Strengths-based services offered to the homeless by non-governmental and faith-based organisations in Tshwane Region Three, South Africa

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Abstract: Homelessness is a global phenomenon that is escalating for economic, social, structural and political reasons. Many organisations render services to the homeless in the inner city of Tshwane (Region Three), but these services have not been explored. This article discusses a qualitative research study focusing on the social services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three. Beneficiaries of the services include men, women and children. Individual, family, group and community services are rendered. Services focus on basic needs, skills training and socio-emotional needs and are rendered from a strengths perspective. Research results indicate that the homeless are often involved in planning, assessing and implementing services. Service-rendering may be hindered by poor funding opportunities and ignorance of service providers regarding the content of policies and guiding documents. The lack of coordinated efforts can be ascribed to unawareness about the services rendered by other organisations. Recommendations include fostering collaboration between the government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs). Specific policy related to the homeless must be formulated to guide service providers to provide a legislative framework for funding, service delivery and the development of training and financing for staff and volunteers of NGOs.

Keywords: homelessness; social services; strengths perspective; developmental welfare approach

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Introduction

Practice research is part of social work and the necessity for knowledge about what social workers do and what works, has increased (Uggerhøj, 2011). The final year social work students of the University of Pretoria conducted qualitative research to explore social services rendered by organisations to homeless people in Tshwane Region Three. This article provides a brief discussion of homelessness as a social phenomenon, the research methodology and subsequent findings. The data presented in this article is based on the responses of 76 participants from 19 organisations who render social services to homeless people. The ultimate purpose of the research project was to inform policy decisions on homelessness in the City of Tshwane.

Homelessness is increasing on an international, national and local level, making it a global concern (Cross et al, 2010). Homelessness is not only a complex interaction of risk factors, but includes a multitude of implications for an individual's health, worth and dignity and basic needs, often in contrast to those of the broader society's interests (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). Most organisations rendering services to the homeless view their main purpose as providing in the basic needs of the homeless population (Seager & Tamasane, 2010). Social services include services rendered to people to empower and assist them in dealing with everyday social challenges, including psychological distress.

Homelessness has costly local and global implications in terms of health, social and other outcomes for individuals and families who are homeless; it also strains governments, stakeholders, policy makers and local and global societal resources in their effort to help (Richter et al, 2012; Sanchez, 2010). It affects all races; however, in South Africa it affects more black people than whites, more adults than children, and more men than women (Makiwane et al, 2010; Sanchez, 2010). Men are thus at a higher risk than women and children of ending up on the streets.

Homelessness as a social phenomenon

Scholars find it hard to define the concept *homelessness*. Sanchez (2010) argues that the subjectivity of the concept makes it hard to define, while Makiwane et al (2010) believe that because of its socioeconomic and structural implications, homelessness cannot be viewed simplistically. Homelessness has to do with lack of shelter, lack of access to structure, absence of housing or poor quality housing as well as lack of basic needs (water, sanitation) and of personal needs (self-determination, creativity, dignity, expression and voice) (Cross et al, 2010; Makiwane et al, 2010; Naidoo, 2010). This reflects the intensity of the problem.

Relative homelessness refers to those who have shelter but do not have a

permanent home and absolute homelessness refers to those who have access neither to shelter nor elements of a permanent home (D'Addario et al, 2007). Ravenhill (2008) describes homelessness as separation from bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures while Tipple and Speak (2005) mention the quality of housing, asserting that homelessness can refer to the lack of adequate shelter or secure tenure and includes squatter settlements, living in backrooms in townships or elsewhere and living in slum conditions.

The homeless are not as isolated as is widely believed. Kok et al (2010), in their demographic profile of street homeless, found that the homeless had ties within the streets, even if they had no contact with their blood relatives. While homelessness might include a lack of housing, the homeless often find ways to meet their basic needs such as washing or guarding cars to afford food (Georgiades, 2015; Seager & Tamasane, 2010). Shelters or drop-in centres provide food, water and showers for the homeless.

Apart from being embedded in political, economic and social issues, homelessness is a human rights issue. Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa, paragraph one, states that every citizen has the right to adequate housing (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). However, the Constitution does not define adequate housing as a concept or provide guidelines on how adequate housing should be achieved as a right.

