

THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY IN A LOW-INCOME URBAN COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA

Izawati Ngadni¹, Nuzha Mohamed Taha², Dr. Siti Farhah A. Aziz³, Fong Jia Yean⁴, Siti
Nor Amira Baharudin⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University
47301 Kelana Jaya, Selangor Malaysia

Abstract: Referring to the data released by Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), 2018 about 500-1000 children and their families suffer from homeless problems each year from 2016-2018 in Kuala Lumpur. This information also states that this homeless person involves children as young as six years old to teenagers. Previous studies have documented the negative effects of homelessness on children's socio-emotional development, mental and physical health, behavior and academic achievement. This study uses a qualitative approach by conducting interview sessions and observing homeless children and parents in addition to sharing their experiences of how homelessness has affected their children's learning process in the urban community. Teachers and community activists of non-governmental organizations have also shared the challenges of these homeless students towards schooling and how they play an important role in motivating these children to believe in themselves in improving their academic abilities. This study has identified the challenges faced by these children in the education process.

Keywords: Homelessness, schooling, education

1. Introduction

Homelessness is defined as the people who are forced or have to live in a house that has below minimum standard or has no permanent and safe tenure. People can be categorized as homeless if they are living on the streets. They are considered primary homelessness, moving between temporary shelters, including houses of friends, family, and emergency accommodation, which is considered secondary homelessness, and living in private boarding houses without a private bathroom and/or security of tenure, which is considered tertiary homelessness. While the definition of "homeless" legally varies from country to country or between different jurisdictions within the same country or region.

In the research by Kirby A. Chow, Rashmita S. Mistry, and Vanessa L. Melchor (2015), Samuels, Shinn, and Buckner (2010) stated that homelessness will have a tremendous impact on their schooling. The data stated Nationally from National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), during the year of schooling session in 2011-2012, over a million students were identified as homeless (2014), and these homeless students are at significant risk for negative educational, behavioral, and mental health outcomes. In addition, as cited in Kirby A. Chow et al. (2015), the homelessness situation that makes them often change schools during the school year makes them face difficulty adjusting to a new curriculum, new teachers, and peers, and

unfamiliar social environments (Samuels et al., 2010).

As a result, mobility can have an impact on these students' academics, psychology, and society. Lower reading and math achievement is associated with lower school mobility and homeless students, in particular, are at greater risk for exhibiting such academic concerns (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012; Samuels et al., 2010). Furthermore, Kirby A. Chow et al. (2015) stated that homeless children have experienced isolation as a result of their mobility and literal separation from their parents and other family members, as well as social and psychological isolation in school.

At the same time, Fantuzzo and colleagues (2012) found that elementary school-aged homeless children had more difficulties cooperating with peers and teachers than children without homelessness or school mobility experience. Children often lose connection with important social support figures, such as family and friends, and disturbance to social bonds is linked to students' difficulty in developing relationships inside the classroom. Feelings of social isolation, rejection, and withdrawal have been correlated with poorer educational achievement outcomes, especially for children who have experienced extensive periods of homelessness.

1.1 Background of the study

Being a child growing up in a homeless state will directly affect the education of the children. In addition to health problems, these conditions also allow them to suffer abuse and neglect, injure them, and tear their families apart. A homeless kid is facing a rather frustrating problem in his academic journey, provided he can continue to attend school. Children's education needs are very important to them, affecting their emotional, social, and physical development, where these developments are directly related to their adulthood. Neurological research shows that the early years play a key role in children's brain development. That is why understanding the need to invest in young children's education is important to maximize their future well-being.

The government is always concerned about the fate of homeless people, especially children. Despite being forced to grow up in disadvantaged situations and environments, it is not a barrier for those children to get an education at the *Sekolah Bimbingan Jalinan Kasih* (SBJK). The school is the only school dedicated to homeless children and was an initiative by the Ministry of Education to provide access to education to homeless children around Kuala Lumpur. Learning in SBJK focuses primarily on developing religious or moral and student self-esteem to enable SBJK students to be accepted by society. Since its inception in 2013, KPM and SBJK school management has organized various strategies with the best efforts to implement various programs so that students at SBJK achieve targeted goals.

The YKN Education Fund was launched on June 20, 2019, to raise funds to help orphans and homeless children. Through this initiative, they would be assisted in education, welfare,

and future careers. The first pilot project was implemented in March 2019, involving five homeless children in the capital city and orphans in Kuching, Sarawak. The Education Fund's results will also be used to help the education of children of street friends (homeless) who have dropped out of education, orphans, the poor, and children from abandoned and disadvantaged families to enroll in full boarding schools, including Tahfiz.

