

A Study on the Homelessness in South Korea

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This paper deals with three subjects about homelessness, analysing survey data from 225 homeless people in Pusan, South Korea. First, comparing the shelter homeless with the street homeless, we discuss about the characteristics of the homeless people: homeless experiences, human capital, work attitude, family relation, disease and disability, cultural identity, awareness of cause and responsibility of homelessness. Second, we analyse the causes of the length of homeless careers. Which factors affect the length of homeless careers? Third, we trace the time-space of the homelessness process, exploring the period between joblessness and homelessness, and the patterns of residential trajectories of the homeless people.

Background and Hypotheses

The length of homeless careers

The study on the length of homeless careers is not less important than the study on the cause of homelessness. What is the difference between long-term homelessness and short-term homelessness? What is the reason of long-term homelessness? What makes effect on the length of homeless careers? It is not until recently that the length of homeless careers has been on the research agenda (Sosin *et. al.*, 1990; Piliavin *et. al.*, 1993; Piliavin *et. al.*, 1996).

The factors which affect the length of homeless careers can be specified as five categories: human capital, work attitude, family relation, disease and disability, and cultural identity. I discuss each category, listing empirical measures which I use as indicators of concepts. I also suggest our hypotheses about the relation between the measures and long-term homelessness.

First, the lack of human capital has been considered as a causing factor which affects homelessness (Burt and Cohen, 1989). Poor education and lack of employment skill are often linked to homelessness. I think that the lack of human capital affects not only the onset of homelessness, but also the length of homelessness. I employ three variables to measure the concept of

the lack of human capital: 'education' is one and the other two are, related to employment situation, 'percent time worked since first job' and 'class location before homelessness'. The hypothesis related to human capital is as follows. Hypothesis 1: the homeless people who have lower level of education, lower percent time worked since first job, and lower class location will have longer homeless careers.

Second, homelessness has also been attributed to individual personalities, work attitude in particular. Laziness, idleness, and lack of the will to work have been discussed as causes of homelessness (see Murray (1990) regarding the moral values and behaviour characteristics of the underclass including the homeless). I think that 'work deprivation' and 'job searching' are related to the length of homelessness. Hypothesis 2: the homeless people who have higher level of work deprivation, lower level of job searching after homelessness are more likely to have longer homeless careers.

Third, Bahr and Caplow are the first researchers who emphasized the characteristics of family relation as causing factors of homelessness. According to them, homeless people were likely to be never married, grown up with childhood foster care, and without family contact (Bahr and Caplow, 1973). The characteristics of family relation of homeless people have been consistently discussed since then (Rossi, 1989; Wright, 1989). Sosin et al. (1990) also found that homeless people had more childhood foster care experience and less family and friend contact than non-homeless people. Piliavin et. al. (1993) suggest that childhood foster care placement affects long-term homelessness. In order to measure the concept of family relation, I propose four variables: 'family formation', 'family contact', 'orphan', and 'childhood foster care experience'. The hypothesis related to family relation is as follows. Hypothesis 3: The homeless career lengths are longer among people who have not formed families, were orphan, have experienced childhood foster care placement, and have little current family contact.

Fourth, the physical or the mental disease have also considered as affecting homelessness (Farr et. al., 1986; Rossi, 1989; Wright, 1989; Baum and Burnes, 1993). In particular, alcoholism, drug abuse, and mental illness are emphasized as causing factors of homelessness. I propose that they make effect not only on the onset of homelessness, but also on the long-term homelessness. Establishing four variables regarding this: 'disease', 'physical dysfunction', 'alcohol addiction', 'mental health', I propose a hypothesis. Hypothesis 4: the homeless people who have disease, have physical dysfunction, current alcohol addiction, unstable mental health will have longer homeless careers.

Fifth, according to Piliavin et. al. (1993; 1996), adaptation to homelessness affects the length of homeless careers. That is, the homeless people who adapt well to their situation are likely to have longer homeless careers. Considering two variables which are 'homeless identity' and 'street

adaptation', a hypothesis is proposed. Hypothesis 5: the homeless people who have more homeless identity and better street adaptation have longer homeless careers.

