

Seminar 13: Impact of Take-Up of Benefits and Services on Homelessness

Chair: Eoin O'Sullivan, IE

Hiroshi Goto, Dennis Culhane, Matthew D. Marr, Japan/USA: Why Homelessness Has Decreased in Japan: Comparison of Public Assistance in Japan and the U.S.



Hiroshi Goto is an associate professor College of Community and Human Services Department of Social Work, Rikkyo University. He started his career as a social worker for a homeless support non-profit organization (San-Yu-Kai) in Japan. He is currently interested in both local-level and global-level research on the homelessness. The former is an analysis of case records of homeless self-reliance support centers (Transitional housing) in Japan, and the latter is a comparative study of public assistance in the US and Japan.

Dennis P. Culhane is Professor of Social Policy at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a social science researcher with primary expertise in the area of homelessness and assisted housing policy. Most recently, Culhane's research has focused on the aging of the adult homeless population in the US.



Matthew D. Marr is Associate Professor of Sociology Global and Sociocultural Studies, Florida International University. His research focuses on how experiences of inequality in contemporary urban America and Japan are shaped by contexts at different levels, from the global to the individual. Marr looks at strategic research sites including housing programs for people experiencing homelessness, "service hub" neighborhoods, and day labor markets.

The number of homeless people on the streets in Japan has been consistently decreasing. As of January 2020, there were 3,992 homeless people, which is about 16% of the number at the peak in 2003. On the other hand, in U.S. 210,000 people are "unsheltered homeless," as defined by the Japanese definition of homelessness, and this number has been consistently increasing since 2015. This paper will focus on one of cause of this difference, the public assistance system.

The main public assistance system in Japan, *seikatsu-hogo* (Livelihood Protection, is behind the decline in the number of homeless people in Japan. But which characteristics of Livelihood Protection have contributed to the decline in street homelessness has not been examined in detail.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss what features of Japan's public assistance have contributed to the decline in homelessness, comparing it to the public assistance system in the United States. We argue that three characteristics of Japan's Livelihood Protection program are at the core of its success in addressing homelessness—1) generality, 2) comprehensiveness, and 3) expeditiousness. We also overview some shortcomings of the program. Clarifying how Japan, as a relatively successful case, has been able to reduce homelessness could provide certain suggestions for homelessness measures in the U.S. and other countries.

Laure-lise Robben and Koen Hermans, BE: Unravelling the homeless conundrum: to get help, you need an address. A case study of the reference address at a Public Center for Social Welfare in Belgium

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Laure-lise Robben is a PhD student at LUCAS, the Centre for Care Research and Consultancy at KU Leuven, supervised by prof. dr. Koen Hermans. Funded by Belspo, her PhD project on homelessness trajectories and non-take-up of social rights from a dynamic perspective (acronym: TRAHOME) is a partnership together with the University of Ghent and the Université Catholique de Louvain.

Koen Hermans is project leader at LUCAS, Centre for Care Research and Consultancy and professor of social work and social policy at the Faculty of Social Sciences. His research focuses on homelessness, social work and evaluation research.

Homelessness is an extreme manifestation of poverty and social exclusion. Especially in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, when 'staying home' became the frontline defense. However, experiencing homelessness comes with a cruel irony: in order to receive help, you need an official address. An address is a basic precondition to receive benefits, to apply for a job, to be eligible for social housing, to open a bank account, to collect postal mail, etc. In many countries, the route to obtaining and exerting social rights starts with registration in the population register. To address this minimum prerequisite, mechanisms for administrative anchoring are in place, such as the reference address at a Public Center for Social Welfare (PCSW) in Belgium. Enshrined in a series of conditions, claimants need to meet eligibility criteria to qualify. Yet, evidence of recent local point-in-time counts in Belgium suggests only a small share of the homeless population takes up this reference address. Despite the extensive literature on non-take-up (NTU) of social rights in welfare states, research on this phenomenon in relation to homelessness is scarce. Drawing on a case study of Belgium, this paper disentangles the underlying mechanisms of NTU of the reference address at a PCSW. Furthermore, we explore similar systems in EU Member States created for this specific vulnerable group following the loss of a permanent address. Analyses will be drawn on in-depth interviews and survey data from point-in-time counts of which we will present the preliminary results. By focusing on the effectiveness of a reference address at a PCSW, the results are expected to lead to a greater understanding of the NTU of rights, the barriers homeless people are confronted with, and the possibility of the concept of a 'reference address' as an administrative system that includes the most excluded.