

Qualitative Study on Effects of Social Support Intervention on Behavioural Change among Homeless In Kuala Lumpur City

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Article History

Received: 08/06/2023

Accepted: 14/06/2023

Published: 16/06/2023

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to discuss the research on providing social support intervention to the homeless in Kuala Lumpur City. The goal is to hope that this social support intervention can help change the life of homeless people. By means of this, the researcher adopted the qualitative study through social support intervention by using hybrid approach to uncover the in-dept behaviours of the homeless, their motivation and feelings throughout the processes, which eventually led the researcher to derive the conclusion and findings from the pre-test and post-test based on the thirty participants selected in the research. Based on the results, it was demonstrated almost all the participants who had been immersed in the social support intervention had shown improvement in their behaviour, self-confidence and self-motivational level which had led them off the streets, reconciled with families and secured job employment. Research had concluded that the social support intervention were proven effective to help homeless to becomes as a productive citizens. Suggestion, appropriate social support intervention can be used as one of the strategies for authority to help the homeless in future.

Keywords: Homelessness, social support intervention main contributor.

INTRODUCTION

Basically, social support is defined as the perception leading the subject to believe that he or she is loved, cared for, esteemed, and belongs to a network that the subject can turn to in times of need or crisis (Macias, 2015). These social supports is the intervention which provided to the needy. It can be in the form of emotional attentions through offering empathy, trust, acceptance, encouragement or care; informational in the form of advice, guidance, suggestions or useful knowledge; companionship in manner that offer sense of belonging; and tangible support in the provision of financial assistance, material goods or services (Cherry, 2020). Thus, social support could come from several sources and its including, but not limited to, family, friends, partners, communities as well as co-workers (Taylor, 2011).

In the United States, social support is defined as support from family and friends as the key resources that individuals turn to in time of crisis, need, stress and trauma; in the situation where family and friends are able to provide assistance, this constitutes a form of social capital that individuals may benefit from the social

support to improve their conditions, have been widely used over the past at least two decades (Campbell & Verdery, 2019). In the United Kingdom, many well-established sociological studies pertaining to salubrious link between social relations and mental health have been published, particularly on studies that address the issue of how social isolation and lack of family support or social ties can adversely affect individuals' mental well-being, supported with evidence that social circumstances can be mediating factors in individuals' depression (Tan & Soo, 2018).

In Malaysia, the Social Welfare Department and National Welfare Foundation strategize their social support programs mostly through job seeking and shelter initiatives to homelessness people. In most circumstances, homeless prefer to stay away from these government run program as they fear of being 'sent away' to state-run shelters and facilities where they will be stripped of their freedom (Wee & Omar, 2019). therefore, the social support in this research focuses strongly in both the emotional attentions, by penetrating deep into the emotional aspect of the homeless to

empathise and support them emotionally, as well as the informational support in the form of providing guidance and moral support to the homeless. Through the research, we are aiming towards more encouraging ecologies for them and this is not for them just to come forward voluntarily but also to continue seeking active guidance and advices from the researcher throughout the research period.

Problem Statement

The problem of homelessness is a global issue, be it in rich or poor cities, in developed or developing countries. In the United Kingdom (UK), the majority of the homeless strategies focus merely on providing suitable accommodation or housing assistance to the homeless (Leicester, 2018), while the UK council offers wide range of advices on housing to the homeless. Likewise in the United States (US), there were strategic action plans to provide housing to the homeless, yet statistic of homeless people indicated that it was increasing over the years (HHS, 2018). So, it indicated that the issue still unsolved. Similarly for developed country in Asia, such as Hong Kong, a country with a highly developed free-market economy with low taxation, almost free port trade, and well-established international financial market, it is not spared from homelessness issue, with at least one thousand street sleepers recorded in 2015, which was double the number shown between 2011-2012 (Au & Wong, 2016). Even for Singapore, which has often been described as an economic miracle, a phenomenal development that features high economic indicators, including being arguably the most economically competitive country in the world, among the top ten best nations to do business with in the world, homelessness is not new in the country with the number of homeless being more than one thousand in 2019.

