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CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMELESS WOMEN IN NEW DELHI, AND THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR HOUSING CONTINUUM

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Introduction

- Homelessness is a global phenomenon, which varies in nature between developed and developing countries.
- Homelessness is a result of rapid population growth, imbalanced urbanization (and) industrialization, and migration towards cities for employment and livelihood, which forces the destitute population to live in inadequate or dilapidated facilities (Ali, 2012).
- Women are at a greater risk of both homelessness and poverty because they are most likely to bear child-rearing responsibilities and are more likely to become victims of abuse by family members or partners.
- Census of India defines the Houseless population as- those people who live in “*the open or roadside, pavements, in hume-pipes, under fly-overs and staircases, or in the open in places of worship, mandaps, railway platforms etc.*” (Census of India, 2011, Chapter I: 5)
- Indian census of 2011 enumerated 1.7 million houseless population in 2011. Gross Underestimation!!
- [See map](#)

Aim and Objectives

- To tackle a social problem, it is essential to understand it. This study aims to throw light on the plight of a woman from the time she is rendered homeless, her coping mechanisms and her aspirations for housing continuum.
- **Objectives:**
- Study the characteristics of the homeless women.
- Enquire the reasons for their homelessness and the steps taken to deter absolute homelessness.
- Examine the challenges faced on the streets.
- Their aspirations for alternate housing and the steps taken towards it.

Study Area & Methodology

- The study is based in the national capital – New Delhi. As per the 2011 census, Delhi's homeless population stood at 46,724, 20% of whom are females. (Gross underestimation)
- The study is based on the experiences of the women living in the DUSIB ladies night shelter of Delhi.
- Out of the total 22 ladies' shelter in Delhi, 12 were chosen.

[\(see map\)](#)

- The study is based on primary data. A total of 95 women were surveyed for this study. The surveys were conducted between the months of December 2015 and March 2016.
- A purposive sampling method was used. The number of samples in each shelter was decided by taking 25 per cent of the average number of persons staying in the shelter in the preceding 4 months.

Demographic Characteristics

- 75 percent of the women surveyed in the shelter are migrants who have migrated from nearby states, the majority being from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. ([See map](#))
- 29 percent of the migrants have been homeless from the time they migrated to the city
- **AGE:**
 - 96 percent of the respondents are within the working age group i.e. 14 to 64 yrs. Median age is 30.
- **MARITAL STATUS:**
 - 53 percent of the homeless women surveyed are married, 23 percent are separated/ divorced and another 23 percent are widowed.
- **FERTILITY STATUS:**
 - 91 percent of the women surveyed are mothers, and among them 59 are staying in the shelter with their children. 41 percent of women staying in the shelter with their children are single mothers who are either abandoned/separated from their husbands or widowed.

Socio-economic Characteristics

■ EDUCATION

- The survey revealed that the majority (53%) of the women were literate. Almost 35 percent of these women have primary level education, while 14 percent came up to secondary level.

■ RELIGION

- About 53 percent of the respondents are Hindus while 45 percent are Muslims.

■ ECONOMIC

- 64 percent had claimed to have worked during the last one year. Almost 56 percent of the women are engaged as main workers, while 8 percent are Marginal Workers.
- 36 percent were not engaged in any kind of work.
- Main Activity : Domestic workers (23%) Laborers(20%) rag pickers (8%) street vendors (7%) Beggars (14 %)
- Considering per-capita income, only 34 % earn above Rs.2500 (33€)
- 33 percent of the women have a per capita income less than Rs. 1252 i.e. below poverty line.

Reasons For Homelessness

- **Causes of their homelessness:** Family breakdown: 37 %, Poverty : 32%, Demolitions 31 %, Mental illness: 1% ([see table](#))
- **Steps to deter absolute homelessness:**

Nothing (voluntary)	36%
Tried to increase earning	23%
Lived with friends/relatives	13%
Find cheaper Accommodation	13%
Asked help from NGOS	11%

- **Duration of Homelessness**
- 80 percent have been homeless for more than a year.
- 14 percent of the women have been homeless for more than 5 years
- 1 week to a month is the average time they spend *living rough*.
- 23percent of the women have been living on the streets for more than a year before coming to the shelter.