Furthermore, Norhafizan Ismail et al. (2018) found that children of the homeless were different compared to ordinary children living in a normal environment. They may be wise in the street but weak in the classroom setting. The daily life has caused the aggressive attitude and focuses on difficulty indirectly affect the teacher's perception of them during the teaching and learning process. These children feel that education is unimportant because, in the end, they will still be homeless like their parents. So, teachers should explain their intentions and goals in pursuing schooling. These homeless children also only come to school because it provides four meals a day, which is one of the main reasons they come to school. Teachers also find it difficult to maintain their attendance at school as all of these children always move to a different place following their parents. If teachers give homework to be completed, they will lose exercise books.

1.2 Research Objective

This study aims to identify the perceptions and challenges of homeless children in schooling, what factors contribute to the problems of these children and how this situation may affect the quality of their education.

1.3 Research Question

What are the challenges faced by children and parents toward schooling?

2. Literature review

Although issues of the street or homeless children have been discussed for decades (Nur et al., 2017), however, street and homeless children are still invisible and suffer from hunger and pain (Abd Hamid, Ahmad & Tahir, 2017). Children who are homeless and living on the street are described as homeless. Losing a home or being homeless is a complex term, and many homeless people have no shelter, access to temporary rooftops, or uninhabitable housing. Those who live on the road may have lived there temporarily, for many years, or permanently. Personal problems and situations are also seen as contributing to homelessness (Cross & Seager, 2010; Richer, 2019). A previous study conducted in southern Africa on homeless people shows that the main causes of homelessness are domestic violence, violence, deportation, economic hardship, and the pursuit of freedom and a better life (Richer, 2019).

UNICEF has divided street children into three groups, namely, "children on the street," "children at risk of being on the road," and "street children." "Kids on the street" are those who have a home that basically uses the streets in the daytime as a source of sustenance to carry on

with their daily lives. The largest group are the "children at risk of being on the road," those facing severe economic crises, so the group has a high probability of becoming street children. The last group is those who take the streets as their home and economic source and forge family relationships with those facing unfortunate circumstances. For example, they include refugees, orphans, or abandoned kids (Jalanan et al., 2020).

Previous studies on the effects of homelessness on children's education generally do not meet the explanation of the relevant theories. Hence, the latest study has linked the theory of motivation (Maslow), Bronfenbrenner, and labeling theory to analyze the impact of homelessness on children's education. When this theory is applied to structural and institutional obstacles, these theories can help to explain why homeless children have difficulties obtaining a basic education.

Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs and motivation may be applied to identify and explain the psychological effects of homelessness on the individual. According to Maslow (1954, 38), human needs are organized in a hierarchy beginning with psychological needs such as food and shelter, moving upward through belongingness and self-esteem needs, and ending with self-actualization. The most basic needs, physiological and safety needs, dominate individuals when unfulfilled. In other words, individuals plan their future around satisfying these needs. Thus, for the homeless family, pursuing an educational goal may not be considered an important option until these basic needs are fulfilled.

Homelessness often has a negative effect on the academic success of children. This literature review, using Maslow as a framework, explores how different aspects of homelessness often act as barriers to the educational process. Two types of barriers, structural and administrative, are identified and discussed in the following section, and then labeling theories will be applied to discuss these obstacles and their effects.

The impact of homelessness on children's development is complex and involves many aspects. Bronfenbrenner's theory and the bio-ecological systems approach are used as a conceptual lens for this study to better understand all the factors involved in the problem of homelessness and its impact on children's development. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological system is used to study and understand how homelessness affects children and their environment in the form of interrelated systems of exchange and open action that shape the relationships that influence children's development.

While the labeling theories are applied to the issue of homelessness to examine the problem of stigma, thus, stigmatization occurs through being labeled as deviant. Once an individual is stigmatized, such as being labeled as homeless and perceived as deviant, other generalized treatments are likely to be assumed regardless of whether the individual possesses these treatments. It has been noted that homeless children may be at a disadvantage in an

academic setting because others may feel they are not smart simply because they are homeless. Labeling children as poor achievers may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which these students structure their behavior to conform to how others see them.

2.1 Barriers and challenges to education

2.1.1 Poor hardcore

Poverty is a situation or circumstance in which a person cannot provide sufficient basic needs in life and is financially inadequate. Children from this poor, high-deferent family will not be sent to school. This is because the children's parents concentrate on accommodating their basic needs, such as food. They will release children to find jobs to help families gain financial resources to sustain their lives. According to UNICEF Malaysia 2018, children in the city are from low-income families with a b40 background and come from broken families or are under the care of single parents between the ages of 5 and 18. Most children in the city face poverty. These children are at risk because they live in urban areas, and some of them begin to explore the boundaries of their existing life because of boredom and the feeling of escaping from their daily routine (A'ina Mardhiyah, 2017).

A study by the National Institute for Child Care and Development on Early Childhood reported that children in low-income families and minorities are less likely to be in low-quality childcare situations than their peers. Researchers have documented the benefits of high-quality child care on children's development and well-being (Pattnaik et al., 2018). Children from homeless families need access to high-quality early childhood programs. The positive experiences they receive in the program can help reduce the negative experiences they face in their personal lives and help them overcome negative experiences (Pattnaik et al., 2018).