Dynamics of homelessness

One of the most important issues in the recent homelessness studies is the patterns of residential transition. The length, permanency, and recurrence of homelessness is also discussed as one of the major issues. The studies exploring these issues is concerned with the dynamics of homelessness (Sosin *et. al.*, 1990; Rocha *et. al.*, 1995; Piliavin *et. al.*, 1996; Wong *et. al.*, 1997; Wong *et. al.*, 1998). It was found in these studies that a considerable number of homeless people experienced prior homeless spell.

Dealing with the dynamics of homelessness, this paper focuses on two points: 1) the period from joblessness to homelessness, and 2) the residential transitions after leaving home. The hypothesis concerned with the relation between the period from joblessness to homelessness and some important factors such as class, age, and marriage status is as follows. Hypothesis 6: the homeless people who were working class, are younger, and have never had family formation is likely to have shorter periods from joblessness to homelessness. On the residential transitions I will just describe the finding facts, not evaluating a hypothesis.

Sample and data

The data for this study were obtained from a survey of homeless adult men, aged 18 and above, who lived in Pusan. The survey was conducted for five days between 12th October and 16th October, 1999. It was estimated at that time that Pusan had at least about 800 homeless people, and 620 homeless people lived in one of ten homeless shelters and the rest slept in the street. We selected 225 respondents using two free-meal programs (85) and nine homeless shelter (140). We considered a man to be homeless, if he slept for at least 30 days either in a homeless shelter or in the street.

The questionnaire is composed of 8 parts: causes of homelessness, residential and job mobility, marriage status and family relation, work attitude, alcohol addiction, health status, estimation of shelter, and etc.

The questions about residential and job mobility were made from a retrospective panel design. Looking back for last 5 years, the respondents provided data on the timing and duration on their various jobs and residential locations. The categorized residential locations included 1) homelessness, 2) stay in one room in motels or SRO (Single room occupancy), 3) stay in homeless shelters, 4) stay in own or relative's or friend's housing

units, 5) stay in homeless camps, 6) etc. (mental hospital, prison, and so on).

The Characteristics of Homeless People

Homeless experience

<Table 1> shows some important characteristics of homeless people. The mean total time homeless is 13.5 months. The spell during which respondents lived in motels or SROs was not counted in the total time homeless. The mean total time homeless of the street homeless people is longer than that of the shelter homeless people (18.6 months, 10.4 months, respectively). If we consider 1 year as a threshold with which we distinguish, dealing with mean total time homeless, long-term homelessness from short-term homelessness, 33.6% of the respondents experience long-term homelessness.

<Table 1> The characteristics of homeless people

Variables	Shelter homeless	Street homeless	Total homeless
Homeless experience			
Total time homeless (month)			
Mean	10.4	18.6	13.5
Median	6.0	11.0	**
Time since first homeless (month)			8.0
Mean	15.9	39.3	
Median	8.5	15.0	24.7
Age first homeless (mean)	42.6	41.7	**
Prior homeless spells (%)	11.4	14.1	11.0
Human capital			
Age (mean)	43.6	44.7	44.0
Education (mean years)	10.7	10.2	10.5
Percent time worked since first job (mean)	75.2	72.6	74.2
coming from new middle class (%)	10.6	2.7	7.8 *
coming from old middle class (%)	14.4	6.8	11.7 *
coming from working class (%)	57.6	78.1	64.9 *
coming from lower class (%)	17.4	12.3	15.6 *
Work attitude			
Work deprivation (mean)	6.32	6.63	6.44
Job searching (%)	92.1	90.6	91.6

