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# Theorizing Homelessness Looking from the Perspective of Multi-Locality

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# THEORIZING HOMELESSNESS: LOOKING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MULTI-LOCALITY

**By**

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**Abstract :**

The world population is increasingly becoming urbanized and according to the United Nations (2017) estimates, this shift towards urbanized population is likely to continue and by 2030, around 60% of the world population will be living in urban areas. The goal 11 – sustainable cities and communities – of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 specifically give attention to the issue of rapid urbanization as one of the key urban challenges of recent times. The shortage of housing in urban areas is a dominant manifestation of rapid urbanization and in this context the first target to be achieved by 2030 under the SDG 11 calls for promoting access to adequate, safe and affordable housing for all (United Nations, 2017). The inclusivity element of the set target suggests that the nation states should formulate their national housing policies by considering the needs of the homeless people as well. In Pakistan, no housing policy until now has targeted the homeless people for inclusion in the policy framework. However, before formulating any policy for homeless people, it is desirable to enrich our understanding on the daily life dynamics of the homeless people. The literature covers a broad range of definitions of homelessness from minimalist to maximalist viewpoints and thus advocates either on sheltering or meeting housing needs of such marginalized groups accordingly. However, there is a dearth of studies which attempt to theorize and link the concept of homelessness within a broader framework of migration and development interaction. The theories which perceive migration as a livelihood strategy of poor attempt to provide a rationale on the growing evidence of multi-locality arrangements of geographically split households. It is within this context that this study conceptualizes

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residential multi-locality by postulating that the urban based migrants of multi-locational households may fit well with the available definitions of urban homeless people and thus attempts to establish a missing link between these two concepts. The study provides a conceptual framework to understand homelessness better in order to devise a policy framework to address the housing needs of homeless people, particularly in the urban areas of cities like Lahore.

**Keywords :**
Homelessness, multi-locality, geographically split households, planning theory, housing policy, Pakistan

## INTRODUCTION

Homelessness becomes the vast issue around the globe upsetting the poor population in both developing and developed world (Springer, 2000; Geertsema et al, 2016). However, the. literature indicates that homelessness is researched with different perspectives and conceptual frameworks. This difference in policy effort curbed system of mutual learning.

Homelessness was firstly taken into account by U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1983, when they considered homeless population by conducting extensive surveys (U.S. HUD, 1984). From last three decades, it appears to have become a challenging task to agree on what constitutes homelessness. Every nation has their own indicators to define homelessness and because of these varying indicators it's very difficult to measure homelessness globally. In fact it has been argued that what constitutes 'homelessness' and how many can be counted as homeless is something being debated for over thirty years. (Amore et al., 2011).

Over the last few years, homeless population has reduced, but not by a lot. Those who live like this around the world are born into poverty, or some unforeseen conditions forces them to start their livelihood like this. There is a huge variance that exists between the homelessness in the developed and developing countries. On the other hand, the literature which perceives migration as a livelihood strategy of the poor sheds light on the economic motives of the migrating population. In this context the concept of multi-locality is prevailing with the flow of migration at wider scale. Multi-locality is a social phenomenon that encourages people to perform their activities at several places and take advantage of the assets offered by different places in order to maintain the living condition

of their family and economic wellbeing. Often a person leaves his family for some job related purpose or any other functional reason from the place of origin to elsewhere for a certain period (several weeks or months) just to achieve satisfactory life style (Van Derklis and Mulder 2008; Wood et al_2015).

## CONCEPTUALIZING PHENOMENON OF MULTI-LOCALITY AND HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness has been defined statistically by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2012). This definition emphasizes *"the 'home' in homelessness; home encompasses a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control one's living space. Homelessness is conceptualized as a loss of one or more of these elements and not just about 'rooflessness'. The ABS (2012) defines someone as homeless if they do not have suitable alternative accommodation and their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate, has no tenure or their initial tenure is short and not extendable, does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations"*. (Parkinson et al, 2019).

Homelessness is one of the main social issues facing countries around the world and needs to be dealt with under a systematic approach. The reduction of homelessness needs an overall framework which should elaborate the process to identify who is actually homeless and who is not. In this regard, it is worth noting that FEANTSA, an European Federation of organization working with the people who are homeless, has established a typology of homelessness and housing exclusion called ETHOS (see Table-1).