Normally, most homeless parents with low education will have trouble sending their children to school to gain an education. They will ignore their children to get financial resources for school funding because these homeless children come from families of hardcore poverty backgrounds. This will be a challenge for their schooling process if they do not receive parental support. This is because parents do not want to change the family's fate or have to be comfortable with their free and unrivaled lives. As a result, these children will lose their direction and motivation to continue their schooling sessions, and as a result, they will continue their survival as street children.

2.1.2 Teacher's ability

Every child has the right to an education, even if they are street or homeless children. Most schools often deny this right where the existing system cannot accommodate this vulnerable group. Transitioning these children to education is difficult because of the many obstacles these children face. Some children need to work to support themselves, so it can be challenging for them to attend school. The shelter takes most children back to school, which is tedious because some are embarrassed and humbled. Problems of teachers' incompetence in

dealing with street or homeless children make the transition difficult (Richer, 2019).

These preschool teachers have honestly and naively given their negative perceptions about these homeless children. Some believe that these homeless children will misbehave and be unfocused. Some teachers expressed that the children would be dressed poorly, very behind in their development, lonely, scared, and shy. The participants predicted that the children would be troubled (Kim, 2013).

Among the other challenges these homeless children face is that responsible teachers face obstacles to giving them the best and most quality learning process. Among the constraints teachers face are long school hours, where once the classroom session ends at noon, teachers should arrange for the children to have lunch and sleep until 4.30 pm. In this case, teachers should look after these children as they sleep at school. Because of this tight schedule, teachers face constraints and have limited time to plan and provide quality teaching aids for teaching and learning activities (Ismail & Alias, 2018).

In addition to teaching and managing these homeless children throughout the day, homeless preschool teachers also have to sacrifice their weekends to find the homeless children, where this activity is called outreach programs. This situation also affected the teacher's emotions due to the commitments they had to devote to the program, and they could not spend time with their families on the weekends. In addition, programs held by outside parties and NGOs in these homeless schools also indirectly disrupt the goals of academic progress that teachers want. This happened because this school is the only school dedicated to homeless children in Kuala Lumpur by the government, so many NGOs and outsiders come to the school to hold programs for these homeless children. This presents additional challenges and tasks for teachers as they are also involved in managing the program. In addition, children start to get bored with the program organized weekly. This situation indirectly affects the achievement of homeless children's academic progress (Ismail & Alias, 2018).

At school, the homeless preschool teacher is also worried and concerned about the new curriculum for preschoolers. According to them, the new curriculum is more challenging to implement for these children because the teachers worry that children cannot afford to adapt to a new curriculum that will stifle teaching and learning sessions. This situation can cause them to become lazier and more bored due to the high curriculum content (Ismail & Alias, 2018).

In their research, Holt and Garcia (2005), as cited in Park et al. (2019), emphasize that the primary tendency for teachers to work with poor and homeless children is to understand the challenges these children face and develop appropriate instructional skills. Specifically, teachers or educators can collaborate with local homeless shelters to help shelter teachers better understand the needs of homeless children through integrated literacy activities (Park et al., 2019). Research shows that homelessness negatively affects children's literacy development

(Ryan, 2018). Previous research has also shown that homelessness has badly affected children's literacy skills, except for teachers, social workers, or volunteers providing early literacy interventions to these homeless children. (Liew, Cao, Hughes, & Deutz, 2018; Park et al., 2019).

2.1.3 *Parental Support/ Support System*

All children have the right to receive a quality education to develop their potential. In line with previous studies (Kisirkoi, 2016; Vameghi et al., 2010), poverty and parental neglect are two main reasons children are forced to work on the streets rather than at school (Nouri & Karimi, 2019). Poverty status and homelessness often inspire a mentality that blames the victim. The community believes that poor and homeless caregivers or parents are always lazy, care little for their children, and neglect them. This perception has discouraged teacher training programs from providing direct experience to prospective teachers with homeless children and their caregivers (Bridges, 2017; Park et al., 2019).

Homeless children with support systems can help positively impact their school success. Building this support system requires the cooperation of school counselors, school social workers, and the community to see what this homeless family needs. Community and agency services and relationships with resources such as community organizations, businesses, and mental health teams can help to provide comprehensive support for these homeless children (Havlik et al., 2017). Their study reports that homeless stigma often hinders families and students from identifying themselves with educational agencies. Due to that, school counselors need to find ways to connect and build trust with the families of these homeless children. One way to build trust with this family is to provide a program for parents where relationships between the two parties can contribute to the academic development of these homeless children (Havlik et al., 2017).