In Malaysia context, there has been a scarcity of published research relating to social support in homelessness. A closer and relevance to this research topic is concerning the role of social support. In the article published on social support among elderly Malaysians who had experienced major crisis life events, it was stated that social network and social support, including the spiritual support in the perspective of religious, have shown significantly aid to depression clients. They perceive feelings of belonging, love, tangible aids and advices that can help them to stay healthy and adapt to stress when they have access to adequate social support network. The research had proven that these people who have gone through major life crisis become better when they receive sufficient social support in an adequate duration of time and involved in religion (Hamid, Dzaher, & Ching, 2019). Now, the question is is there a possibility to apply social support to the homelessness in Kuala Lumpur city?

Based on the recent news published in Kuala Lumpur, although the government has initiated a job placement program for more than 800 homeless peoples which aimed to rescue them from the city's streets during the movement control order (MCO), only 166 of them secured a job, or rather, willing to accept the job offer (Bernama, 2020). In another study on elderly FELDA settlers, it has shown that depression is large associated with low scores on both physical and mental support. Besides, low depression is found on patients who receive adequate emotional and informational

support. This indicated that social support is an important factor that influence the physical and mental component of the people and it supported by (Ibrahim, et al., 2013) Subsequently, it was published that many of these homeless were back on the streets as they were not able to cope with the job with which they were placed (Goh, 2020). This was indeed experienced by the researcher herself as many of the homeless that she encountered and interviewed, were homeless whom the researcher has known for years, being on and off the streets over and over again, from prison back to the streets, from reconciling with families but reverting to being homeless and from getting odd jobs provided by various groups but didn't make it for long.

Drawing from the above studies, social supports have been identified as most commonly received by the needy in developed countries compared to the developing countries. In developed countries, they generally prioritize social interaction and support among homelessness as a long-term plan to integrate them back to the society, while in developing countries, they often neglect or have not reached to a stage to regard social support as an important measure. However, in some other study which not relates to the homeless context, several studies has been carried out to help the clients. The result indicated positive outcomes. Therefore, it is hope that the homeless in Malaysia also given certain degree of social support intervention to enable them to return to the society as productive citizens.

Literature Review

Social support theory emerged since the early 1980s from the publications by Don Drennon Gala and Francis Cullen, both drew upon insights from several theoretical traditions, were historically connected mainly to development of caregiver offering self-validation to intended participants or clients through supportive relationships (Kort-Butler, 2017). It is through these interactions within these relationships built over time that individuals create a shared experience, knowledge, and information with peers within the social support system (Hajli, 2015). Through active communication in words and actions by caring individuals who work together to create a supportive interaction system, it is expected that social relationships can be enhanced for both individuals involved including the researcher, participants as well as the group or community involved in the research process (Cherry, 2020).

In order to achieve the sustainability of behaviour change, solid set of effective behaviour change intervention tool for sustainable development is important, which include coordinated set of activities designed to change specific behaviour patterns that focus on increasing, decreasing, maintaining, as well as enhancing human behaviour (Klaniecki & Wurupulos, 2018). As it requires a critical understanding of how human makes decisions and act on them do directly influence how they develop their beliefs and attitudes, in order to achieve the sustainable development goals for individuals, the following behavior science theories and the behavior change tools will be included which focus on increasing, or maintaining, as well as improving or enhancing behavior (Klaniecki & Wurupulos, 2018):-

- **Informational Intervention Tool** - that provides guidance supported with information and education to help individuals understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future as they decide where they want to go.
- **Structural Intervention Tool** - which often uses reinforcement such as punishment or rewards based on the actions or decisions of the individual to promote behaviour change.
- **Nudge Intervention Tool** - which can be both information and structural that proposes more positive reinforcement as ways to influence the behaviour and decision-making of the individuals.