Life on the streets

- **Places lived before the shelter:** Streets: 43%, religious institutions: 23%, parks/under flyover: 14% railway/bus station 13%. Only 16 percent came directly to the shelter.
- **Surviving the streets:** 39 % depended on husband's earnings, 23 % begged, 22 percent were working, 12 % were living on the money they saved or got from their relatives.
- Delhi has a very high crime rate against women, 58% faced harassment on the streets from police, pedestrians, relatives and drug addicts.
- How they found the shelter:

By themselves	25%
Suggested by friends/relatives/passersby	40%
Rescue team	16%
Police	9%

Housing Aspirations

- 18 % plan to find alternate housing within 6 months, 12 percent within a year and 24 % within 5 years, and 8 percent will need more than 5 years.
- 38% have reported to have No Intention of Leaving the shelter.
- 70 % of those leaving within 6 months, will return to their homes in their hometowns.
- Prolonged stay of 5 years and more is mainly to save up money for building their home or to finish child's education.
- Those who have been in the shelter longer, plan to prolong their stay while those who have stayed for a shorter duration want to leave it sooner.
- 28% of those who have no intention of leaving the shelter, claim that they do have other places they can stay, but prefer not to.
- 'Negative Duration Dependence'. Acclimatization and close knit bonds make the shelter more desirable.

Strategies taken for Alternate Housing

- **Personal strategies**
- Only 54 % can afford to get a house on their current income.
- 52 % want to change their current occupation.
- Most sought after jobs: Maids, Tailor, Labourer, Shopkeeper. Low aspirations due to their situation.
- Barrier : lack of contacts, husbands, lack of documents
- **Government strategies to help the Homeless**
- After the deaths of many homeless people, government attention was given.
- “Shelter for all scheme” has set up Night Shelter and increased housing stock.
- No links to livelihood programs, no links to working women's' hostel or transitional home. [\(See table\)](#)
- Government Programs:
- Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana provides provisions for buying/building houses with cash entitlements and loan subsidies.
- Rental housing scraped from scheme. No access to the schemes.

Conclusion

- The homeless women coming from poor economic backgrounds with low level of education and skill development barely earning for survival.
- For these women, abandonment by family members is the main cause for losing their homes. Coupled with poverty and the failure of their social support system, they find their way to absolute homelessness.
- However there exists another group of homeless women, who have opted to live in shelters as a means to improve their economic condition while they are working in Delhi. These women have alternate housing options in their hometown which they return to during the harvest season.
- Those who prolong their stay in the shelter are those who are saving up money for owning a house.
- Some women even though they have alternate places to stay, prefer living in the shelter because of the freedom it affords them
- Burden of finding alternate housing falls entirely on the woman and her family, which lengthens the duration of homeless spell.
- Essential prescribed services are not provided in the shelter. Government strategies are unable to cater to the present need of the homeless women.
- Early intervention is required – counseling services, livelihood programs. Working women's hostels and housing rental schemes should be provided and linked with the shelters.