Anthony et al. (2018) stated that there is a strong positive correlation between parental psychological stress and children's social-emotional inconsistency, and thus, the relationship between parent and child influences two-way relationships. Consequently, issues faced by families experiencing homelessness, including the lack of a positive parental role model and low parental self-esteem, have increased parental and child stress and may impair healthy parent-child relationship functioning (Swick, 2008). While the negative effects of homelessness on children's development may be due to stress, including extreme poverty, housing instability, school mobility, property loss, and social network disruption, the results of the study also suggest that it happened because of the unsafe primary bonding between parent and child (Anthony et al., 2018).

2.1.4 *Children with no identification documentation*

Street children are children, from infants to 18 years old, who have critical social problems. Indirectly, they are exposed to negative social developments and have to deal with this problem. These challenges happen, especially in the case of children who have no birth certificate or no relevant documents. This documentation problem causes them to not get benefits or social services from the relevant authorities as they are not properly registered as Malaysian citizens (Aliaas et al., 2012).

Identification documentation is the most important information in the registration of the identity of an individual in a country. This is important because one's identity documentation can identify the identity and status of the individual's citizenship, population, and personal information. Children with no self-documentation are children born on the street, children who do not know their offspring (nasals), children with financial restrictions on birth registration, exploited children, and refugee children.

In Malaysia, orphanages have provided basic education by sending orphans to schools or through informal education (Bakar, 2010; Aliaas et al., 2012). However, for those who do not have legal documents supporting their existence, the possibility of enrolling in these educational institutions is very slim. This also applies to government-sponsored schools. The results of this study contradict the possibility that these street children are receiving proper education. Without educational activities, children living on the streets or homeless were forced to struggle independently with whatever activities they came across. Their unique natural potential cannot be realized before they reach adulthood. For example, many do not acquire basic formal literacy skills (Aliaas et al., 2012).

3. Methodology

This research aims to explore the challenges faced by homeless children and their parents, the schooling process, and how it will impact the quality of their education and development. This chapter will discuss the research design, setting descriptions, data collection procedures, data analysis processes, and legality and trust data.

This study has chosen qualitative research as it provides a naturalistic interpretation and approach to the selected subject, such as the homeless students, teachers, Non-Governmental organizations (NGO) involved with these students, school management, etc. Qualitative research provides a deep picture of the real-life experiences and problems of homeless children and their families. The implemented approach is case study research, defined as an analysis of the people, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems available and holistically studied using one or more methods. The case study might be obvious in illustrating entities that make up a unit, such as a person, organization, or institution.

Methodology in this research focuses on case studies based on in-depth research on

individuals, groups, or activities directly involved with the research title. The purpose of this case study is to understand the case's complexity. For this reason, this case study uses qualitative research methods to collect the required data based on the research questions. The following qualitative methods have been used in this case study.

3.1 Participants

This qualitative study obtained information from seven adult participants and five students. The first participant was a secondary school teacher who had served under the Ministry of Education for more than fifteen years. In addition to his responsibilities as an educator, he is also active in volunteer work and has helped many homeless until some can lead a better life. He has also worked with government agencies to help these people get support for a better life.

The second and third participants were homeless parents from Selangor and Kelantan. They have been living as a homeless family for several years and have two children, a boy, and a girl. The father was a former drug addict who succumbed to this bad habit but had to live without a home due to job loss and unpaid wages by an irresponsible employer, and the mother is a housewife. Loss of income and often being deceived by employers have caused them to lose their income source and even their homes.

The fourth participant (P4) is the co-founder and principal of *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit*. She is also a mother and a teacher who believes that education is a human right. Enthusiastic in all matters related to education and community culture, she and her colleagues established the Buku Jalanan Chow Kit, which is an organization that emphasizes the idea that knowledge through education is the most important food for human beings if they want to thrive. The *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit* Team (BJCK) has collaborated and unpacked attentively and critically through educational activities specifically to educate the minds of children from urban low-income families around Chow kit, Kuala Lumpur.

The fifth participant (P5) is a teacher who works permanently at the BJCK Learning Centre, who holds a Degree in Mathematics and has been with BJCK since its inception in 2015. Initially, BJCK only provided small library facilities moving from lane to lane around the Chow Kit area, formerly known for its bad images. Currently, BJCK is fully operated daily with the sponsorship of the public and corporate bodies in the shophouse at Lorong Haji Taib 1. BJCK offers not only reading classes but also learning Mathematics, Science, English, etc.

Next, the sixth participant (P6) is an oil and gas engineer who serves voluntarily as one of the teaching staff at BJCK. He started serving as one of the volunteers at BJCK in 2017 when a friend introduced him to the volunteer programs and activities at BJCK. Realizing that the children here have the potential to excel, he decided to continue serving by teaching mathematics twice a week. At first, it was quite difficult for his family to support his decision,

but now he has the family's full support, and he has admitted that he is finding peace and joy by teaching the children at BJCK.