Historical, political, societal and economic context

Homelessness is a worldwide phenomenon and a final stage in a lifelong series of struggles, crises and missed life opportunities. It must be understood historically, politically, socially and economically to grasp and address the problem (Sanchez, 2010).

The apartheid land dispossession affected the current state of homelessness in South Africa. Due to unequal land distribution, the majority of black people still live in rural areas (Mashau, 2014) and travel distances to the cities in order to find employment opportunities (Du Toit, 2010). Although land dispossession may have had a devastating impact in contemporary South Africa, homelessness is a global phenomenon. Different countries experience the same problem even though the history is different (Cross et al, 2010; Richter et al, 2012).

While South Africa is regarded as one of the most developed countries, especially when it comes to its constitution, Methula (2014) argues that institutionalised poverty, chronic unemployment and systematic inequality still exist in the shadow of democracy. Unemployment, the lack of affordable accommodation, divorce, disability, illness and an underprivileged childhood are the main contributory socioeconomic factors to homelessness (Makiwane et al, 2010). The prevalence of

poverty in South Africa is the main causal factor in determining the emergence and duration of homelessness (Kok et al, 2010) as caused by rural-urban migration, as well as migration from one country to another, mostly illegally.

The effects of homelessness

Homelessness has devastating effects not only on homeless individuals but also on cities and the country. The homeless experience harsh treatment from society and occasionally are discriminated against by police and security officials. The homeless lose their human dignity, their voice and sense of confidence, and they experience deterioration in their health (Makiwane et al, 2010). Chances of employment diminish with the duration of their homelessness (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). The homeless are ridiculed, abused and used for cheap labour (Mangoedi & Mogashoa, 2014). They go through secondary victimisation by officials, and that has led to mistrust of the government.

Most of the homeless population is made up of men, and many males are victims of rape which goes unreported (Mangayi, 2014). They experience a loss of faith, hope and belief in a brighter future. Makiwane et al (2010:40) state that this has led to many homeless individuals resorting to criminal activities such as prostitution and drug trafficking as a way to sustain a living.

Nationally, the impact of homelessness comes with the examination of the Bill of Human Rights and the Constitution of South Africa. The Bill of Rights claims that every human being has the right to proper housing, education, food, water, life, and other necessities (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The implication is that the government has the responsibility to address the issue of homelessness for the sake of preserving the dignity and worth of homeless people but also because homelessness has an adverse effect on the country's economy (Nooe & Patterson, 2010).

Rationale for the study

The Homelessness Forum in the City of Tshwane identified a knowledge gap regarding the services rendered to homeless individuals in Tshwane Region Three. Therefore, the study aimed at informing policy on this aspect. The main research question was: What are the strengths-based social services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three?

Theoretical framework

The strengths perspective formed the theoretical basis for the research with the focus on the strengths of organisations as well as the homeless in order to reach pathways out of homelessness. The strengths perspective developed in response to critique of the "deficit-oriented psychotherapeutic model that dominated social work practice" (Pulla, 2012:55). Contrary to the medical model, the strengths perspective is rooted in theories of empowerment and ecosystems, with underpinnings of humanistic philosophy (Pulla, 2012). The strengths perspective as a theory of empowerment builds on people's resiliency, resources, hopes, capacities and to be engaged in action pursuing social justice. Due to the strengths perspective's commitment to promoting social and economic justice, it links with the developmental approach in social work and social welfare (Gray, 2002) which asserts that people have the capacity to develop and become independent and self-reliant, should their strengths be identified and utilised (Birkland, 2005; Drake, 2001; Midgley, 2010).

The six hallmarks of strengths-based practice (Rapp et al, 2005) further explain this perspective's relevance for researching services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three. These hallmarks focus on the following: (1) The strengths-perspective is goal orientated; this is also an important aspect for service providers in order to plan effective services, (2) The systematic assessment of strengths; this was one of the aims of the research study, to determine which services to the homeless are effective, (3) The environment is seen as rich in resources; the study was undertaken to discover the resources that are available in the community via NGOs and FBOs to service users, (4) Explicit methods are used for using client and environmental strengths for goal attainment; the study revealed specific strategies service providers use to develop service users' strengths, (5) The relationship is hope-inducing; the study aimed to reveal the effective strategies that service providers implement, therefore creating hope for service development to the homeless, (6) The provision of meaningful choices is central and clients have the authority to choose; this is a core element of empowerment that was explored through the study.

