming homeless. When I lost my job, I lost my source of income. In Lagos, where the cost of living is high, it became impossible for me to afford rent and other basic needs. I quickly depleted my savings trying to make ends meet.

The respondent went further by saying:

I stayed with friends for a while, but it was not a stable arrangement. I struggled to find another employment without a permanent address. Eventually, I ended up on the streets of Lagos, where survival has now become my primary concern.

Another homeless person opined that:

Most of us are products of the poor state of our economy. It reflects bad governance that Nigeria has to contend with in recent times. Some years back, the issue of homelessness was not as rampant as it is today. However, now that it has become difficult to get job, many of us have no choice but to be sleeping in the motor park. (A male adult at Iyana Ipaja Motor Park).

A homeless woman at Osa bar beach expressed it this way:

Losing my job took a toll on my mental health coupled with the fact that my husband is late. I felt hopeless and stressed about my future. It's hard

to focus on finding a new job when you are worrying about companionship, where you will sleep or where your next meal will come from.

The above reports underscore the economic challenges faced by many individuals and families in the study area, where job opportunities are scarce, and access to stable employment is often limited, especially for vulnerable populations. This is in tandem with the work of (38) who noted that unemployment is an important driver of homelessness. According to (39), having a job is crucial for both preventing and ending homelessness because it is, in many respects, a prerequisite for stable housing. One of the main causes of homelessness may be a lack of financial resources brought on by unemployment. A homeless person's ability to participate in the workforce may be hampered by several circumstances even in situations when jobs are available.

Family conflict was also identified by homeless people as a major problem of their homelessness. This was reported by 33.5% of the participants as one of the key causes of their homelessness. Family conflict was analyzed from diverse perspectives. While some section understood family conflict as disagreement, others viewed it as family separation. Yet, some section perceived it from the point of view of family violence and death of relation. This finding highlights the profound impact of interpersonal and family dynamics on housing stability and overall well-being. Family conflict was particularly rampant among the homeless youths and reported by them. A respondent illustrated family conflict this way:

Family conflict played a significant role in my journey to homelessness. My family had a disagreement over inherited property. It escalated to the point where I was forcibly evicted from our family home. With nowhere else to go and no financial resources of my own, I found myself on the streets. (A young man at Mushin Market).

Another respondent expressed it differently:

My story is unfortunately not uncommon. I grew up in a large family where tensions often ran high. As I got older, disagreements with my parents, particularly over my choice of friends and career aspirations, intensified. Eventually, things reached a breaking point, and I was asked to leave home. It was a devastating moment for me because I had nowhere else to go. Again, being rejected by your own family takes a heavy toll on your self-worth and mental health. I felt abandoned and betrayed, which made it hard to trust others or even believe in myself. There were moments when I felt completely hopeless. (A female youth at Ojoo)

Another respondent, a female youth, had this to say of family conflict as a causative factor of her homelessness:

My story is quite painful to recount. Growing up, my household was marked by domestic violence, mostly directed towards my mother. It

created a hostile environment where fear and tension were constant. When I was 18, my father passed away unexpectedly due to illness. His death exacerbated the violence in our home as financial pressures mounted. Eventually, unable to cope with the abuse, I left.

Approximately, 13.3% of the sampled respondents opined that migration was the reason why they opted for the streets. For example, a male adult expressed his opinion this way:

When I first moved to Lagos from Ibadan, I did not have any family or friends here. I was unfamiliar with the city and did not have a support network to rely on. This made it difficult to find stable accommodation and employment." I ended up in the informal sector, doing odd jobs that paid poorly and irregularly. This left me vulnerable to exploitation and unable to secure stable housing.

Table 2: Causes of Homelessness from the Homeless' Perspectives

Causes of Homelessness	Frequency(n=188)	Percentage
Civil conflict	23	12.2
Family Conflict	63	33.5
Unemployment	69	36.7
Natural Disaster	8	4.3
Migration	25	13.3

Displacement/civil conflict as an important cause of homelessness was emphasized by 12.2% of the sampled homeless individuals. A male youth living under Iyana Ipaja flyover, had this to say:

I used to have a good life back in the North-East. I had a small shop and my family was doing alright. But then the violence started. Boko Haram came to our town, burning homes and forcing people to flee. We had no choice but to leave everything behind and escape to Lagos. Here, life is tough. I sleep on the streets, begging for food and trying to find odd jobs. My family is scattered, and we do not know if we will ever go back home. The conflict took everything from us—our home, our livelihoods. Now we're just trying to survive, day by day.