Family relation			
Never married (%)	40.0	35.3	38.2
No children (%)	19.3	13.0	16.8
Orphan before 18 (%)	22.9	9.4	17.8 *
Childhood foster care experience (%)	18.6	11.8	16.0
No family contact in last two months (%)	45.0	50.6	47.1
No shelter from family in last two months (%)	73.6	81.2	76.4
No money from family in last two months (%)	88.6	80.0	85.3
Disease or disability			
Disease (%)	33.6	38.8	35.6
Physical disability (%)	7.1	14.1	9.8
Alcohol addiction (%)	26.4	34.1	29.3
Mental health (mean)	1.02	1.45	1.19
Cultural identification			
Sense of communality with other homeless people (%)	50.0	52.9	51.1
Consider homeless people as friends (%)	42.9	55.3	47.6
Know well where free meal programs are (%)	25.7	61.2	39.1
Know well where homeless shelters are (%)	21.4	60.0	**
Consider homelessness as not dangerous	45.0	34.1	36.0
Recognition on the cause and responsibility of homelessness			
Cause	36.3	48.2	40.8
Individual cause	63.7	51.8	59.2
Structural cause	50.0	54.8	51.8
Responsibility	50.0	45.2	48.2
Individual responsibility			
Social responsibility			
Total	140	85	225

*: p<.05 **: p<.01

<Table 2> Length of homeless careers and homeless location

	Shelter homeless	Street homeless
Short-term homeless	105 (75.5%)	43 (51.2%)
Long-term homeless	34 (24.5%)	41 (48.8%)
Total	139 (100.0%)	84 (100.0%)

$\chi^2 = 13.9$ $p < .001$

Looking at <Table 2> crosstabulating total time homeless and homeless

locations (street homelessness and shelter homelessness), we see that the shelter homeless people experience short-term homelessness more than the street homeless people, and that the street homeless people experience long-term homelessness more than the shelter homeless people.

The age first homeless is 42.3 years. 12.4% of respondents have prior homelessness spells. This means that those who experienced exits from and returns to homelessness are not as many as in the USA: the percentage of the homeless people having prior homelessness spell is in the fifties (57.1% in Piliavin *et. al.*, 1993; 54.2% in Wong *et. al.*, 1998).

Other characteristics of homeless people

The current mean age of the homeless people is 44 years, and the mean year of education is 10.5 years. The homeless people seem to have had jobs for a considerable percentage of time before first homelessness. The percent time worked since first job is 74.2%. It means that, if it passed 10 years before one became homeless since he had the first job, he had jobs during the period of three fourths of the 10 years. This percent is higher than that of USA (56% in Piliavin *et. al.*, 1993).

When we consider class locations of the homeless people with the jobs which they have before homelessness, we see that the majority are working class (64.9%). The percents of subgroups of working class in the total are 25.9% (production workers), 25.1% (construction workers), 12.7% (service workers), and so on. The percentage of the lower class is 15.6%. That of the middle class is 19.5%: new middle class 7.8%, self-employed 11.7%, respectively. Class and homeless location are statistically related: the homeless people coming from the working class are more in the street more than in the shelter, and those coming from the middle class are more in the shelter than in the street. It is interesting that about 25% of the shelter homeless people were the middle class.

38.2% of homeless people have never been married. They have never form families. 17.8% have lost both parents under their age of 18, and 16% have grown either in foster-care institution or relatives. We find that the Korean homeless people have less foster care experience than those in the USA, considering that 38.6% have foster care experience in the USA (Piliavin *et. al.*, 1993).

29.3% of the homeless people are found as having alcohol addiction symptoms. The street homeless people are more unstable in their mental health than the shelter homeless people.

Cause and responsibility of homelessness

About 60% of homeless people attribute their homelessness to the structural

cause such as joblessness. About 40% consider the individual factors such as individual ability, family problems, health problems (including alcohol addiction), and free life-style, as the major cause of their homelessness.

We asked them to answer what an important cause each factor is, giving them 6 factors. The scale for answer is composed of 5 points from 1 (very weak) to 5 (very strong). <Table 3> shows the means of 6 factors each. They think that the most important cause is joblessness, the second family problems, the third individual ability. The rest are drinking, disease and accidents, and finally dislike of work, illustrating in the order.