All the three types of behavioural change tools above will be used in different phases of the adopted social support intervention to drive the decisions and behavioural change of the homeless systematically, rather than relying on the researcher's own method or assumption to ensure greater impact and effectiveness.

While hybrid research is most often being defined as a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, now it is more evolved that, where hybrid research can also be a combination of two or more research methodologies within the qualitative or quantitative method as published by few researchers including the Qualitative Experiment Research on Mediated Meaning Construction using Hybrid Approach (Robinson & Mendelson, 2012), A Hybrid Approach to Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research: Using a Practical Example (Swain, 2018) and Generalising about Public Health Intervention: A Mixed-Methods Approach to External Validity in Qualitative Research (Leviton, 2017).

As this research was intended to help uncovering the thoughts and opinions of the homeless and to deep dive of homeless' problem in a microscopic manner while aiming to provide insights to help researchers in developing new ideas for potential qualitative research in future, a qualitative study using hybrid approach, by means of combining few methods such as interview, focus group discussion and observation. In addition, the use of the hybrid approach allows the researcher to compare the validity and reliability between results generated from the different approach within the research, with added advantage to provide more credible and trustworthy of the outcomes.

Objectives

The objective of the research is to investigate the impact of social support intervention on behavioural change among the homeless people mainly; pre and post-intervention.

In terms of research question, the researchers are interested to find out How is the behaviour changes of the selected homeless before and after the social support intervention given.

Research Methodology

In this research, researcher had adopted qualitative research method to collect and analyse the data. The data collection procedure includes 4 steps; firstly (i) select the relevant homeless,

(ii) assess the participants via pre-test, (iii) adopt the social support intervention and finally (iv) assess the participants via post-test result.

In the proposed adopted model, the researcher who has been volunteering in street feeding activities for more than ten years, initiated the research by selecting the appropriate participants based on their level of readiness and willingness and subsequently proposed and adopted the intervention tools within the Social Support Intervention, which is guided largely by the Three Level of Behavioural Change Strategy by HCH Clinicians (2000). This was done collaboratively with a group of experienced and dedicated street volunteers. The researcher then tracked the changes observed in the selected participants over a stipulated period of time, while assessing the outcome of the intervention tool in eliciting behaviour changes in the homeless.

The social support intervention was segregated into the following three phases:-

- **Phase 1: Individual Guidance**, mostly performed by the researcher.
- **Phase 2: Small Group Intervention**, jointly performed with researcher and street volunteers.
- **Phase 3: Community-Level Intervention**, collectively performed with communities.

Within these three phases of social support intervention, the intervention tools used in this research includes:-

- **Informational intervention tool**
- **Nudge intervention tool**
- **Structural intervention tool.**

In corresponding to this research objective, there were thirty participants have been selected from Kuala Lumpur streets, ranging from 18 to 70 years old with most of them, were Malaysian, were being referenced with alphanumeric sequence as 'P-1' to 'P-30', with the alphabet 'P' representing the word 'Participant', who had been interviewed by the researcher. These thirty homeless were then be segregated into two groups with half of them being included in group 1 as the experimental group and the remaining as group 2 as the control group:-

- **Experimental group**, the group who receives the intervention.
- **Control group**, the group who did not receive or exposed to the intervention.

After collecting the data, The researcher subsequently adopted the electronic data coding by using a web application named QCMap, an open-access software for qualitative content analysis (QCMap, 2020).

Research Findings

Based on the data collected, the researcher thence compile the findings based on the hybrid method namely the semi-structure interview, focus group discussion, and observation. Upon completing the full cycle of social support intervention, which took place for approximately two years from Phase 1 till Phase 3, a pre-

test and post-test were subsequently performed for both the experimental and control group.