Here is also a hypothetical interview from a homeless woman at Iyana Ipaja, describing how displacement or civil conflict has caused her homelessness:

I never thought I would end up like this. Back in my village, life was peaceful. But then the fighting started, and everything changed. Our village was attacked, houses burned, families separated. I lost my husband in the chaos, and with no one to turn to, I fled to Lagos with my children. Here, we sleep under the bridge, always on edge and never knowing what tomorrow will bring. The conflict took away our home, our sense of security. I want to provide for my children, but it is hard to find work and we rely on the kindness of strangers for food. I pray for peace so we can rebuild our lives, but for now, we are just trying to survive.

Natural disaster was the least cause of homelessness in the study area as perceived by the sampled homeless. This was reported by just 4.3% of the participants. While responding to this, one of the participants, an elderly man, had this to say:

During the flooding in Lagos last year, our whole community was swept away by the water. We lost everything - our home, our belongings, our livelihoods. We had nowhere to go, so we ended up on the streets, struggling to survive. The government said they would help, but it has been months, and we are still here, forgotten. Natural disasters don't just take away buildings; they take away our lives, our hopes, and our futures.

To ensure triangulation of data, residents living within a 500-meter radius of locations where homeless people are found were also asked the same question about what causes homelessness among unhoused individuals, and their responses were largely consistent with what was obtained from the homeless themselves. But, before looking at their responses, it is important to examine the profile of the participants.

The Profiles of the Participants

Participants were drawn from among residents living in close proximity to each of the identified homeless people's location in the study area. The residents were selected for interview using systematic sampling technique. In the overall, interviews were conducted on 144 residents across the locations. As presented in Table 3, the age group of residents who participated in the interview represented 54.3% for young adults, 41.7% and 4.0% for adults and the elderly, respectively. Male participants were higher (53.6%) in number than their female counterparts (46.4%). The majority of the residents interviewed were Christians (55.6%), while Muslims and Traditionalists represented 43.7% and 0.7%, respectively. The marital status distribution showed that a vast majority (67.5%) were married. It was also observed that 60.9% of the interviewees were secondary school certificate holders, while 23.8% had tertiary education. About 60.9% were self-employed, 7.9% were civil servants, 24.5% were artisans, while the rest (6.7%) were unemployed. The income distribution showed that most (65.5%) of them earned above ₦50, 000, a little above one-fourth (27.8%) realized between ₦30, 000 and ₦50, 000, while less than one-tenth (6.6%) earned less than ₦30,000. Details of all these are presented in Table 3.

Causes of Homelessness: Residents' Perspectives

The residents' answers included a wide range of ideas and hypotheses regarding the causes of homelessness in Lagos. But the most often accepted theory on the causes of homelessness was poverty, which was mentioned by more than 78.9% of the participants. This is consistent with the literature because poverty has been shown to be an underlying cause of homelessness in a number of studies on the subject in both the developed and developing nations (32, 40). Regarding poverty, particularly in Nigeria, it is estimated that over 133 million people, or around 60% of the country's population, live in multidimensional poverty (41). This circumstance undoubtedly has a big influence on household income and urban poverty which, in turn, affects securing stable housing. The

homeless used a variety of expressions to demonstrate that poverty is the primary cause of homelessness. For instance, a married woman at Iyana Ipaja put it this way:

Poverty is the major problem that drives those homeless people onto the streets. They cannot meet the basic needs of their families. Some fathers are unemployed while the families live on petty trading of the mothers. So, I see it every day—the lack of opportunities pushes people onto the streets, where survival becomes a daily struggle.

A resident living around Oshodi expressed it this way:

I believe poverty drives homelessness in Lagos. The gap between rich and poor is widening, leaving many without a safety net or support system. We should be thanking God that some of us are able to rent an apartment, feed and clothe ourselves. It is not the same story with some people.