This typology commences the conceptual understanding by arguing that there are three domains which contribute to make a thing called a "home" and not fulfilling these domains can delineate homelessness. *"Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession **(physical domain)**; being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations **(social domain)** and having a legal title to occupation **(legal domain)"*** (https://www.feantsa.org).

***Table-1: ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion***

| | Conceptual Category | Operational Category | Living Situation |
|---|---|---|---|
| HOMELESSNESS | Roofless | *People living rough* | *Public space or external space* |
| | | *People staying in a night shelter* | *Night shelter* |
| | *Houseless* | *People in accommodation for the homeless* | *Homeless hostel* |
| | | | *Temporary accommodation* |
| | | | *Transitional supported accommodation* |
| | | *People in a women's shelter* | *Women's shelter accommodation* |
| | | *People in accommodation for immigrants* | *Temporary accommodation, reception centers* |
| | | | *Migrant workers' accommodation* |
| | | *People due to be released from institutions* | *Penal institutions* |
| | | | *Medical institutions* |
| | | | *Children's institutions/homes* |
| | | *People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)* | *Residential care for older homeless people* |
| | | | *Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons* |

***Source: Adapted from FEANTSA, 2006***

***(https://www.feantsa.org/download/ethospaper2006361859291413 6463249.pdf accessed October 30, 2019)***

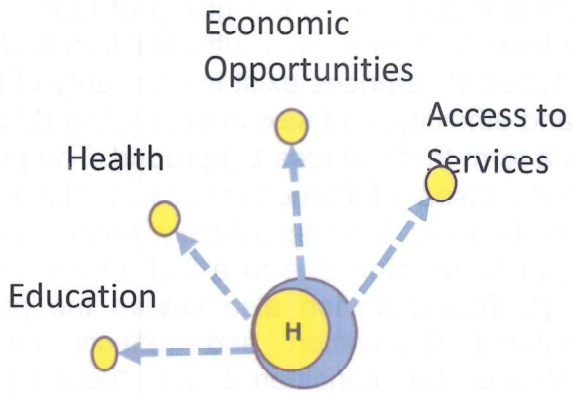
However, homelessness is not a constant understanding, it varies from region to region depending on situations and circumstances. For example, some researchers highlight the differences between the three types of homelessness i.e. transitional, episodic, and chronical

homelessness which includes different group of homeless population e.g. old and new homeless, singles, youth, children and adults. When we join all these types, differences exist in familiarity of homelessness by gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Meanwell, 2012). Homelessness is a term that includes big ground. The proposed global definition by Geertsemsaa of homelessness is, "Lacking access to minimally adequate housing' More specifically, homelessness as "living in severely inadequate housing due to a lack of access to minimally adequate housing". This definition also covers the phenomenon of poverty and material deprivation and reflects an aspect that homelessness should be considered as "housing deprivation". (Geertsemaa , 2010).

## MULTI-LOCALITY

In general, the term multi-locality states about the individual's daily life across several places, "spatially separated, functionally divided". A number of factors work together to bring changes in living arrangement of the household and also become the cause of homelessness. These include: individual activities with reference to time and space, mobility as well as stabilities, modernization, spatial patterns, technological innovation, Ttme geography, and economic transformation (Zelinsky, 1971).

Multi-locational living shows some temporary arrangement on a seasonal basis and some migrants considered it as a long term. However, most often multi-locational living arrangements are the outcome of inadequate access to services and opportunities to the household in the place of origin. This wider scale social practice is gaining attention in research and is being described as, "multi-locational living means living in more than one place, having multiple homes" (Schier_et al._2015). Multi-locality is not limited to one region but it can take place at certain distances of proximity and can also occur within or across the national boundaries. (Wood et al. 2015). The livelihood activities and multi-locational household network conceptualize this social unit as "multi-local livelihoods" "trans-local livelihoods" (Greiner, 2010, de Haan, 2008). In the context of multi-local living the definition needs to distinguish from residential multi-locality which goes beyond just visiting places, but focuses on staying overnight or living in two or more places.