Based on the results gathered from the participants, 30 of them during the pre-test which later reduced to 26 of them as 4 participants had dropped off, through the hybrid method, significant improvement were noted for the experimental group who had been emersed with the social support intervention, compared to the control group. Findings revealed that participants in the experimental group had shown significant on behavioural improvement in their self-confidence and motivation, in the manner that they had answered the interview questions, the eye contact, and the positive body language or facial expression noted in the observation category, as well as their motivation in life when they talked about their future.

The researcher subsequently compile the result from the pre-test and post-test and segregate the participants into these five categories below, which revealed the improvement before and after the social support intervention in the Table 1 below:-

Table 1: Comparison of result before and after intervention

Category	No of Participants before the Interventio		No of Participant s after the Interventio	
	n	%	n	%
High Self-Confidence and Motivation	4	12%	15	57%
Above Average Self-Confidence and Motivation	5	17%	1	4%
Average Self-Confidence and Motivation	8	27%	2	8%
Below Average Self-Confidence and Motivation	8	27%	6	23%
Low Self-Confidence and Motivation	5	17%	2	8%
Total Participants	30	100%	26	100%

Based on the above table, prior to the social support intervention, it was only 4 participants (12%) who were having high self-confidence and self-motivation category. However, after the social support intervention, almost all the participants in the experimental group, total of 15 of them (57%) were noted to be in this high self-confidence and self-motivation category. This had shown that most of the participants who were previously in the lower self-confidence and self-motivation category, had moved up to this improved category after the social support intervention, which was likewise shown in the corresponding decrease in other categories in the table below; the above-average self-confidence and motivation category from 17% to 4%; average self-confidence and motivation category from 27% to 8%; below average self-confidence and motivation category from 27% to 23% and low self-confidence and motivation category from 17% to 8% as illustrated above.

Based on the feedback from the interview questions during the post-test assessment that these participants had responded, these were the key changes that were noted based on the findings gathered from interview, focus group discussion, and observation after the participants had completed the social support intervention:-

- This group of participants was generally happier in the sense that they became warmer, more considerate, more respectful, more helpful, less negative language or vulgar words, and more pleasant to be around compared to the moment that they had not participated in the social support intervention.
- They had better mental health and had become more optimistic in the way they responded to the questions with full confidence compared to before.
- They had become more resilient to overcome the adversities and learn from them.
- They were more receptive towards their own self-appearance, with higher self-esteem that they knew better what their weaknesses to focus and proud of the strength they now possessed which translate to self-confidence in things they do.
- They started to set goals for themselves and were able to self-motivate themselves towards their own targeted goals such as going for holidays, reconcile with families or resist from all the addiction temptation.

Summarising all the data above, the findings revealed that those participants who participated in the social support intervention over a period of time were able to benefit from both the social and emotional support, which made them more able to cope with problems in lives, focus on their goals that they had never thought of, improved their self-esteem so that they have confidence and motivation to reconcile with their family members, increase their sense of autonomy that allowed them to continue staying in their job proudly in a more permanent basis, and most importantly have the capability to resist the temptation of addiction.

It is also worth noting that social support does not come naturally.

This was proven by the findings in the control group where no social support intervention was introduced to them. In this group of people, they either had very little improvement or remained stagnant in their stage of life, and continued to have trouble in making social connections with people around them, which hindered them to get employed, reconcile with family members or to quit their addiction.