A strengths perspective entails working with people to promote positive change to achieve social development and sustainable employment where services should be based on the principle of helping people discover, embellish, explore and exploit their strengths and resources (Weyers, 2011).

A strengths perspective relates to empowerment as the process of helping individuals, families, groups, and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and influence toward improving their circumstances (Zastrow, 2012). Saleebey (2009) mentions that empowerment indicates the intention to assist, and the processes of assisting individuals, groups, families and communities to discover and expand the resources and tools within and around them. The strengths-perspective therefore, was an appropriate theoretical model for researching services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three.

Goals and objectives

The goal of this study was to explore and describe the social services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three. The objectives were to contextualise homelessness and to explore and describe the specific services rendered to the homeless by NGOs and FBOs. The final objective was to draw conclusions and make recommendations to the Tshwane Municipality and the Tshwane Homelessness Forum regarding services to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three.

Research methodology

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria in May 2015. A qualitative research approach was used to gain a subjective understanding of the social services rendered to the homeless. The absence of documented services, a critical challenge in practice, highlighted the need for applied research in this study.

A collective case study design was chosen to attain the goals of the research study. The Tshwane Homelessness Forum identified 19 organisations rendering services to the homeless to assist them in moving out of their position of living on the streets. These organisations formed the population for the study. With non-probability sampling four participants per organisation were selected from non-governmental and governmental organisations (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The criteria of selection were that participants must be directly involved with the services; must have at least six months to a year's involvement in the organisation and must be from different operational levels (manager, supervisor, care worker). A pilot study was done with one participant from each organisation to ascertain if the questions formulated in the schedule were sufficient and logical, and this assisted in establishing rapport with the community.

Seventy-six (76) semi-structured one-to-one interviews with an interview schedule were done. In using the spiral image process for analysing data, the researchers moved in analytical circles processing and analysing the raw data resulting in a narrative with a more coherent interpretation of data (Boeije, 2010). With consent from the participants, data was audio recorded and content transcribed. The researchers wrote memos and field notes at the bottom of the transcripts. Categories were generated to help sort patterns and recurring themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Collectively, the researchers critically challenged patterns of data in view of the different contexts to explore the meaning the participants intended.

Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking where researchers shared the findings of the research with participants to confirm the understanding of information (Lietz et al, 2006). Furthermore, peer review included sharing the findings with fellow researchers and research supervisors to minimise bias and reactivity. An audit trail maintained a systematic process of documentation. For triangulation purposes, external reviewers knowledgeable about the topic assisted in interpreting the findings (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006).

Research results

The research results will be presented in themes as they emerged by means of the steps of data analysis mentioned above. As an introduction to the services rendered, information on the type of beneficiaries is provided.

Beneficiaries of social services rendered to homeless people by organisations in Tshwane Region Three

The organisations render services to people from all races and ethnic backgrounds. Social welfare services should focus on meeting the needs and building on the strengths of individuals, families, communities and other social groups through the provision of a comprehensive range of services and programmes that extend beyond the inherent capacity of individuals and their natural support networks. It can be said that services rendered by the various organisations fall into these categories.

Foreign nationals are faced with many challenges to settling in host countries. In South Africa, with incidences of xenophobic discrimination (Landau et al, 2004), the presence of foreign nationals may be a sensitive issue and thus hinders service rendering to non-South African nationals.

The street homeless are seen as the main beneficiaries of services. Differences exist as to whether vulnerable children are seen as beneficiaries. Some participants agreed that they are, while others disagreed and stated that there are no children involved in the services of some organisations. Makiwane et al (2010) found that there are more homeless adults than homeless children in South Africa because children receive more care and protection from institutions due to their legal status as minors.

Some organisations only provide for women; thus, the primary target group for the outreach programmes. Other organisations have programmes which focus on different service users such as men, women and children as well as girls. Some women become homeless because they flee abusive domestic situations. Homeless families generally appear to be composed of women with their children.

Several organisations were established based on the need to support youth in need. In some cases, services focus on young adults identified as being in need. Participants rendering services to the youth stressed the existence of a prominent need to house young adults graduating from children's homes and other institutions as they often end up on the streets with no means of support and protection.