Another resident at Ikeja opined that:

In Lagos, poverty forces families out of their homes. It is heart-breaking to see young people living on the streets because their parents cannot afford rent or basic necessities." Now, in my neighborhood, a-two room apartment goes for as high as ₦1million while a single room is rented out for ₦500,000 per annum. How many people can afford that? People are really passing through a lot.

Table 3: Socio-economic Characteristics of Resident Participants

Variable	Frequency (n=144)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	81	53.6
Female	70	46.4
Age		
Young adults	82	54.3
Adults	63	41.7
The elderly	6	4.0
Religion		
Christianity	84	55.6
Islam	66	43.7
Traditional	1	0.7
Marital Status		
Single	46	30.5
Married	102	67.5
Divorced	3	2.0
Educational Status		
No formal education	9	6.0
Primary	14	9.3
Secondary	92	60.9
Tertiary	36	23.8
Employment Status		

Artisan	37	24.5
Self-employed	92	60.9
Civil Servant	12	7.9
Unemployed	10	6.7
Income		
Less than 30,000	10	6.6
31,000 – 50,000	42	27.8
Above 50,000	99	65.6

One other main issue with homelessness in Lagos, according to the residents, is negligence. Of the participants, 50.5% cited this as one of the main reasons for homelessness. Analysis of negligence was reported from several angles. Some saw negligence as the absence of family support, while others saw it as societal rejection. However, there were those who saw it as an act of desertion and exclusion, as well as government failure to provide for a check on inter-state migration. A respondent at Mushin illustrated negligence this way:

Loss of family support is a silent tragedy in our community. I have known individuals who, after losing a spouse or falling out with their families, had nowhere stable to live.

An elderly man residing at Iba had this to say:

From my experience, homelessness often stems from a combination of factors, including loss of family support, social exclusion, ostracization, and abandonment. These issues create a cycle of instability that's hard to break.

Another male resident living around Obalende reported that:

Ostracization pushes many into homelessness. When communities reject or stigmatize individuals, it becomes incredibly difficult for them to find stable housing or employment.

In a switch reaction to the above, a male respondent at Oshodi opined that the state government has completely neglected inter-state migration, which is an important factor responsible for homelessness.

From where I stand, the government's negligence of inter-state migration is a major factor causing homelessness here in Lagos. Many people come here seeking opportunities, but there is not enough planning or support from authorities to accommodate this influx. It is like they turn a blind eye to the fact that people need affordable housing and basic services.

This neglect forces many into informal settlements or living on the streets, struggling just to survive. The government needs to step up, acknowledge this issue, and take real action to provide housing and support for everyone who calls Lagos home.

In a similar vein, a male youth resident at Iyana Ipaja has this to say:

From what I have seen living in this neighborhood, the government's indifference towards inter-state migration has fueled the homelessness crisis. People flock here seeking opportunities, but there is a severe lack of affordable housing and support services. It is like the government turns a blind eye to the thousands arriving every year. Without adequate planning and investment in housing, healthcare, and education, many end up living in deplorable conditions or on the streets. The government needs to acknowledge this issue and take decisive action before it spirals further out of control.

In contrast to negligence as a causative element, nearly half (48.2%) of the respondents claimed that the collapse or weakening of African kinship structures in urban environments could be the primary cause of the homelessness crisis. One of the respondents affirmed that:

...although isolation may be a responsible cause of homelessness, one has to look beyond loss of family support, social exclusion, ostracization, and abandonment and emphasize the gradual departure from the traditional kinship system, where extended families serve as a safety net in case of routine situations. (A married woman at Idumota).

Another participant has this to say of the weakened family kinship system as a causative factor

Back then, it was expected of families and communities to accommodate one another. Any member of the extended family may provide temporary housing to a homeless person until they are able to find employment or get themselves together. But now that things have shifted, no one is prepared to take on other people's obligations. Therefore, if someone is homeless, they are on their own. (A community leader at Maiyegun).

It is sufficient to argue that the kinship system's ongoing inability to assist family members in need is one of the detrimental repercussions of urbanization and modernity. For urban homeless persons, this means that in the worst-case scenario, the street is their only remaining option for housing.

