



## Paper 6

**Reflections on the *Homelessness study*:  
Implications and recommendations for research, practice  
and policy**

**Chris Desmond, PhD**  
Research Director, Human and Social Development Unit,  
Human Sciences Research Council

# Defining and understanding homelessness

In many cases homelessness has been viewed as a problem that encroaches on the rights of other citizens or businesses in the area. The solution has been merely relocating the homeless to other less visible areas. Little consideration is given to the rights of the homeless as citizens to occupy these spaces.<sup>1</sup>

Despite frequent references to “the homeless,” homelessness is a characteristic of a situation in which people find themselves, not of the people themselves. Understanding homelessness requires understanding not only the characteristics of people who are homeless, but also the dynamics of how and where people become homeless, and how they may find their way out of homelessness

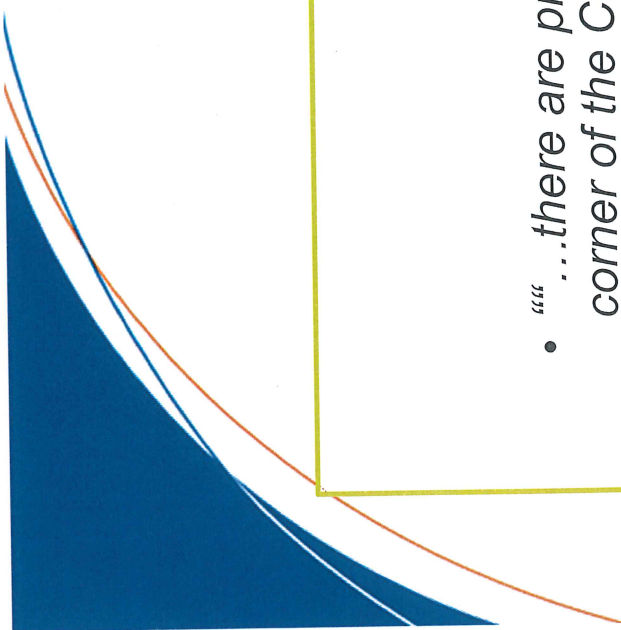
The way we understand homelessness and the subgroups that exist is important for the development of contextually relevant interventions to support these populations



# Who/what to prioritise

As pointed out by Cross, Seager et al. (2010)

- In South Africa, the plight of the homeless has been overshadowed by the large numbers of people living in shacks/informal settlements
- People living on the streets are worse off than those in shacks/informal settlements as many people in the latter group have access to regular employment and shelter even though it may be inadequate
- The conflict between municipalities objectives to eradicate poverty from the CBD to encourage investment and the rights and needs of homeless people who live in the CBD to be close to their source of livelihoods has hindered Governments ability to develop a longstanding homelessness policy.



# Changing the narrative of homelessness in Durban

- *“...there are programs which talks to security each and every corner of the CBD including Point and South Beach, here we thought that it will eliminate this situation but we don't want to do it aggressively and end up damaging individuals' rights but we want to do it in a manner in which **these people** will understand that they are not being thrown away but we are trying to create a situation that Durban should be back to where it was before. The truth is that there is no one who doesn't see that the city is dirty because of the situations of these people plus the way things are happening...”  
(Government representative)*

# Street living and shelter living populations are not homogenous

*“...by seeing the circumstances makes to feel that they are separated into categories the people who are living on the streets; there are those who are too critical, those who are coming from their homes who does not have relatives and no one in the cities because saying that maybe if he/she come to the city he/she can be able to get a job, and ends up then now (.) ehh being up and down not getting a job...” (Government representative)*

## **Different People - Different needs**

- *“My challenge is that I wish I can change my life, stop smoking so that I can be that good boy again who is loved” (street-living participant)*
- *“I think (.) if I can get (.) a job, a permanent job, not just a job for six months, a permanent job (.) then I can live for my own and I can (.) do some much things, or I can leave that job cause I can study while I’m still working that job, so I can IMPROVE my life (.) so it’s the permanent job that is needed.” (street-living participant)*
- *“We’d be really pleased if government assisted us with accommodation for at least 3 months so we can get on to our feet and find jobs, we’d rather have shelter than even have food” (street-living participant)*



# Evidence Based policy recommendations

- *“ ...the attempt to resolve that issue but it focused on very specific area so the response of the city and Metro police has largely been displacement, so you just move people around, you chase people from this area to somewhere else or you arrest them for loitering or you try to arrest them for drug related issues or whatever the case may be...” (Government representative)*
- *“ ...the so called Operation Qalakabusha in my opinion, it focused too much on the security aspect so it was very much about cleaning up the areas, making these parks look nice again that kind of thing, it was more public pressure thing, it was more of a public pressure response than it was a social response... your security responses are also important because there are crime concerns and drug concerns related to these problems. There need to be a solid social response and I think that is where the city has failed.” (Government representative)*



# IKHAYA LAMI: UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS IN DURBAN

Using participatory action research (PAR) to explore the plight of the street-and shelter living community in central Durban, South Africa.

International Conference on Community Psychology

28-30 May 2016

ICC, Durban



# Symposium Overview

This symposium presents the methodology and key findings of the first phase of a community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) study that examines the plight of street-living in central Durban, South Africa. This on-going “Homelessness study” is conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in partnership with eThekweni Municipality-Safer Cities unit and aims to understand a) the pathways to street-living; b) how people survive living on the streets; c) the support needs and challenges faced by the street-living; and c) the number of people who are currently living on the streets in central Durban. To achieve this, we adopted a mixed method, two-phase approach that incorporates life history interviews, focus group discussions and an upcoming census phase. This symposium will be presented in the form of six research papers.

Paper 1	Ms. Furzana Timol	Understanding homelessness: Research protocol of a multiphase mixed method community based participatory action research study
Paper 2	Dr. Ernest Khalema	Methodological Framework: Community-based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR)
<b>Questions of clarity</b>		
Paper 3	Mr. Kombi Sausi	Pathways into homelessness: Understanding how both internal and external factors contribute to homelessness in Durban
Paper 4	Dr. Candice Groenewald	“you have to know your story. You have to know who you are. You have to be strong”: Survival strategies of persons living on the streets.
Paper 5	Ms. Zinhle Mthembu	Challenges and Support needs of persons living on the streets: Findings from the ‘Homelessness study’
Paper 6	Dr. Chris Desmond	Reflections on the <i>Homelessness study</i> : Implications and recommendations for research, practice and policy
<b>Discussion</b>		