

Homelessness-A curse in our society

Letter to editor

It is very difficult to describe the exact extent of problem only on the basis of media reports. Problem of homelessness is a curse and it requires a great attention of law makers in our society. These people are mainly migrant labourers, beggars, rickshaw pullers and riot victims. Increased urbanisation and a disproportionate increase in income and infrastructure in rural areas forced people to migrate in urban areas for search of work and food. Poor lifestyle and education facilities in rural areas are also some other major factors responsible for this migration. Due to severe scarcity of living space in night shelters and large number of these destitute people, forced them to survive under open sky near road side. Condition of these migrant people is more devastating in other metropolitan cities of India than in Indian capital. Other Indian cities are lacking behind than Indian capital in terms of budget distribution. According to media report majority of metropolitan cities have either none or very few temporary shelter home. Today whole Indian population is suffering from transition phase with large number of unemployed younger population. Besides it lack of basic infrastructures for living and education in rural areas has add on effect in these migration. They have to work far from their native homes in metropolitan cities to provide a better lifestyle and education to their children.

Condition of homeless people is worst than general population of that particular country. Many studies from metropolitan areas of developed countries like New York City and Toronto demonstrate a higher age adjusted death rates of homeless men and women in comparison to general population.^{1,2} Even in UK, recession or falls of economic activities in recent years lead to an increase rate of homelessness and their problems. This Increasing rates were also strongly linked with government reductions in welfare spending.³ But in comparison to developed nations, problem is worst in their developing and underdeveloped counterparts. In these countries, large population, unemployment, illiteracy, terrorist activities or riots, lack of infrastructure and funding make their citizen more vulnerable for homelessness. Large population, unemployment, rural poverty and lack of proper rural infrastructure lead to migration of large number of these people in search of food and work to metropolitan cities. These metropolitan cities are unable to provide shelter to all the migrants. So there are obviously an increase number of homeless people in India. Besides lack of funding from government, neglected behaviour of people towards these homeless also lead to higher morbidity and mortality.

Establishment and proper maintenance of night shelter requires large amount of funding and political support, and both of these are important limitations in developing countries like India. These homeless people are reluctant to go in night shelters in many cases as these are centres of illicit drugs and criminal activity. So there is a lack of proper security arrangement in night shelters. Continuous tremendous rise in number of these homeless people and lack of allocation of proper shelter and source of livelihood results in struggle for existence. These homeless people are generally employed in low paid, unskilled works and often choose to sleep on the streets are more prone to RTA. These homeless migrant settlers are mostly belong to rural background and not accustomed to chaotic traffic of the cities. These people are frequently suffering from HIV/AIDS, gastric illness,

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T.B. and other respiratory illness, Hypothermia and Hyperthermia. In subtropics, majority of deaths are reported in extreme weather conditions (summer and winter) due to lack of shelters.⁴ They are more victim of crime, rather than perpetrators if it. Homeless women and children are most often the victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking.

There should be allocation of budget for establishment and maintenance of shelters or home for these homeless people. Government should also take step to create proper employment. Involvements of different NGOs are best method for smooth running of these shelters and distribution of food supplements to children and pregnant ladies. These NGOs can also play an important role to prevent sexual abuse with female and children. Public-private partnership model should be introduced to counter problem of funding. In remote term, there should be generation of proper measures of livelihood in rural areas to prevent migration of these people.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

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