Various types of services rendered to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three

The services rendered range from attending to basic and personal needs to attention to poverty alleviation programmes, specifically targeted at the homeless population. It became evident that the type of services rendered by organisations, and which the participants were aware of, were related to the basic needs for human survival. The most dominant social services rendered and mentioned by the participants fall under three categories:

Services focused on attending to basic needs of beneficiaries

All the organisations provide for homeless people's basic needs, the fundamental requirements that serve as the foundation for survival. Access to the basic needs, such as shelter, food and clothing, is necessary to the development of a strong community and is an essential precursor to individual independence. The ability to exit homelessness becomes increasingly difficult without meeting basic needs. Much time and energy is expended every day to simply meet these needs, increasing the challenge of exiting homelessness. The most important physical needs that the homeless long for are shelter, food, clean clothes and a bed to sleep in.

The researchers found that meeting physical needs assists beneficiaries to stay in shelters and be involved, assisting the care givers with cleaning and ensuring that the shelter remains in order. Within the strength perspective, involving the homeless even in providing in basic needs use their strengths such as personal abilities and resourcefulness.

Children living on the street reported that their basic needs such as food and clothing were typically met by soup kitchens at church organisations. At some shelters, prepared or cooked meals are offered on certain days of the week. One organisation offers food and drinks, clothes and blankets and bathrooms. Occasionally, when organisations receive material donations, they provide the homeless with small bags of toiletries including a washing cloth, tooth brush, tooth paste and body lotion.

Services focused on skills training

Skills training involves the teaching, developing or acquiring of specific skills that

can improve one's capability, capacity and performance. Examples of skills training include literacy classes, life skills training, drawing up a curriculum vitae and preparing for a job interview, and arts and crafts work. The skills training refers to Rapp et al (2005) elucidating that within a strength perspective explicit methods are used for using client strengths for goal attainment; this study revealed specific strategies service providers use to develop service users' strengths. One of the participants mentioned that providing skills training for beneficiaries is sometimes a challenge because organisations lack qualified staff members to teach such skills due to a lack of funds.

Psycho-social services that focus on socio-emotional needs of beneficiaries

Socio-emotional functioning refers to a process that consists of variations that occur in an individual's personality, emotions, and relationships with others during one's lifetime (Purcell & Eckert, 2005). Socio-emotional services are rendered by social workers, social auxiliary workers, psychologists and psychiatric staff at hospitals in prevention, early intervention and treatment through group work sessions, individual counselling or casework and community work programmes. Organisations render support services, for example, to obtain legal documents such as identity documents, asylum papers and social grants. Within a strengths perspective, individuals, families, groups and communities are helped to increase their personal, interpersonal, and socioeconomic circumstances (Zastrow, 2012). All organisations, however, focus on holistic service rendering which contributes to building beneficiaries' independence and self-reliance.

Involvement of the homeless in service rendering

Within a developmental welfare approach, organisations should include the homeless to partake in some service rendering activities. Without the voices of those affected by homelessness, there is a risk that important understandings essential to the development of effective solutions to homelessness will remain obscured (Norman, 2013). Participants were of the view that participation of the homeless themselves makes programmes sensible and practical because they know what is best for them.

   The White Paper on Welfare (Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997) requires that social work should contribute to the eradication of poverty through a developmental approach, which among other things, discourages dependency and promotes the active involvement of people in their own development. Social workers should pay attention to clients' strengths rather than their deficits and help them to realise their potential for personal growth (Midgely, 2010). They need to focus on the skills homeless people inherently possess. Empowerment models explore people's strengths and how they overcome hardships. This is viewed as evidence of their resilience and power, and it focuses

on human resourcefulness, passion, energy, intelligence, imagination, curiosity and creativity (Gray, 2002). Data collected indicated that the homeless are involved in and encouraged to participate fully in designing and assessing services at some organisations. This can give them a sense of self-determination and ownership.

Most of the participants confidently stated that the homeless were involved in planning the services in practice. In some instances, former homeless persons are invited and encouraged to share experiences with the current homeless to motivate them and to share information on pathways out of homelessness. Although former and current homeless people are involved in planning and assessing services at most organisations, some organisations do not allow beneficiaries to participate and emphasise that final decisions regarding the organisation still lie with the top management of the organisation.

Funding and partnerships

Organisations rendering services to the homeless depend on partnerships both for funding and support. Participants listed partners such as government departments, volunteers from the community, the police forum, the community homeless forum, other NGOs, tertiary institutions, churches, international organisations and the business sector. These partners constitute strengths in organisational networks and community connections.