Multi-locational households generally use living in two localities often at distant (in case of rural and an urban) for the social well-being of life (see figure 1). It includes social functions to increase economic resilience, for child schooling, family rearing and for the care of sick (Schmidt-Kallert 2009). It has become a mass phenomenon that arises in different social set-up and distresses all member of social classes by creating an informal settlement (Weichhart, 2015). The literature documents, the factors of multi-locational living arrangement to analyze this phenomenon with spatial-temporal patterns and mostly researchers relate it with circular migration, space and time. Thus, the flow of migration generates the concept of household split and multi-locality on which some researchers believe that migrants often choose household split for bringing-up their families and to get maximum economic benefits (Fan, 2011). Contrarily some researchers report various factors that forced migrants to choose household split to get satisfactory life (Wei, Y, 2018). However, the income is considered as most important factor in migrant's life satisfaction (Appleton and Song, 2008, Liu and Guo, 2008). To understand the relation of migrants and life satisfaction, Chen et al (2019) conducted a study in 8-cities of China and data were collected from 2014 China Migrant Dynamic survey in which two types of migrants were taken viz inter- migrants at longer distant from place of origin, and intra-migrants within the same region. They found out that life satisfaction of those migrants is less who bring their families towards cities as compared to those who left their families in rural areas because bringing children to the city may increase migrants living expense. Besides this lack of social welfare support in the city makes difficult for them to join by their families.

With residential mobility and rapid flow of migration, most of the household move towards second home to achieve decent lifestyle which is not available at their prime Residence. In addition, it provokes the

trend of rental housing, flat purchasing, furnishing, and maintenance of everyday bits and pieces. Such expenses in order to maintain second home are counted as "Additional housing costs" (Weichart 2015). Residential multi-locality incorporates the concept of household as a social unit whose prime purpose is economic production and consumption to fulfil the needs of family members. (Breckner 2002; Schier 2015).

The concept of second homes is highly visible in European countries as it is defined as the residence that are used in connection with job related purpose, education, workshops and training purpose. After conducting the survey from residence Wesbuer et al (2015) observed that the second home is widely spread in Germany which is predominantly used for education and job related purpose by young and adults. The highest second home rate is in Austria where mostly 20-30 years old age group used second home for education and training purpose. In Switzerland the concept of multiple homes is increasing with growing income of household.

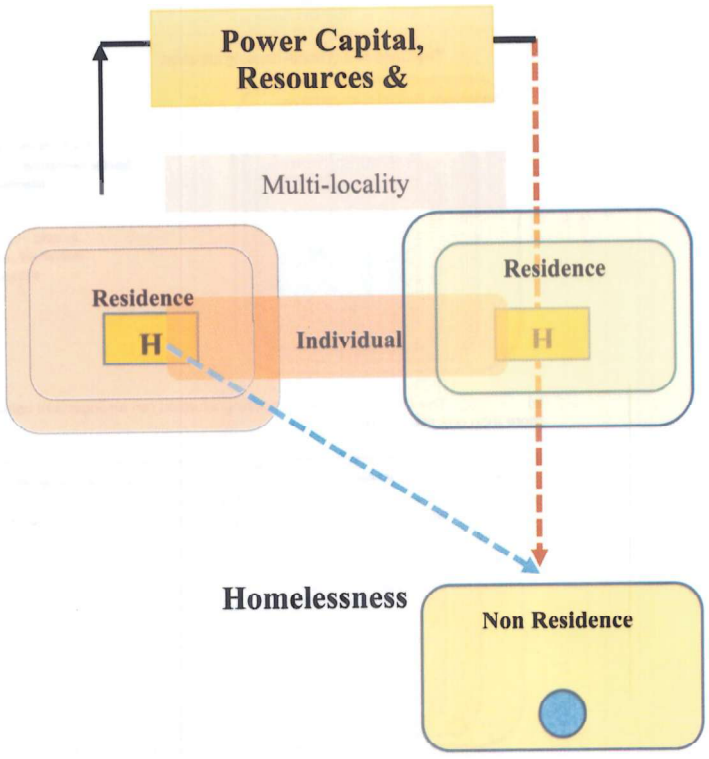



Figure 1: Conceptualizing multi-locational Household.

## LOOKING FOR LINKAGES

In the light of theoretical and empirical research homelessness and multi-locality has been described in two different perspectives. One is associated with studies of homelessness, which depicts homeless population, origins, major reasons and some aspects of homelessness. The other features multi-locality in terms of spatial distribution of population to achieve a better and stabilized livelihood and monetary system. Somehow the term multi-locality is deliberated with livelihood strategies. The theories based on livelihood suggest what poor do in their difficult time for survival. Moreover, such theories also considered the survival strategies for low income group based on inadequate delivery of resources and power (Chambers and Conway, 1992). In fact, homelessness occurs when people meet several life challenges including structural and individual factors while unable to cope-up housing market prices. Recent literature and data are still insufficient to explore comprehensive framework which provides a mutual understanding and common grounds to discuss different aspect of multi-locality towards homelessness.

