

From Street to Shelter: An Explorative Evaluation of the impacts of Panagah (Shelter Home) on the homeless and needy population in Charsadda

Sher Shah¹, Fazal Haq², & Farhan Ali³

Abstract

Homelessness is a global issue that restricts and harshes human lives in all countries, whether they are developed or developing. The current study title is "From Street to Shelter: An Explorative Evaluation of the Impacts of Panagah (Shelter Home) on the homeless and needy population in Charsadda." Aiming to explore the impacts of the Panagah on the homeless, destitute, and labourer population. The theoretical framework consists of two theories, i.e., Social Exclusion Theory and Social Support Theory, which were utilized to gain deep insight into the problem. The study nature is qualitative, and the collected data were thematically analyzed, and it was found that Panagah, a shelter in a place where the majority of visitors are poor, destitute, and labourers. Panagah plays an important role in inclusiveness, poverty elimination, and uplift of the Vulnerable Population, a step towards a welfare society.

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Introduction

Homelessness is the lack of a safe, stable, and functional residential setting is known as homelessness. It may include dwelling in the streets, adjustment in temporary accommodation with family members, living in boarding houses that have no security of time duration, and people who have been homeless due to civil conflict and other natural disasters.

The United Nations (2020) claims in its 58th session report on social development that homelessness has negative impacts on people of all ages in both developed and developing countries. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities) also emphasize homelessness, aiming to provide adequate, affordable, and safe housing and basic services. However, providing adequate housing to all people is difficult because the United Nations human settlement programs have calculated that 1.6 billion people live in unsatisfactory housing, and 150 million people have no house yet.

Similarly, like other developed and developing countries, Pakistan is also facing the challenges of homelessness of 207 million people. There is a lack of proper housing for over 10 million people, and 47% of the urban population has improper housing. The gap between the demand and supply of housing is increasing by 350,000 units annually (World Bank, 2028). The increase in inadequate housing and homelessness is caused by rapid urbanization, high prices of land and construction materials, and the weak and unreliable focus of the finance sector on housing (Khalil & Nadeem, 2019). In contrast, Hasan & Arif (2018) argue that

¹ Incharge officer ShelterHome, Department of Social Welfare Charsadda. Email: Shershahsworker@uop.edu.pk

² Social Case Worker, Center for Intellectually and Physically Challenged Children Charsadda. Email: fazalhaq8434@gmail.com

³ Incharge officer ShelterHome, Department of Social Welfare Swat. Email: farhanaliuom@gmail.com

homelessness is a result of irregular rural-urban migration, which causes many people to spend nights under bridges, pavements, and junctions, particularly in major cities.

According to the 2017, Census the homeless population in Pakistan includes the highest proportion of homeless people which becomes 44.1% of Punjab, secondly, followed by Sindh province which is 38.3%, thirdly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which is 11.3%, fourthly, Baluchistan comprise of 4.9%, FATA consisting of 0.7% of homeless people and, finally the capital of Pakistan (Islamabad) has 0.6% of homeless people (Census, 2017).

Global Literature/Statistics on Homelessness

Homelessness is a chronic problem worldwide that tends to abolish the social, financial, psychological, and emotional aspects of human life. It has the same influence on both developed and developing countries. The increasing number of homeless people indicates its crucial effects on human lives. For instance, Australia has 116,427 homeless people, a 13% increase since 2011 (Muir et al., 2020). Likewise, Canada faces more than 235,000 homeless people annually, and every night, there are 35,000 homeless people (Gaetz et al., 2014). Similarly, Benjaminsen (2018) argues that 6,653 people were homeless in Denmark. Additionally, Patterson (2017) stated that New Zealand has many homeless people among Developed countries. Furthermore, New Zealand has an alarming number of homeless people, numbering 41,000 in 2013. This ratio has increased by 15% between 2006 and 2013. While this increase was only 9% between 2001 and 2006 (Amore, 2016).

The increased homeless ratio also hits England, which is rated at 9% compared to 2014-15 to 2016-17, which becomes approximately 59,110 (Feantsa-The Foundation Abbe Pierre, 2018). Terry (2019) argues that the UK also has an equal proportion of homelessness, with an estimated 4,500 homeless people spending rough nights in different places in the UK. According to a recent study by Meyer et al. (2022), most homeless people in the US who are 500,000 to 600,000 spend roughly nights. Among these homeless people, one-third spend nights in the streets, and two-thirds live in shelters.