<Table 3> Homeless people's recognition on the cause of their homelessness

	Jobless- ness	Family problems	Individu al	Drinking	Disease &	Dislike of work
Shelter homeless	4.08	2.62	2.45	2.00	1.49	1.31
Street homeless	3.96	2.98	2.81	2.16	1.67	1.20
Total	4.04	2.76	2.59	2.06	1.56	1.27

Although the homeless people tend to consider the structural cause as the major cause of their homelessness, more homeless people assume responsibility for their homelessness. 51.8% took over the responsibility for it, while 48.2% think that firms, the society, and the state are responsible for their homelessness.

According to <Table 4>, the evaluation of the cause of their homelessness is statistically related to that of the responsibility for it. 70.9% among those who consider individual factors as the major cause of homelessness assume the responsibility for it, while 60.3% among those who attribute their homelessness to the structural cause make emphasis on social responsibility for it.

<Table 4> Recognition on cause and responsibility of homelessness

	Individual cause	Structural cause
Individual responsibility	61 (70.9%)	50 (39.7%)
Social responsibility	25 (29.1%)	76 (60.3%)
Total	86 (100%)	126 (100%)

$$\chi^2 = 20.0 \quad p < .001$$

Causes of the Length of Homeless Careers

Causes of the length of homeless careers

The five hypotheses derived above are tested in this section. To examine the variables affecting the length of homeless careers, we establish a regression model having the length of homeless careers as dependent variable. Independent variables can be classified into two categories. the first, the demographic characteristics which homeless people have had long before homelessness (X1 to X8), and the second, other characteristics which they have had shortly before or after homelessness (X9 to X16). The regression model is as follows.

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5 + b_6X_6 + b_7X_7 + b_8X_8 \\ + b_9X_9 + b_{10}X_{10} + b_{11}X_{11} + b_{12}X_{12} + b_{13}X_{13} + b_{14}X_{14} + b_{15}X_{15} + b_{16}X_{16} + e$$

Y : total time homeless (month)
X₁: age
X₂: education (year)
X₃: class (1: working class 0: middle class)
X₄: time worked since first job (%)
X₅: marriage status (1: not married 0: married)
X₆: orphan (1: yes 0: no)
X₇: foster care experience (1: yes 0: no)
X₈: physical disease (1: yes 0: no)
X₉: family contact (0-3)
X₁₀: job search (1: yes 0: no)
X₁₁: alcohol addiction (1: yes 0: no)
X₁₂: disease (1: yes 0: no)
X₁₃: mental health (0-5)
X₁₄: work deprivation (-14 to 14)
X₁₅: homeless identity (0-2)
X₁₆: Street adaptation (0-3)

<Table 5> shows regression coefficients of the variables which seems to affect the length of homeless careers. Above all, among 16 independent variables, it is three which affect the length of homeless careers significantly in the statistical sense. These are education, time worked since first job, and street adaptation. Looking at the regression coefficients of these three variables, we find that the homeless people who have more years of education, and have higher percentage of time worked after first job, have shorter homeless careers. We also find that the homeless people who better adapt to the street have longer homeless careers. These results are what we expected. Illustrating the meaning of non-standardized regression coefficients (b) of these three variables, we find that when education increases by one year, homeless careers decrease by 1.2 months, and that the percent of time worked after first job increases by 10%, homeless careers decrease 2 months, and that the street adaptation increases by one step, homeless careers increase by 4 months.