Thank You



A typical Night Shelter

Inside one of the crowded shelters

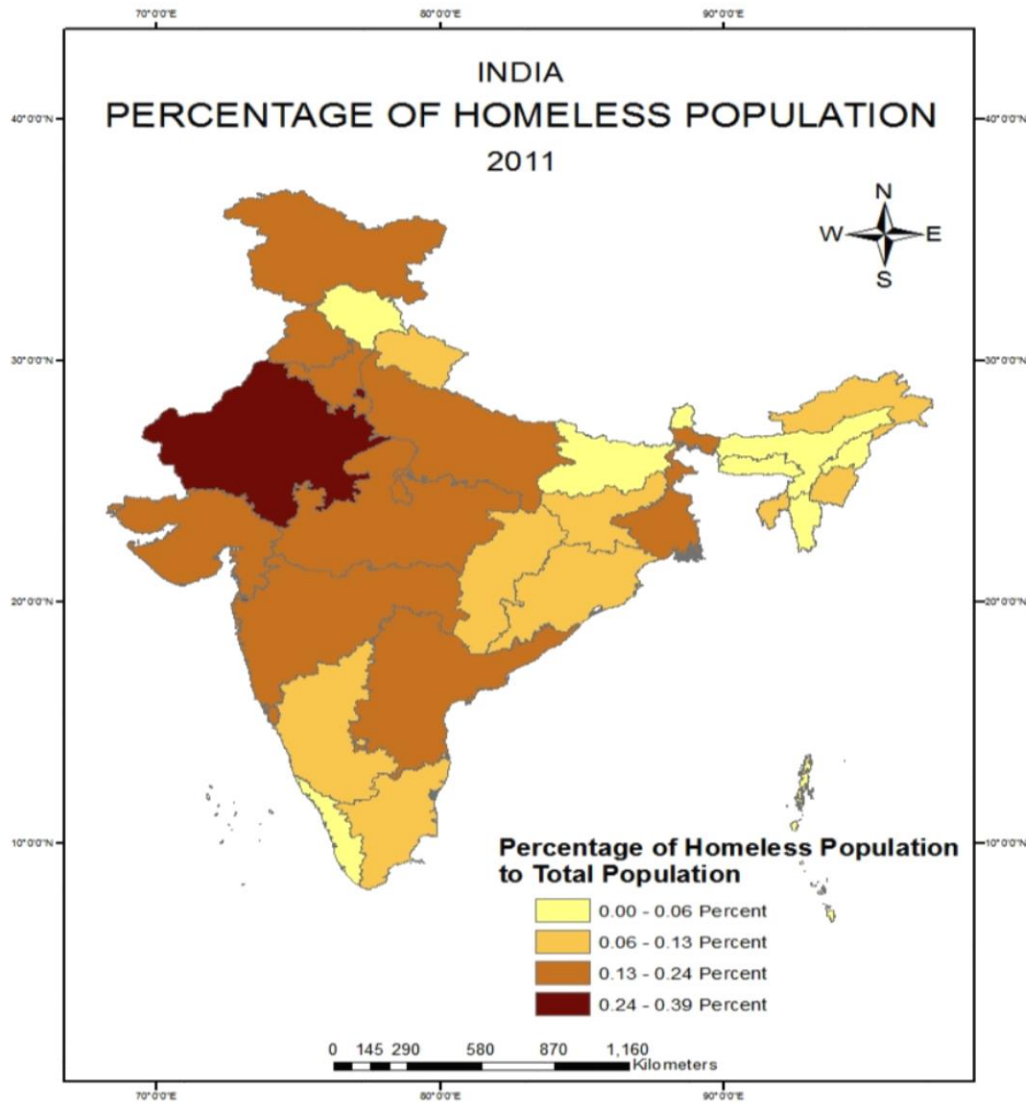


Storage area for luggage

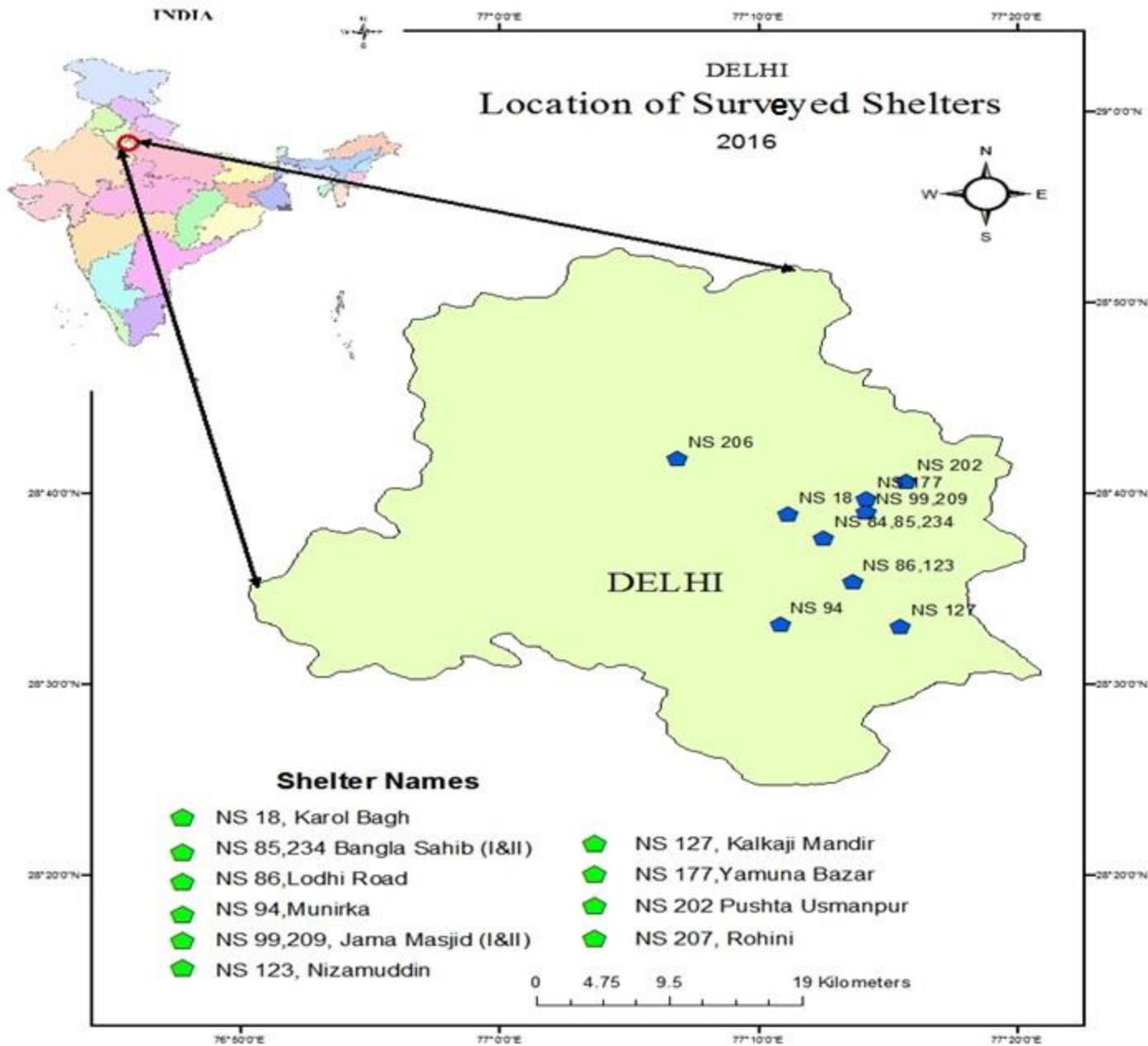


A lazy Sunday afternoon in the shelter

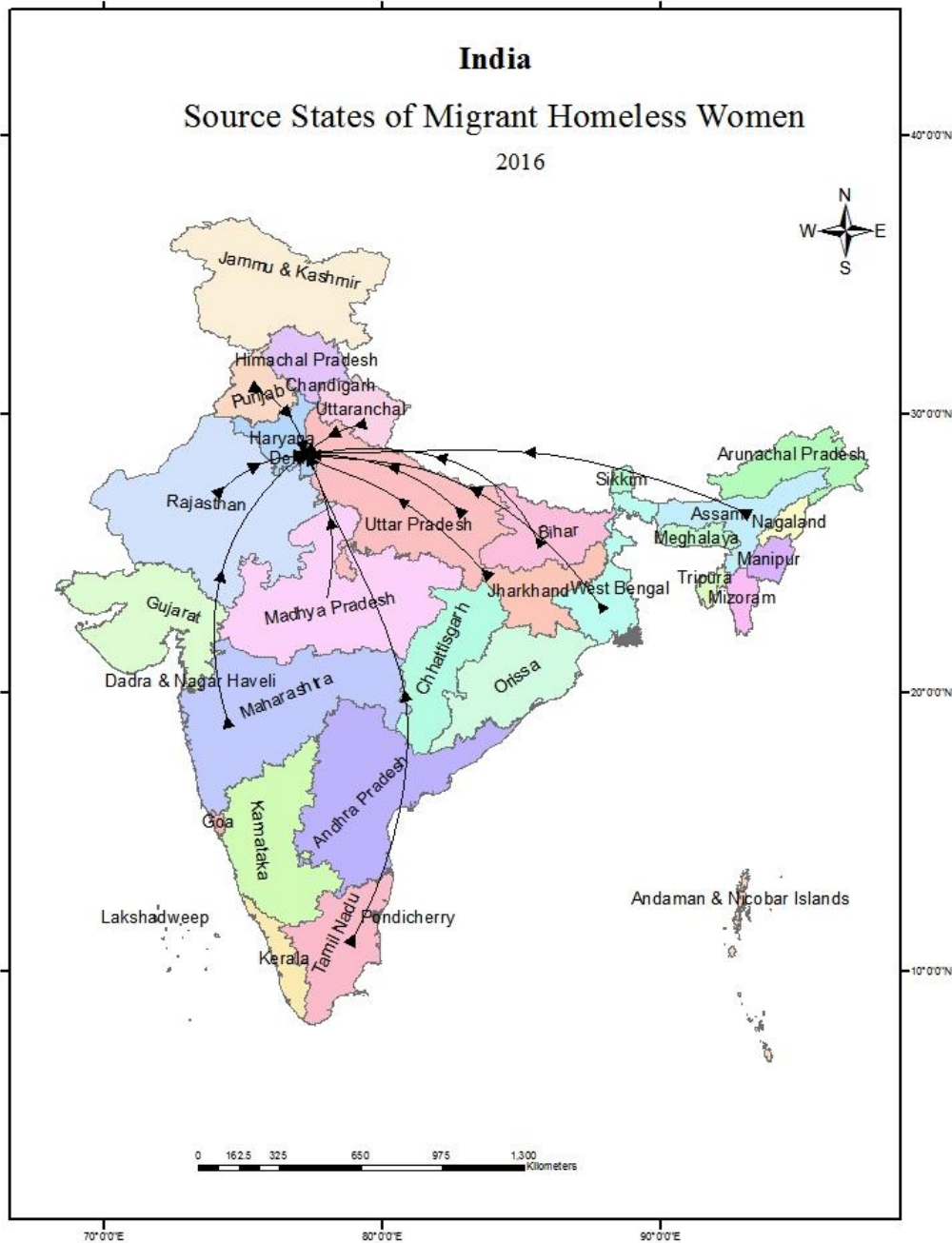




European Research Conference
CHANGING PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICES.
 BARCELONA, September 22nd, 2017



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Table 1 Reasons Behind Women Becoming Homeless

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage of Respondents
<i>Interpersonal Problems</i>		
After Husband Died, The Family Abandoned Her	12	12.63
Left Her Home Due To Domestic Abuse	9	9.47
Husband Abandoned Her	7	7.37
Family Abandoned Her	5	5.26
She Left Her Family	1	1.05
She Left Her Husband	1	1.05
<i>Poverty</i>		
Husband Lost Job	2	2.11
Lost Their Home, Migrated To Delhi To Earn And Save	2	2.11
Migrated To Delhi To Improve Income	15	15.79
Lost Her Job After Which She Couldn't Afford Rent	1	1.05
Landlord Suddenly Increased The Rent, which They Couldn't Pay, So Were Evicted	10	10.53
<i>Demolition/destruction of house</i>		
House Got Demolished, Had Nowhere Else To Live	26	27.36
House Burnt Down	3	3.16
<i>Mental Illness</i>		
Mentally Disoriented	1	1

Source: Field Survey

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Table 2 Essential Facilities And Services Provided At The Shelter

Ladies Night Shelter	Facilities Provided					
	Skill Development/ Adult Education	Medical Check Up	Legal Aid	Counseling services	Alternative Housing Options	Crèche
Bangla Sahib	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Jama Masjid	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Kalkaji	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Karol Bagh	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Lodhi Road	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Munirka	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Nizamuddin	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Rohini	No	No	No	No	No	No
Usaman Pushta	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Yamuna Bazar	No	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Field Survey

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