Similarly, the ratio of homelessness in developing countries rose to the head. For instance, the Ministry of Social Solidarity of Egypt states that 12 million people have been homeless, including 3 million children. Mostly Cairo, Giza, Qalioubiya, Alexandria, Menoufiya, Sharqiya, Suez, Beni Swief, Minya, and Assiut are affected by homelessness (Leila, 2019). Additionally, Lagos, Nigeria, has a 70% homeless population who are living in informal housing, and most people have been homeless due to the unlawful behavior by the authorities to prevent the capital's rapid population growth (Cunningham, 2017). Correspondingly, Bangladesh is also facing such a chronic problem of homelessness; the increasing number of homeless people, mostly in urban areas, like Dhaka, is eye-catching, caused by urbanization and irregular migration from rural to urban areas for basic needs like food, Shelter, Health, and Education (Rahman & Hasan, 2023). In addition, our neighboring country, India, is also suffering from homelessness. The 2011 Census estimated 1.77 million homeless people. Those who have no secure shelter, hygienic food, or water (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2021).

Prevention strategies

Mostly, the impacts of social problems can be minimized by identifying the problem, diagnosing the problem, and preventing the problem. Prevention of homelessness strategies include Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary aspects. The primary prevention tends to avert new cases of homelessness through cause identification of the problems. Intervention in primary

prevention solely focuses on reducing poverty, providing affordable housing, and increasing the financial assistance/income of households. While the Secondary prevention aims to eliminate homelessness by providing short-term assistance who are at risk of homelessness. In this category, Intervention may be in the form of housing subsidies, resident mediation, and support to pay for loan or utility services. Lastly, Tertiary Prevention emphasizes creating opportunities for long-term stability and integration to reduce the impacts of homelessness. Intervention may include relocation assistance, landlord recruitment, and long-term services engagement (Montgomery et al.,2013).

Similarly, Evans et al. (2016) argue that historically, the US had adopted crisis accommodation or transitional housing strategies to prevent homelessness. Like, the US authorities established emergency shelters for the provision of temporary accommodation along with basic and supportive services without any lease agreement with homeless people. These strategies stand for a short and temporary housing in the US. Similarly, Slovakia adopted the housing first approach to minimize homelessness. It is recommended that this approach be incorporated into the national strategy for housing support, with a sole focus on providing safe and dignified housing for homeless individuals (Switzer & Rakos, 2022). Correspondingly, the UK had introduced the Rough Sleepers Initiative in 1990, which offers emergency hostels and temporary settlements with social and mental health service support to homeless people (Wilson, 2015). Besides this, England's homeless legislation provided temporary accommodation to the homeless people until they get permanent/long-term housing from the Government (Aldridge & Enevoldsen,2021).

Prevention strategies in Pakistan

In light of the Pakistani constitution, Pakistan is a welfare state. Every welfare service is delivered through the Bait-ul-Mal Board (BMB). At the 68th meeting of this board, a welfare program for the needy, laborers, and destitute people was launched under the name of Shelter Homes/Panagahs. This program was designed by the federal government and consists of two phases. Phase one is designed to reestablish and renovate existing shelter homes in Islamabad and other areas, and Phase two includes the establishment of new shelter homes across the country. This initiative is intended to provide two times of quality food to the shelterless, destitute, and laborers. Along with food provision, temporary accommodation has also been provided to alleviate homelessness. Additionally, medical, hygienic water, living rooms, and items as per the weather will be provided.

Aims of Shelter Homes

The shelter homes are designed for the provision of temporary and dignified accommodation with two meals to the marginalized segment of society. Additionally, the deserving people who come to urban areas for the sake of education, employment, health facilities, and other amenities, like the poor people, can avail themselves of such facilities free of cost. Each shelter home is designed to facilitate 400 beneficiaries for dinner, 100 for Night stay, and breakfast (Pakistan Bait-ul-mal, n.d).