In addition, this study did interview a group of five children (P7, P8, P9, P10 & P11). These children are stateless but were born in Kuala Lumpur and are trapped with parents or guardians who are not Malaysian citizens. Some of them live with their neighbors because both parents return to their home country of Indonesia.

This study has also obtained information from the 12th Participant (P12), a manager, and a registered and licensed counselor at the Chow kit Foundation.

Besides, the opinion in line with the research question has been taken from the panel members of the online discussion on the Marginal Child Education: Post Covid-19 held on 16 July 2020. These three-panel members are directly involved with alternative schools for marginalized children throughout Malaysia in Selangor and Sabah.

Table 1 represents the list of participants:

Table 1

Participant	Gender	Status
P1	Male	School Teacher under MOE (15 years) and NGO Volunteer (10 years)
P2	Male	Parent
P3	Female	Parent
P4	Female	Co-founder and Principal at BJCK (8 years)
P5	Female	Teacher at BJCK (8 years)
P6	Male	Oil and Gas Engineer and Volunteer at BJCK (5 years)
P7	Male	BJCK student
P8	Female	BJCK student
P9	Male	BJCK student
P10	Female	BJCK student
P11	Male	BJCK student
P12	Female	Manager and Counsellor in Chow Kit Foundation

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

3.3.1 Interview

Before the interview started, each participant was asked to read and sign the authorization form for case study purposes and a statement assuring confidentiality. All participants are selected purposely based on the criteria of at least 1 year of experience dealing with homeless children.

In-depth interviews with these participants representing the selected organizations are the first step in the data collection process. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2006), the conversation usually happens between two people but sometimes involves more people directed by one to get information from others. These field notes prove written accounts of what has been heard, seen, experienced, and conceived when collecting and reflecting data. Once all participants are selected, each person will be given a series of questions related to factors related to schooling challenges to homeless children, the quality of education received, and suggestions for improvement.

Each interview is recorded and copied, and all feedback during fieldwork has been taken. Conducting individual interviews can provide data for every in-depth view of the responses of the participants. Throughout the interview sessions, field notes have been taken, including those showing the expressions and emotions of each participant. All field notes are logged in private logs. Maintaining personal logs is particularly useful for me as a researcher. It helps to track the development of research projects and to record how researchers have been influenced by data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Apart from physically interviewing, this study also interviewed participants through phone conversations, WhatsApp, and email.

3.2.2 Observation

Apart from interviewing participants, the data is also being collected by observing them, their activities, and their physical features in natural conditions. Observations were made on children and teachers at the *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit* learning centre. These observations are also made openly where the subjects know they are being observed.

3.3.3 Document analysis

This study also obtains data through document analysis, a form of qualitative research where the documents are interpreted to obtain information around the topic of evaluation. Documents are analyzed through the document's contents on the ongoing activities, policy manuals, strategic plans, and learning syllabus in the annual report provided by *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit* and *Pusat Aktiviti Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Chow Kit*.

3.3 Research Location/Site/ Setting

This case study was conducted around Kuala Lumpur and focused on those involved in social activities of NGOs, parents who are experienced as homeless, and teachers involved in teaching these homeless children. It has been conducted at two learning centres that provide educational activity facilities and services for homeless children, children from urban low-income families, and street children around the Chow Kit; namely, *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit* and *Pusat Aktiviti Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Chow Kit*.

Located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, Chow Kit has a reputation as a poor, rough, and crowded urban area. The relatively rapid development in the vicinity of this area was found not to help the people living there, as many of them were in an urban poor situation, with the whole family having to stay cramped in one room. There is a misconception that people on the streets of Chow Kit have lost their homes and live without jobs. However, in many cases, this is a problem for adults who do not have enough income for a good life, while children have nowhere else to escape from their crowded homes.

Buku Jalanan Chow Kit (BJCK) is an educational center and a safe place for children in this neighborhood. Most of them have no citizenship and do not have access to educational facilities. Children without citizenship will attend classes here, while Malaysian children will enter here after the school session. BJCK started its first class at its new location on the last day of 2017. *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit* (BJCK) is an NGO with a proven track record and has gained widespread support among beneficiaries and the general public. This learning center has been set up to meet the needs of children from the underprivileged in the Chow Kit community. Among the facilities provided are providing educational opportunities for every child, a safe space and children's activity center, and a home-schooling center for the displaced children.

Apart from the *Buku Jalanan Chow Kit*, the *Yayasan Chow Kit* is an earlier foundation that fights for the fate of at-risk children around the Chow Kit. The *Yayasan Chow Kit* was established in January 2011 and is an organization under the Ministry of Women and Community Development. Its main mission is to protect the rights of at-risk children and adolescents and to provide a conducive environment and positive and comprehensive opportunities so children's optimum potential can be polished and achieved. There are three entities under this foundation, namely *TASKA Baitul Amal* at Jalan Raja Laut (for children 0-4 years old), *Pusat Aktiviti Kanak-Kanak Yayasan Chow Kit* at Jalan Chow Kit (for children 5-12 years old) and Kuala Lumpur Krash Pad (KLPP) at Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (for 13-21 years old).