Discussion

Based on the pre-test findings highlighted in Table 1 above, at least half of the selected homeless portrayed average or above average self-confidence and self-motivation, although with only a handful of them, total four participants, at the high self-confidence and self-motivation, this is an interesting findings that revealed that not all homeless are lazy and without motivation. The findings concluded that society at large should not make assumptions that homeless, in general, have low self-confidence or self-motivation or lazy to improve their current condition of life. This study revealed that a good number of participants, at least fifteen out of the thirty homeless selected were prepared to take action to improve their conditions in life, albeit that they had not been exposed to any intervention at all during this point of time. This aligned with the study performed in United States on homeless and individual with homes. The findings revealed that there were no significant differences on the motivational level to change their alcohol or drug use between homeless person and housed individuals; covariates that were significantly associated with high confidence and readiness to change behaviour were those participants who had participated in their structured addiction treatment and program over a period of time (Upshur, et al., 2015). This was likewise confirmed by another study that the general perception that homeless are lazy is fallacious, as the research revealed that proper guidance from a veritable mentor can help keep the homeless' mind sane and motivate them to excel in life (Murray, 2011). Henceforth, society at large should not possess pervasive negative mentality or attitude towards homeless and should not judge any homeless until detailed understanding is obtained or until they walk a mile in the homeless' shoes.

According to the results of the current research, the difference in the behavioural state were qualitatively significant for those who had been exposed to the social support intervention compared to the participants had not been involved in the intervention. All of the participants in the experimental group, after being immersed in the social support intervention for a period of two years, had shown improvements in terms of their behaviour, self-confidence, and self-motivation; most had managed to remain at the maintenance stage for a period of six months or more. In summary, the findings from the post-test revealed that participants who had been exposed to social support intervention had improved their confidence level as well as their motivational stage; with noticeable improvements noted for participants in the experimental group after intervention. Overall, participants in the study, namely the experimental group, with most of them had been exposed to the three phases of the social support intervention, described that the relational perspective of social support that had impacted them directly, while there were no changed noted on the result of the control group. Intimate

interactions best demonstrated this perspective, with this group of participants highlighting how social interactions with their daily community created a mutual experience of trust, support, and care.

This is further confirmed by a research in California that in curbing homelessness in the country, social support in terms of guidance, support, consultation, and training to the homeless proved to yield favourable results, demonstrating that social support can be crucial in improving the situation, including both the formal and informal forms of social support and that the presence of any can be associated with less episode of homelessness (Macias, 2015). Similarly in Florida, where social supports were provided by someone whom the participant felt emotionally close to and whom they felt they could confide with. This provided them with tangible support or information support and findings indicated that the more social supports one had, the fewer homeless episodes they experienced (Zugazaga, 2018).

Besides, it is time for the society to expand beyond the 'feeding alone' or 'work-first' principle; neither nor the emphasis on issues such as accommodation, medical care, and job recruitment as their main method to reach out to homeless. Hence, based on the above findings, it was revealed that the behavioural change tools used in the intervention had demonstrated their effectiveness and efficiency in changing in the behaviour of the participants, although some tools may be more effective than the other, maintaining their improved behaviour, as well as achieving higher self-confidence as well as self-motivation

Conclusion

Summarising from the above, social support intervention, not only can provide the benefit of social and emotional support leading the homeless towards a positive behavioural improvement, but it can also translate to long-term impact or even permanent new positive behaviour to be formed once the homeless get used to the new ecologies in the new environment that he has slowly and eventually normalised with. The homeless will eventually disregards him or herself as homeless and do his or her best level not to turn back to his or her life as a homeless as before.

It is also critical to note that, although there is no one single method of intervention that can be proven effective on everyone. There are interventions that would produce more improvements on the participants compared to other intervention. Hence, individual-based interventions that are directed specifically towards individual participants' needs, according to their background, as well as the factors contributing to their homelessness, will be much more effective than using a single intervention for all, which is also why the individual-focused approaches, such as the informational tool and the nudge tool which focus more on the relationship between the individuals and the surroundings, are considerably more effective compared to the structural tool where views and feelings of the individuals are constrained by the structures that shape them.

With this intervention and support from all service providers with comprehensive understanding of what is required, coupled with the readiness to make the effort to reach towards this goal, it is hopeful that it can lead more homeless to achieve better quality of life,

healthier behaviour, leading to improvement in the economy, safety of the society and cleaner image of the country in long run.

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