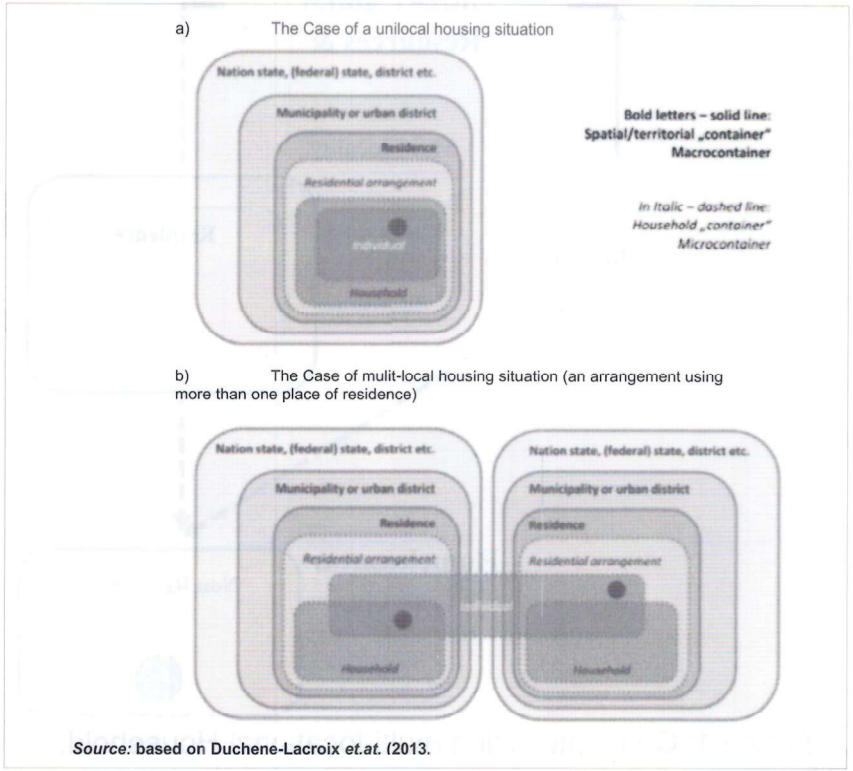



Figure-2: Cases of uni-local and multi-local housing situations
Source: Refer Wesbuer et al (2015)

Figure-2 illustrates the cases of uni-local and multi-local housing situation. It clearly does not shed light upon the concept of homelessness that is emerging through it. However, it does express the residential arrangement in terms of multi- locality. It has been argued that the root cause of multi-locality need, to be treated, to have a strong focus on job and institutional behavior because these factors forced them towards daily commuting. However, there is still a gap in theoretical perspective which is yet to be explored to understand this phenomenon in the context of development of necessary infrastructure and livelihood.

Primarily the term multi-local living arrangement expresses that housing is considered as social practice in terms of residential mobility which has to be perceived by both the household as well as the families to conceptualize multi-locality.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding discussion depicts that it has become more essential to integrate homelessness with multi-locality to observe the mobility behavior, changing patterns in human life to meet their future demands and to limit the adverse impacts on housing location in the life of multi-local household This study suggests that the innovation in the field of social networking might help to remove the complexities in multi-locational arrangements. It is expected that this major issue as conceptualized in a new way will help to further develop understanding of multi-locality and its impact on men, women, and children which causes homelessness rapidly. Street sleeping can be a manifestation of abject destitution and lack of any support for an individual's problem. However, it is often driven by economic need. Importantly, for many, street sleeping is temporary or cyclical and part of an economic strategy. To stem the flow of migration, or to mitigate its effects, the focus must be on rural and urban employment for the low skilled, in addition to the provision of truly affordable housing and realistically accessible housing finance. This will require a better understanding of what the poor can afford and a re-evaluation of the importance of informal economic activity. This research paper also intended to generate a debate to conceptualize multi-locality in terms of homelessness and predominantly its linked indicators, Doing so can help to explore cause and effect relationships on local, provincial, national and global basis.

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