A lack of affordable housing was also identified as an important reason for homelessness. This was acknowledged by 35.7% of the participants as one of the key factors to homelessness. This was expressed by residents in different ways. For example, an elderly man at around Iyana Ipaja Market, opined that:

I've seen first-hand how the lack of affordable housing directly leads to homelessness in our community. People are being priced out of their homes, and there simply aren't enough options for those struggling financially. It's heart-breaking to see families forced onto the streets because they can't afford a place to live. Affordable housing isn't just

about shelter; it's about dignity and stability. Without it, we're failing our neighbors and our community.

Speaking in the same vein, another respondent had this to say:

Living in this city, it's clear that the root of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. Rents keep skyrocketing, and wages just aren't keeping up. It's not just about finding a place to live; it's about being able to afford to live somewhere stable and secure. Without affordable options, more and more people are being pushed out onto the streets. We need real solutions that address this crisis before it gets even worse.

Another participant, a male youth at Ikeja, acknowledged that:

Finding a place to live in Lagos is incredibly tough. Affordable housing is almost non-existent, especially for those of us with low incomes. Landlords demand huge upfront payments and high rents that are simply out of reach.

Eviction and forced displacement (23.6%) as a significant contributory factor to homelessness was also cited by the participants. An adult female at Ojoo expressed it this way:

Eviction and forced displacement are critical issues contributing to homelessness in Lagos, Nigeria. Many families and individuals are abruptly uprooted from their homes, often without adequate notice or alternative accommodations. This displacement disrupts lives and undermines stability, pushing vulnerable populations into precarious situations where finding shelter becomes a daily struggle.

In a similar response, an adult male at Mushin reported that:

Eviction and forced displacement in Lagos are profound contributors to homelessness. Families are abruptly uprooted from their homes, often with nowhere else to go. This not only strips them of shelter but also disrupts their livelihoods and access to basic services. It's a harsh reality that perpetuates cycles of poverty and vulnerability, demanding urgent attention from policymakers and communities alike to safeguard the right to housing and prevent further displacement.

Mental health issues and/or addiction was also acknowledged as a factor contributing to homelessness, as perceived by a substantial portion (13.2%) of the residents. For example, a male respondent living around Oshodi expressed his view on this factor this way:

In my experience, mental health issues and substance abuse are intertwined factors that perpetuate homelessness in this neighborhood in particular and Lagos State in general. The lack of specialized facilities

for psychiatric care and addiction treatment limits our ability to effectively address the root causes of homelessness.

In a similar vein, another respondent around Iyana Ipaja Motor Park narrated it this way:

Homelessness in Lagos, Nigeria is a complex issue, often exacerbated by profound challenges like mental health issues and addiction. We must address these underlying factors with urgency and compassion, recognizing that effective solutions require holistic support and understanding.

It has been noted that individuals suffering from both physical and mental ailments lack access to healthcare facilities or cannot afford them. As such, living on the streets with several vulnerabilities aggravates mental health issues or even precipitates their development, which frequently leads to a rise in drug and alcohol dependence. Consequently, a large number of homeless persons turn to drug misuse (42, 43). The causes of homelessness from residents' perspectives as summarized in Figure 2 show that the phenomenon was attributed to causative factors beyond the individual homeless person.