Yayasan Chow Kit (YCK) is a 24-hour crisis and drop-in center that provides food, activities, therapy, case management, and educational programs for at-risk Chow Kit children. YCK is a non-profit organization that caters to the needs of children in and around Chow Kit. They run two one-stop centers in Chow Kit and one safe home for children needing temporary

care. At YCK, they provide many positive and holistic opportunities through programs and case management to enable children to reach their full potential. They also provide services without discrimination and protect all children regardless of status, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Various social services are provided, including issues of adoption, parenting, documentation, counseling, meal programs, referrals, medical assistance, education, skills building, rescue, cases of abuse, homelessness, and others. YCK is also involved in advocacy to protect children's rights in Malaysia.

4. Findings

What are the challenges faced by homeless children towards schooling?

The homeless children were found to skip school often due to a lack of necessities for them to survive. This includes things like food, housing, and medical care. In addition to these basic needs, many homeless children face resource problems such as citizenship documentation, life stability, parental support, economic problems, and basic support for the schooling process. Missing out on these needs for their survival has created challenges and obstacles for these children to learn and thrive in school.

4.1 Stability of life

Participant 1 (P1) stated that homeless children feel unstable in life as having no stable income and this has made it difficult for them to attend school. However, P1 who is a teacher claimed that the Ministry of Education Malaysia has provided educational facilities to all Malaysian children. Supposedly with the support and concern of parents or guardians, they will have no problem going to school. However, these marginalized children feel that their instability is the main reason for schooling.

"As is the case with P2 and P3, when their living conditions are unstable, there are no jobs, sources of income, and homelessness has made it difficult for them to sort and organize their family life." - P1

The parents' constraints of having no occupation, no fixed income, and other necessities have made them waive the issue of their children's education.

Besides, the issue of often being tricked by employers with unpaid wages is another challenge. P2 said he has been struggling to continue living with his family on the street. He admits that he still needs continuous motivational support from P1 to continue his life. Without continuous support, it is hard for him to return to normal life.

4.2 Parental perception

The parents also do not want to change their fate as they feel complacent though they are living on the streets and struggling with drugs and vices. They love their children, but they

could not find ways to run away from their current life as homeless people. P1 claimed that without the help from social activists, NGOs, and government bodies, these children would have lived in poverty and been exposed to various unhealthy symptoms.

"I used to work with JKM to rescue a homeless child who was taken by his young mother and involved in drug-related crimes. Although some have accused me of being cruel and disagreeing with my actions that separated this mother and child, I think the child has the right to live in a better environment for his future. This young mother needs to change if she loves her child and wants to regain custody of her child from JKM."- P1

No childbirth certificate was among the issues too. According to P3, most homeless parents cannot enroll their children in public school because there were no documents due for unregistered marriage. They have the mindset whereby the children will be taken care of by the welfare unit or any related government agencies. Their minds have been doctrine with the thought that their children will be confiscated under the care of the Community Welfare Department (JKM). So, they tend to deny their children's right to education.

"I have always been scared by other homeless friends that my son will be confiscated and placed under the care of the JKM."-P3

However, P1 has denied this statement. According to him, after obtaining evidence from the JKM officer, the JKM policy was never permitted to seize and separate the children from their parents or guardians except in the event of negligence or abuse occurring to the children.

"JKM will not arbitrarily separate children and their parents, as they need love from their parents unless there are elements of abuse, neglect and so on that are damaging to the safety and future of the child." - P1

In line with the P2 statement, P4, P5, and P6 said after almost five years of helping these stateless children by providing free education at BJCK, the main challenge for these children in schooling is having no identification cards. With the status of non-Malaysian citizens or stateless, they have no access to the education provided by the Malaysian government. They are also incapable of enrolling in a private school due the financial constraints.

"I used to try to help these children to enroll into a private school (whose founders are from Indonesia), but fees which are so expensive have made them unable to enroll their children into the said school." – P4

These children also have to accept that they do not have access to education in Malaysia due to their stateless status. However, they continue to struggle to learn and greatly appreciate

the free educational opportunities provided at BJCK. They also continue to hope and pray for the betterment of their future.

***"Because of our stateless status, we can't study in a day school in Malaysia, to study in a private school, the fees are expensive, and our parents can't afford it".
– P11***

In addition, through observations, while giving educational services to the local children at BJCK, P4 admits that the overcrowded number of students in one class is another challenge for the homeless children not going to school. The children feel that they cannot get full attention from the teachers and are scared of society's negative labels towards their backgrounds. The children feel unmotivated and embarrassed by the perceptions. In contrast, society should be more focused on filling the needs of these children, such as educational needs and emotional support, rather than frequently talking about their parent's working background and their personal problems.