Theoretical framework

The current study will implement a multi-theoretical framework to identify the impacts of shelter homes/Panagahs on the lives of the destitute and marginalized population in Charsadda. Homelessness is not only the non-availability of materialistic houses, but it involves social vulnerabilities, social exclusion, lack of opportunities, and many other social evils. Therefore, it is intended to gain deep insight into the role of shelter homes/Panagahs, which

requires a multi-dimensional approach. The two theoretical perspectives, i.e., **Social Exclusion Theory** and **Social Support Theory**, will be applied for better analysis and interpretation of the data.

Social Exclusion Theory

This theory was established by Silver (1994) and Levitas (2006). It stresses that homelessness is not the result of unemployment and lack of income, but it is due to the systematic exclusion from social, political, economic, and cultural systems. According to Silver and Levitas, people who experience homelessness are excluded from mainstream society. By referencing this, the People of Charsadda face some social exclusion, lack of stable housing, lack of proper income, and limited access to institutional safety nets.

Similarly, the Panagahs intended to provide temporary shelter and food with dignity and recognition, except for material relief, aiming to reduce stigma and enhance social integration. Thus, the Social Exclusion theory will provide a brief map to evaluate the impacts of Panagah from marginalization to social inclusion.

Social Support Theory

This theory was coined by Cohen and Wills in 1985, which solely focused on the role of social support in reducing vulnerability and improving the well-being of individuals. Social support encompasses emotional, instrumental, and institutional support, which can help alleviate stress and foster resilience.

In the light of this theory, Panagahs play a vital role in institutional care and reintegration by providing food, shelter, and a sense of belonging to marginalized and needy people. This role of Panagah can reduce the psychological stress of social exclusion and improve resilience, which ultimately leads to long-term reintegration.

Methodology of the study

This research study was conducted at the Shelter Home/ Panagah located in the District Headquarter Hospital, Charsadda, running under the administration of the Social Welfare department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study intends to explore the impacts of the Shelter home/Panagah on the homeless and needy population in Charsadda. The study nature was qualitative, aiming to get rich, reliable, and in-depth data regarding the study objectives. Being an In-Charge officer of the Shelter home/Panagah, I have the entire data set of inmates of Shelter home / Panagah. Convenience sampling was adopted, and data were collected through in-depth interviews with open-ended questions after getting their consent. In-depth interviews and Open-ended questions allow the respondents to share their personal experiences and perceptions towards a problem. The closed-ended questionnaire cannot achieve the targeted information regarding the subject area.

Analysis and discussion

According to Aldridge and Enevoldsen (2021), homelessness has no consistent definition. Despite the differentiation in the definitions of homelessness across different countries, strong empirical evidence portrays that most of the homeless population migrates to urban areas for employment and livelihood, which emphasizes the linkages of homelessness with migration (Welle, 2017). However, Tipple and Speak (2005) state that some standards, i.e., living situation, location, security duration, and quality and access to welfare services, can be utilized to define homelessness. Likewise, it is only the perception between the developed and developing

countries that determines how they perceive homelessness and the different experiences and impacts of homelessness on the population (Ahmed et al., 2022). Additionally, Salcedo (2019) claims that the lack of permanent housing is a severe form of material deprivation, and having housing below one of the housing standards, such as security tenure, quality and quantity of housing, and privacy will compel the homeless people in unhygienic conditions, isolated social life and restricted access to health care and social services (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016).

The collected data through interviews were thoroughly coded and decoded for thematic analysis. The related themes are mentioned below as per the indicative codes.

Theme 1: Facilitation towards dignity and human worth.

One of the respondents anonymously stated during his interview:

"When I stayed in Panagah for shelter purposes, and found the staff interaction was so humble and polite that I had no feeling of being a labor poor man in such premises of the Panagah. I haven't felt shame for a while during my stay. The food and breakfast that they are serving in such a dignified way, which boosted my dignity and made us feel my worth, being poor in any government institution."

Another anonymous respondent shared his thoughts during the interview.

"After a long and exhaustive journey from Shangla to Charsadda, I was taken to Panagah by a local man. I was felt so astonished to see such a clean, secure, and comfortable environment in such summer days for poor, labor, and strangers like us was an appreciable act of the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In my two-day stay, I haven't felt any hesitation, and low self-esteem due to cooperative staff, available resources, and food arrangements in a dignified way, and served us like worthy human beings."

Theme 2: Panagah, a Place of social connection and social bonding

One of the respondents shares his thoughts.