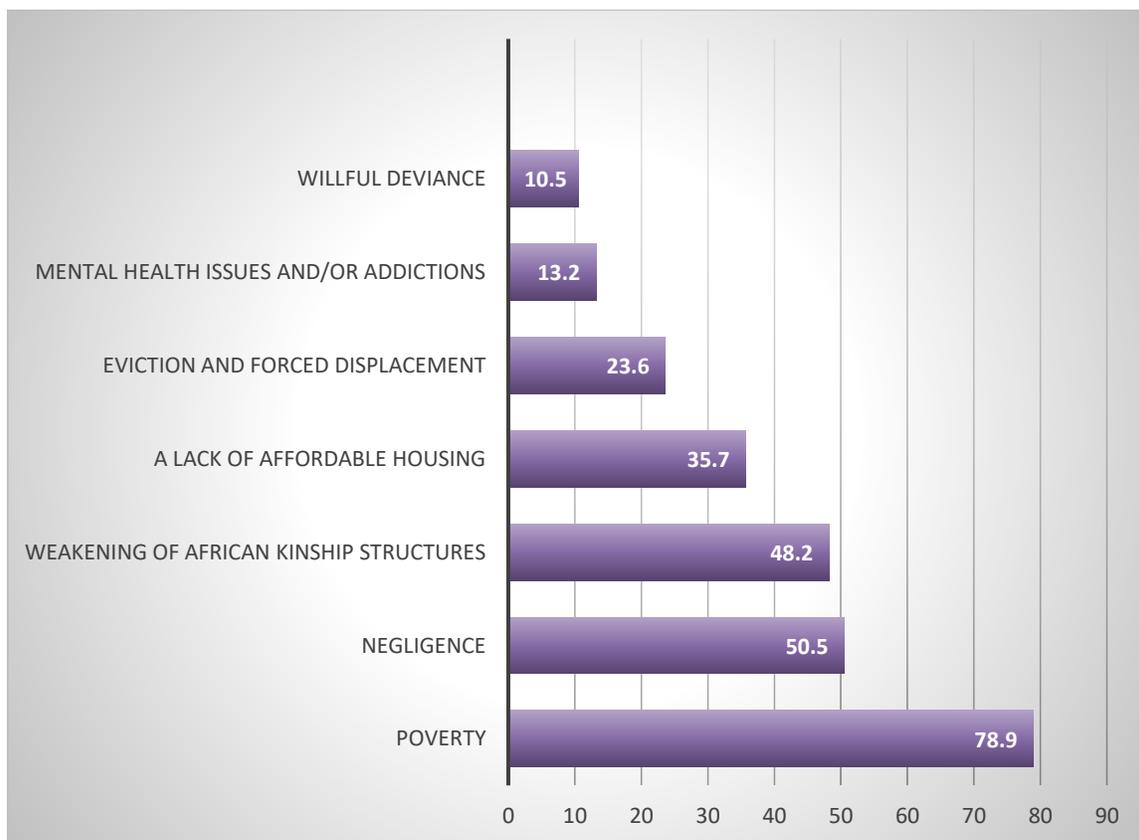


Figure 2: Residents' Perspectives of Causes of Homelessness

A little above one-tenth (10.5%) of the respondents opined that wilful deviance was the reason for homelessness among some individuals. This is particularly common among the youths in the city as viewed by the respondents. This suggests that some young individuals themselves had chosen to leave home and be living on the streets. An elderly woman illustrated it this way:

From what I have observed in Lagos, wilful deviance among youth often leads to homelessness. Some young people make the choice to leave home, whether due to conflicts with family, seeking independence, or getting caught up in risky behaviour. They end up on the streets, exposed to dangers and struggling to survive. It is a tough reality because many of them are bright and capable, but without the right support networks, they fall into a cycle of instability.

A similar view as expressed by a respondent at Ojoo is thought provoking

As someone who has grown up in Lagos, I believe wilful deviance plays a significant role in youth homelessness here. Some young people make choices that lead them down the wrong path – whether it is getting involved in drugs, crime, or just refusing to follow societal norms. It is not just about lack of opportunities; it is about personal decisions too. Without guidance or support, many end up on the streets, struggling to find their way back. We need more programs and mentorship to steer our youth in the right direction and prevent homelessness from becoming their only option.

The views as raised by residents showed that wilful deviance, particularly among the youths, can be a complex factor contributing to homelessness. This term typically refers to behaviors where individuals deliberately choose to engage in actions that deviate from societal norms or expectations. In the context of homelessness, wilful deviance often manifests when young people voluntarily leave or are forced out of their homes due to various reasons such as family conflicts, substance abuse issues, or involvement in criminal activities. For example, (43) noted that young people struggling with addiction or mental illness may find it difficult to maintain stable housing arrangements, leading them to live on the streets where support and resources are scarce. More so, in their study, (44) pointed out that young people may be drawn into risky behaviour or lifestyles that disrupt their familial ties and stability, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that homelessness in Lagos Metropolis stems from an interplay of structural, economic, and social factors. The study concluded that poverty, unemployment, family conflict, and inadequate housing are key drivers of homelessness. Thus, it requires a policy response that promotes inclusive urban planning in order to tackle the systemic barriers.

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