"The overcrowded number of students in the classroom at the day school makes it impossible for teachers to pay attention to these children. Moreover, society more often talks about the background of these children such as the work of parents, their personal problems and so on. Whereas we should be more focused on the needs of these children such as educational needs, emotional support and so on."- P4

4.3 Economic status

According to P12, some children are born without registration and proper documentation; some are coming from low-income families. Therefore, they cannot provide proper education to their children and send the children to additional classes or after-school programs.

"Among the challenges faced by these children are, that some of them are born but not registered, some are born from low-income families to the point of not being able to get proper education, not to mention to be sent to additional classes or after-school programs". – P12

P12 states that the family's economic situation does not allow it, and their parents cannot afford to send them to extra classes or after-school programs. They are also exposed to gangs of thugs, violence, criminal activities, and drug abuse. Worst case scenario, if they are being manipulated and involved in prostitution, human trafficking, and child labor. Some even had to work after returning from school to earn money to help their families.

" In addition, the main challenge is to come from themselves not to be affected

by the laziness to learn because of the personal problems faced among them is that the economic problems of the family have caused them to be unable to attend additional classes or after-school programs to fill their time. Some of them are forced to work after-school hours to help increase their family income. What is most worrying, these children if not given attention are easily exposed to unhealthy symptoms." - P12

Recognizing this fact, the Yayasan Chow Kit provides various services to help, especially in education and unearthing young talent. The YCK team (known as the YCK Family) aims to address issues affecting the local community, such as education, parenting, documentation, skills building, adoption, homelessness, abuse, etc.

The Yayasan Chow Kit brings the mission of protecting the rights of underprivileged children and adolescents by providing a safe place and good opportunities that enable them to reach their full potential for a glorious future. The Yayasan Chow Kit also respects every child's rights and acknowledges that every child born should be given equal treatment regardless of race, religion, gender, ability, age, and socio-economic status.

4.4 Support for educational needs

As the education of these stateless and refugee children is dependent on the initiative of NGOs, among the challenges they face towards schooling is the infrastructure facilities and teachers who can teach them voluntarily. The current challenge in providing educational facilities to these stateless children is that most locals will feel uncomfortable with these immigrants.

The latest challenges are based on the current Malaysian politics matter. Participants P4 and P12 acknowledged that when the issue of Rohingya immigrants was raised again, it indirectly affected these marginalized stateless children. For example, during the Movement Control Order of Covid 19 outbreak, the government only provided educational Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) for government and private schools (under the Ministry of Education) to prepare all children to return to school, but not for these marginalized children who are in the alternative education centers. Therefore, the NGOs involved would have to work hard in providing SOPs (following the one provided by the government) so that these children can return to school as the other children are.

"Among the latest challenges that these children face in their educational process is that, with the spread of the covid 19 pandemic, the education ministry is only providing SOP to the opening school of government, but not for alternative schools for these marginalized children. So, we have developed our own SOP which is in line with the SOPs provided by the Government to enable these children to return to school." -P13

Although the related NGOs have developed SOPs in line with what the Ministry of Education (MOE) outlined, they are still in a state of caution as they are worried about unwanted problems. They still did not get any official endorsement from MOE for them to go back to school. During this precautionary period, they continue to carry out educational projects slowly from time to time to ensure that these marginalized children can continue their learning sessions like the other children.

"Although we have implemented our SOP, we are still concerned and forced to operate under caution as we have not obtained an official endorsement from the ministry for the reopening of this alternative school and hope that no problems arise. We continue to pursue educational projects slowly to ensure these children can still learn."-P13

4.5 Loss of job opportunities during Pandemic Covid 19

The pandemic led to massive reductions in working hours, reversing job growth and pushing millions of people into unemployment issues. Malaysia's economy has been severely affected by COVID-19 and subsequent mobility restrictions were implemented to flatten the curve of the epidemic. According to research done by Rahman et al. (2020), approximately 64.5 percent of jobs in Malaysia cannot be done from home, after adapting to internet access while approximately 50.9 percent of jobs require a high level of physical proximity. These jobs are the most vulnerable to COVID-19, especially if strict mobility restrictions are reinstated. The workers most at risk are especially those who were already vulnerable before the crisis due to their relatively low education, low-income level, and advanced or very young age. Jobs in less developed areas in Malaysia are also very vulnerable (Rahman et al., 2020).

In this challenging situation, these children live in fear and anxiety. Apart from the fear of this covid -19 epidemic, they are also scared and worried when their father or family members cannot go to work. Observing the issue and the current situation, participant (P13) feels that the Malaysian government has closed the space and opportunities for illegal immigrants, including these refugees, to work. According to the law, these refugees and illegal immigrants are not allowed to work legally, so they have to do difficult work or referred to as 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous, and demeaning), to continue surviving for their families, especially their children.

