



# IKHAYYA LAMI: UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS IN DURBAN

Paper 4

**“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.

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# Presentation overview

## Aim:

- To introduce some of the psychosocial strategies that homeless individuals use to navigate or survive on the streets.

## Four themes

- Learning the rules of the street
- Begging and hustling
- Using illicit substances
- Hidden identities

# Learning the rules of the streets

The participants' narratives were replete with references to 'street conventions' as they relate to gangs, interpersonal relationships and trading on the street

## Gangs and hierarchy of power

- “you see [this] side (.) is twenty six side (.) you see [this] side. This area is called [ruled] by the twenty-six side. So the one who's showing this twenty-six [showing the hand-gesture that represents this gang]. They control the whole [area] so if you are not twenty-six, you not allowed to go there. But you have to go there if you know your story.” (SLP, male)

# Learning the rules of the streets (cont.)

## Interpersonal relationships and finding a 'street home or family'

- Closely linked to safety and belonging
- “so quiet [and it's] so nice to stay there. It's like a home” (SLP, male)
- “because we are friends now. Maybe I got this guy sleeping... [I can say] Ok my friend, we must move here 'cause it's dangerous now. [We] move in groups of two or three. Some of us move alone” (street-living participant, male)
- “my boyfriend takes good care of me” (SLP, female)

# Learning the rules of the streets (cont.)

## Trading is a common way to establish an income on the streets

- “when I couldn’t find work, I started selling chips and cakes. The municipality then said because we are selling without permits, we must stop trading. And then we stopped trading. I went to apply for a permit but the response was that there is a long waiting list before me, I wasn’t going to get it [the permit] then. I then realised that I should just keep on applying for it and when I went to ask for a form they said they had run out! I also live here on the street. I take second-hand clothes and sell them at the flea market. The money is little but it’s enough for me to eat” (SLP, female)
- “the permit provides the protection for us” from being questioned and “harassed” by the police (SLP, female)



# Begging and hustling

- “we struggle to make ends meet and sometimes we go begging and look for a place to sleep and all of that. If we don’t have money, we go begging from [the people] and they give us free food. So we hustle like that.” (SLP, female)
- You see, this homeless situation we have been going through lead us to begging like you ask to any person you see please, give me R5, give me R10 just to make sure that you pay for your shelter and you buy food. Some nights, some of us go to bed without eating because we have only R20 just to pay [the shelter]. It leads some of us to prostitution, the last option that [they] have to pay [to stay in the shelter]. (SLP, female)

# Using illicit substances

Substance abuse emerged as a driver to-, consequence and perpetrator of homelessness in our study

## Harmful coping mechanism

- *“I mean you see its kind [of] like, you know when you are seeking for happiness and you know if I can have one or two sips then I can feel better, at least for that certain time. But to be honest we do not like to do it but for the sake of you want to feel better and forget about what is happening; you poverties and stuff like that you know? That is why we are like, we are drowning our sorrows” (SLP)*

# Hidden identities

## Premised on fears of stigmatisation

- *"I can't [identify myself as homeless], 'cause they are going to gossip about me. You see if you tell somebody your problem, he's not going or she's not going to help you. (She's gonna?) Go, "oh this man is this and this". You see for instance now if you go= if he or she sees-sits next to you he will shift a little bit. You see.... Ya because that's why we don't tell our story to everybody." (SLP, male)*
- *"They take our belongings and throw them away. Sometimes as far as [Pietermaritzburg] and take us as well then we have to come back walking ... Yes, at night when we are sleeping they just come and pick everything! at that time we are sleeping so they will throw us in the dustbin ...Even our phones and ID books, everything... Even our certificate, everything and they beat us... They once beat me and I was bleeding" (SLP)*
- *"I do not want my family to know that I am here... I must keep quiet now till I get out. If I tell my mother she will talk to some people and I will be news over the township!" (SLP, male)*





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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

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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 ‘ <i>Homelessness study</i> ’
Paper 6	Dr. Chris Desmond	Reflections on the <i>Homelessness study</i> : Implications and recommendations for research, practice and policy
<b>Discussion</b>		