<Table 5> Regression coefficients of 16 independent variables with the length of homeless careers

Independent variable	Unstandardized coefficient (b)	Standardized coefficient (beta)
(Constant)	36.174	
Age	.131	.063
Education	-1.208 **	-.218 **
Working class	1.750	
.036		
Time worked since first job	-.229 **	
-.254 **		
Never married	4.207	
.001		
Orphan	2.709	
.055		
Foster care experience	2.776	.053
Physical disease	2.399	
.038		
Family contact	-.490	-.026
Job search	-6.339	
-.085		
Alcohol addiction	-1.792	
		R ² = .222

*: p<.05 **: p<.01

The six variables among the eight ones, the demographic characteristics which homeless people have had long before homelessness, do not affect the length of homeless careers. The older the homeless people are, the longer homeless careers are, but this is statistically insignificant. The homeless careers are longer for those who came from the working class than for those who came from the middle class, but this is also statistically insignificant. The experience of family formation and the physical dysfunction are not statistically significant variables explain the length of homeless careers. The foster care experience is not also a statistically significant variable, though it affects the length of homeless careers in the USA (Piliavin *et al.*, 1993).

The seven variables among the eight ones, other characteristics which they have had shortly before or after homelessness, do not also affect the length

of homeless careers. Although we expected that more family contact lessened the length of homeless careers, it is found that family contact does not affect the length of homeless careers. Although work deprivation, unstable mental health, disease, and alcohol addiction were hypothesized to increase the length of homeless careers, they have no effect on homeless career duration.

We can draw some policy implication from the fact that it is not alcohol addiction, disease, and mental health status, but education and time worked since first job that affect the length of homeless careers. Recently, several policy programs have been developing for the homeless people, on the condition that the main policy axis turns from emergency care to revitalization. For revitalizing the homeless people staying in the shelters, policy programs such as psychic treatment, alcohol abuse treatment, and job training have been introduced (Seoul Development Institute, 1999; Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1999). Although, of course, each program can help homeless people, when we consider that education and time worked since first job are the most important factors lessening homeless career duration, the job training program should be developed as the major program for revitalizing homeless people. The provision of jobs and chance for work, including job training, must make the most important effect on lessening homeless career duration.

The Process of Homelessness

From joblessness to homelessness

Above mentioned, about 60% of homeless people attributed their homelessness to joblessness. When did they leave home after joblessness? As soon as they lost their jobs?, or after one month?, or after one year? In order to these questions we selected, among our 225 sample, 144 homeless people who stayed in their or relative's, or friend's housing unit, when they lost jobs since October of 1997. They are 64% of the total respondents. The mean duration of stay in the housing unit after joblessness (the mean survival time) is 3.5 months.

<Table 6> is a life table and <Figure 1> is a survival function, both of which are based on a survival analysis of the stay in the stable housing unit after joblessness. According to these table and figure, we see that more than half of the total (79 among 144 respondents, 54.9%) left their home during no more than one month after joblessness. 19.4% stayed in their home after 6 months, and only 11.8% stayed after one year. That is, after one year since joblessness, 89.2% left home. They might stayed in the street or in the

homeless shelter or in motels or SRO. The median survival time is counted as 0.9 month.

<Table 6> Life table of the stay in the stable housing unit after joblessness

Interval (month)	Number entering this interval	Number of terminal events	Proportion terminating	Cumulative proportion surviving at end
0	144	79	.5486	.4514
1	65	8	.1231	.3958
2	57	10	.1754	.3264
3	47	8	.1702	.2708
4	39	4	.1026	.2431
5	35	3	.0857	.2222
6	32	4	.1250	.1944
7	28	4	.1429	.1667
8	24	2	.0833	.1528
9	22	1	.0455	.1458
10	21	0	.0000	.1458
11	21	2	.0952	.1319
12	19	2	.1053	.1181
13	17	2	.1176	.1042
14	15	2	.1333	.0903
15	13	4	.3077	.0625
16	9	1	.1111	.0556
17	8	0	.0000	.0556
18	8	1	.1250	.0486
19	7	3	.4286	.0278
20	4	1	.2500	.0208
21	3	2	.6667	.0069
22	1	1	1.0000	.0000

The fact that more than half of the homeless people, who stayed in stable housing units and had jobs, left home in one month time after joblessness provides some policy implication for us. In order to prohibit those who lost their jobs from leaving home, we need to intervene as soon as they became unemployed. The rapid policy intervention in unemployment may be one way of hindering the unemployed from becoming homeless.