"Through my observation of the changing politics of the country where the current government is playing, the sentiment of fighting foreigners has closed their opportunities to work and in turn has given them various problems such as loss of income that leads to homelessness, educational opportunities for their children and so on." -P13

In Malaysia, there are no specific laws or acts for refugees. Under the immigration law, these refugees have the same status as illegal immigrants, where they have no documents unless the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) gives them the documents or identity cards. They might have a refugee card from UNHCR but they will remain vulnerable to detention by the authorities, especially when their refugee card has expired. In this situation, these 3D works are also not possible for them to work, and employers are not willing to risk hiring them to avoid any penalty by the authorities.

As a result of this issue, most of them no longer have a source of income. Some of them were evicted from their rented houses or because the premises' owners had to order them out due to receiving a circular letter from immigration that warned owners of the premises not to rent out their premises to these illegal immigrants. This situation will cause them to be homeless, and indirectly there will be homeless children. Of course, they will not be able to continue the learning session due to this lack of necessities. This fear has become the biggest challenge for these children who are supposed to live in a state of feeling safe, happy, and calm and have hope to develop their future through education but have lost space and hope for this.

Based on this situation, it can be concluded that support for educational needs and life stability is very important to ensure that they can live and then focus on their education. Unstable life with a lack of basic needs such as employment, financial problems, and imperfect housing will cause the whole family to face various interrelated problems and lead to a loss of focus on the needs and importance of education for children. The support from NGOs, the community, the government of Malaysia, and the government of the origin country of their parents are very much needed to guarantee the right to education for these affected children. If these children continue to live with documentation issues, their life will never be improved and there is no development from one generation to the other.

5. Discussions and conclusion

The data for the research question found that the challenge of these homeless children towards schooling is influenced by their unstable life due to economic issues that have caused most of them to drop out of the national education system. These financial problems have caused parents to focus more on the basic needs that are more important for their survival (Anuar Ahmad and Norhaidawati Mohd Noor, 2007).

As cited by Havlik et al (2017), the information obtained also stated that parental awareness and support on the importance of education to their children can impact children's cognitive achievement. The support from community activists, government agencies, NGOs, and the community for these children's educational needs too can also positively impact the children's learning progress.

The findings from this study agreed with Aliaas et al. (2012) that documentation

problems become a big problem for undocumented children, especially stateless children. Without a birth certificate and citizenship documents, this child cannot be enrolled in government schools, and they only depend on NGOs for educational opportunities. Free or low fees for educational facilities are an important community resource as an alternative for these homeless families, especially children. This facility is an essential aid in terms of physical and mental support to get out of this homeless problem. However, the political issue is a new finding in this study where the participants agree that the future of children's education is influenced by the actions of politicians and the government agenda that holds the reins of government.

The effectiveness of policies and programs for homeless children and a clear understanding of the definition of homeless children is important (Hamdan & Herman, 2020). Policymakers in Malaysia still do not have an official definition of homeless children. Initiatives and launches of education programs implemented by government agencies are generally targeted at homeless children who are Malaysians. However, the right to education for marginalized children from non-citizens or refugees usually depends on the hard work of NGOs and community activists with the help and support from a few corporate bodies.

Furthermore, participants have seen the success of educational programs regarding children's outcomes in various areas of development depending on the learning method. The methods used are not academic and are more about highlighting children's talents to build self-confidence. This approach turns out to be fruitful where some of these children have successfully built their self-confidence. This is not in line with the literature review, which focuses more on poor academic achievement.

Alternative education providers see that the use of psychological approach skills to drive student success is in line with the opinion of Michael L. Sulkowski (2016). According to him, to support and assist these homeless students, school psychology plays an important role and is responsible to support all children in reaching their full potential. Masten et al. (2015) also stated that school psychology plays a special role in assessing these students' needs and encourages them to succeed individually and in the school's ecological system to help these children in their school success.

Several agencies and institutions are designed to partner with schools to address problems outside of school to enhance and broaden the scope of the problem faced by these homeless students and to enable educators to improve their practices (H. Richard Milner IV et al., 2015).

According to James and Martell (2015), understanding the homeless issue is not only the responsibility of the school, NGOs, and government agencies, but it also involves the surrounding community. It is similar to how school social work practice supports this larger purpose and schools' methods for addressing the academic barriers to student homelessness.

The community must support the efforts to reduce this problem. The cooperation between NGOs, community activists, and government agencies has reduced the rate of homeless cases involving children in this country. Assisting with documentation matters from the government agency involved can help these children get the right educational opportunities. In addition, campaigns on the importance of education for children can help change the perception of parents or guardians to support children in schooling. Furthermore, cooperation from the government and the private sector in providing employment opportunities to the parents involved is also very important to help this group improve the stability of their lives.

6. References

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