"I have been living in Panagah for two years due to the loss of my home, and I couldn't afford rent. Panagah, give me a shelter and safety where I have no place to live or go. I have made many friends here, we talked and shared our problems, and this environment has made my life easier. Living under one roof for a long time created a strong bond among us, and we are living just like a family. It gives us a hope of care, dignity, and a sense of belonging."

Another respondent says:

"Before coming here, my life was harsh, and I had no connection with family and peers, and felt lonely and insecure every day. When I came to Panagah, I received here not only food and shelter but respect and strong friendship. We share stories, meals, and help each other emotionally. We sit together, pray together, and discuss problems, which gives us company, peace of mind, and social cohesiveness. It saves us from homelessness and social isolation."

Theme 3: Panagah as a source of Psychosocial Support

During the interviews, a respondent stated:

"I have been here for one week. Before coming to Panagah, I was facing multiple psychological and social problems. I was stressed and socially

isolated. I find here shelter, regular food, and a place of comfortable and peaceful sleep. Living with different people in similar situations gives me mental and social comfort. I learned how to cope with stress and negative thoughts. This allows me to strengthen my psychological conditions."

Theme 4: Panagah a step towards a Welfare state

District officer, Social Welfare

"I consider Panagah a practical example of a welfare state narrative where the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is wholeheartedly working on this to provide free shelter, food, and an inclusive environment for the vulnerable population. It works like a home for homeless people and addresses other issues, like to reduce poverty. It functions like social protection in worse conditions and immediate relief for unemployment and family breakdown."

Nazim, Local Government representative

"I think at the community level, Panagah clearly manifests the government's concern about community support and the welfare state. It provides an inclusive environment for the vulnerable segment of society, like the homeless, the poor, and daily wage laborers, where they are treated in a dignified way. It builds confidence and trust in local people about government services. It clearly message to poor people that the government cares for them and is taking practical steps towards an inclusive and welfare state."

A warden

"I will share here my experience being observing so closely, I will say it cares for both physical and psychological needs. It provides a peaceful environment for social connection, emotional healing, and, more importantly, a safety net for social isolation. Every individual is treated in a dignified way, and all benefit from all the facilities which are available to the middle and upper middle class in our society. This project clearly indicates the government's vision toward the welfare state and a practical example to transform charity into state responsibility."

Conclusion

The explorative evaluation of the Panagah (Shelter Home) in Charsadda reveals that the initiative plays a crucial role in supporting individuals who face homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion. By providing free meals, safe accommodation, and basic amenities, the Panagah offers much-needed relief to people who often lack access to even the most fundamental necessities. Beneficiaries reported improved feelings of safety, dignity, and emotional stability, highlighting that the shelter serves not only as a physical refuge but also as a space where individuals experience respect and compassion—elements often missing in their lives on the streets.

Moreover, the findings show that Panagah contributes to reducing immediate survival pressures, allowing beneficiaries to focus on rebuilding their lives. Many users expressed that without Panagah, they would struggle with harsh weather, hunger, and insecurity, which often push vulnerable individuals deeper into social and economic marginalization. Although some operational challenges remain—such as overcrowding, limited specialized services, and

resource constraints—the overall impact demonstrates that Panagah is an essential component of Pakistan’s social protection ecosystem and has significant potential to transform the lives of marginalized populations.

Recommendations

To maximize the effectiveness and sustainability of Panagah facilities across Pakistan, policymakers should prioritize increasing financial support and improving administrative structures. A dedicated and transparent budget, clear guidelines for staffing, and strong coordination between government departments would enhance operational efficiency. Introducing targeted services such as psychosocial counseling, employment guidance, vocational training, and drug rehabilitation can create pathways for self-reliance and long-term reintegration into society. Ensuring gender-sensitive facilities would also expand access for vulnerable women who currently face additional barriers to shelter use.

In addition, upgrading Panagah infrastructure, including the development of proper dining halls, recreational areas, medical corners, and administrative offices, would significantly improve the user experience and operational management. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, involving community stakeholders, and forming partnerships with NGOs, welfare organizations, and local philanthropists can expand service quality and encourage community ownership. Finally, integrating Panagah services with existing social welfare programs such as Ehsaas, BISP, and local government initiatives would create a more holistic and interconnected support network for Pakistan’s homeless and needy populations.

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