We tried to make clear the difference of the survival functions between the working class and the middle class, between age groups (twenties, thirties, forties, fifties), between the married and the unmarried. Our hypothesis was as follows. The homeless people who were working class, are younger, and have never had family formation is likely to have shorter periods from joblessness to homelessness. Contrary to our hypothesis, these three factors (class, age, family formation) do not make any statistically

significant difference in the survival function.

However, we find the difference of survival functions between the shelter homeless people and the street homeless people. <Figure 2> shows us two survival functions of the stay in stable housing units after joblessness between the two groups. We see that the street homeless people leave home at the more rapid speed after joblessness than the shelter homeless people. The two median survival time are 0.7 month and 1.5 month, respectively (Wilcoxon statistic= 7.468, $p < .01$). The Wilcoxon statistic indicate that the difference in survival functions is significant at a 0.05 level.

Residential transitions

Examining the residential transitions of 225 homeless people, we noticed 17 types of residential trajectories which they experienced after leaving home. <Figure 3> shows the three most common residential trajectories. This figure illustrates transitions made between homelessness, motel or SRO exit, and own or relative's or friend's housing unit exit. It also shows the median duration of stay in each residential state.

As <Figure 3> indicates, the most common residential trajectory is 'chronic homelessness' in which homeless people have experienced no residential transition after they started being homeless, leaving home. This type reaches to 62.6% (141 among 225). The second most common type is 'delayed homelessness' in which people became homeless after the stay in motels or SRO for a certain period which they found when they left home. 18.2% of the homeless people experienced this type of residential trajectory. The third most common residential trajectory is 'homelessness → exit → homelessness', in which homeless people have escaped from being homeless to the stay in the own home or homes of relatives and friends or the residence in motels and SROs, but they left once more the better state materially and emotionally, and became homeless again. 7.6% of homeless people belong to this type.

The median duration of stay in 'chronic homelessness' is 9 months. As far as 'delayed homelessness' is concerned, the median duration of stay in motels or SROs is 7 months and that of homelessness is 9 months. Finally, as for 'homelessness → exit → homelessness', the median spell of exit from homelessness is 3 months and the median duration of homelessness is 11 months.

Conclusion: Summary and Policy Implication

We examined three subjects in this study: the characteristics of homeless people, the causes of the length of homeless careers, and the process of

homelessness. To analyse the homeless careers and the process of homelessness, we collected event historical data through a longitudinal research design. Our major findings in this study are as follows.

First, between the shelter homeless people and the street homeless people, there are some different characteristics, though both of them share most characteristics. The street homeless people have longer homeless careers, have higher percentage of the working class in the total, have more unstable mental health, and better adapt to homelessness than the shelter homeless people.

Second, the variables affecting the length of homeless careers are education, time worked since first job, and street adaptation. The homeless people who have more years of education, and have higher percentage of time worked after first job, have shorter homeless careers. The homeless people who better adapt to the street have longer homeless careers. The variables such as age, class, family formation, disease, physical disability, foster care, family contact, alcohol addiction, mental health, and work deprivation are make no effect on the length of homeless careers.

Third, as for homeless people, the period between joblessness and leaving home is very short. More than half left their home during no more than one month after joblessness. While class, age, and family formation do not make any difference in the speed of leaving home after joblessness, the street homeless people leave home at the more rapid speed after joblessness than the shelter homeless people.

Fourth, the three most common residential trajectories are 'chronic homelessness', 'delayed homelessness', and 'homelessness-> exit-> homelessness' in the order.

The policy implication of this study is as follows. First, the rapid policy intervention in unemployment may be one way of hindering the unemployed from becoming homeless. Second, we need to include those who stay in motels or SROs in the homelessness policy target group, considering them as latent homeless people. Third, to lessen homeless career duration, we should provide homeless people with something relevant to work such as jobs, chance for work, and diverse job training programs.

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