Most participants indicated that their organisations collaborate with tertiary institutions through provision of resources and services. Tertiary institutions can assist with skills training and can provide organisations with research on international and local perspectives. Universities could assist with enhancing income generation activities by providing skills training programmes and projects to the homeless population, again emphasising the focus on the strengths of the homeless, the organisations and networks.

Participants indicated that the homeless youth are often students who have dropped out of university or those who are interested and willing to study but do not have the means to do so. Students registered at tertiary institutions may also fall into the category of being homeless due to financial constraints and being away from home. Universities may consider offering scholarships and bursaries for homeless students, and they should realise the complexities of homelessness.

Most participants mentioned that their organisation was started by a church, which is still their partner. Some organisations have international partners. Sanchez (2010) mentions that religious organisations may be pivotal in expanding social support networks, building a more inclusive agenda on homelessness and in its public initiatives to address the homelessness phenomenon.

Funding was a central theme linked to service delivery. The main sources of finances are government, businesses, individuals and churches. Building

partnerships with outside stakeholders has proved to be one of the elements that contribute to the success of an organisation. Apart from government funding, organisations receive donations from private sponsorships and public appeals. These donations are not always monetary but may also be food, clothing, services or other useful items.

Challenges that organisations experience in rendering social services

Lack of adequate funding hinders service delivery. The declining value of public assistance and shifts in welfare policy results in fewer resources and stricter guidelines for subsidies and services.

Society generalises and labels homeless people; this has negative psychological implications for the homeless. Homeless people can be confined to the periphery of public consciousness because the public perception is that they violate social norms and offend public sensibilities (Tipple & Speak, 2006). Labelling of the homeless as criminals creates challenges in rendering services.

Organisations face challenges when they have service users that do not fall under the criteria of a specific policy, which impacts negatively on obtaining government funding for services. The challenge of operating within a network forces organisations to adopt a new set of practices and policies.

Some services are only provided when a volunteer can render those services. For example, development and skills training services are possible only when there is a professional offering the services without monetary expectations. For this reason, the skills training services are only rendered occasionally.

Recommendations

Awareness of services that social workers render, does not effect change. Uggerhøj (2011) emphasises that research must not only focus on findings but on actions too. Research and practice both produce knowledge. From this research study on social services rendered by organisations to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three, the following recommendations can be made for possible application in addressing the issue of homelessness. There is a need for collaboration between the government and NGOs. Specific policy related to the homeless must be formulated so that service providers do not need to fit their services into categories not applicable to the homeless. For effective policy implementation, there is a need for on-going co-operative policy making, planning and budgeting between all role players in the sector. Government must consult service providers and the homeless in order to design specific criteria for organisations that render services to the homeless. The

funding policy should provide a legislative framework for funding, service delivery and capacitating the development of training and financing for staff and volunteers of NGOs. There is a need for low cost accommodation, accessible to people earning a very low income, enabling them to work closer to their residence and not spend their meagre earnings on transport. To ensure sustainable service delivery, NGOs need competent management boards to manage permanent workers and volunteers. Children in shelters need proper education that will give them the opportunity to further their education. Services in shelters should focus on all categories of homeless, not only the youth. Skills training for the homeless must be prioritised.

Partnerships should be formed on vertical (local), horizontal (national) and international levels in order to create a common base for dialogue with funders and the government. Areas of collaboration and integration of services need to be identified between the government, municipalities and NGOs. Monitoring and evaluation structures to assess effectiveness of the practice and involvement of the homeless within organisations are necessary. Efforts towards reunification between the homeless and their respective families or significant others must be facilitated. Prevention and early intervention, especially where homelessness is a result of family violence, must be prioritised. Emergency shelters should be located in areas accessible to the homeless with appropriate professionals to divert them to longer term shelters or elsewhere.

Conclusion

This research has revealed a wealth of good and effective practices which service providers to the homeless in Tshwane Region Three have developed over the years. Services focusing on the strengths of the homeless, the networks available for partnerships and community resources have the possibility for pathways out of homelessness. The main obstacles to service rendering centre around obtaining government funding, criteria for government funding to organisations rendering services to the homeless, ignorance of service providers regarding policies related to homelessness, and misconstrued public perceptions about homeless people. Collaboration between the private and public sector, is thus crucial in rendering effective services to combat homelessness in Tshwane.

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