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Introduction

Homelessness, defined as individuals sleeping rough in public spaces, has been a fairly marginal (social) issue within Hong Kong's urban context. This is not a surprising fact as Hong Kong has been rather known for its previous large scale squatter settlements in the old urban area fringes, and its immense resettlement projects which amounted in its current public housing system. Even today, much more (academic) attention goes out to ongoing urban renewal projects and schemes, or issues with housing and poverty in general. Especially Hong Kong's rapid tract of economic growth, in conjunction with the public rental housings scheme, seemed to have been able to provide housing of some kind or other, without leaving anyone out. This changed, however, to a certain extent, with the advent of the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s. Suddenly, homelessness became a visible social issue that required government intervention. The objective of this chapter is to place homelessness in Hong Kong into context, and identify structural as well as individual hurdles to overcoming homeless. First, we provide a historical background of the homelessness issue and the development of homelessness assistance services. We then focus on common housing resources used by the (ex-)homeless, before further examining the current situation. A summary and some suggestions are provided in the conclusion.

Policy Background

Seen from both public measures and frontline assistance, the overall assistance for the "homeless" can be divided into two categories (Blundell 1993, Kornatowski 2008). The first category, which will be of particular interest of this paper is that of the "street sleepers". These are the so-called rough sleepers who don't own an address and sleep in public spaces such as parks, sidewalks and open areas under flyovers. They constitute the most visible form of homelessness. The second category is that of the "bedspace lodgers". Bedspaces (formerly mostly known as "cagehomes") are tiny subdivided 1 person apartments, often found in old decrepit tenement buildings. Although the living environment is extremely substandard, these apartments are the most affordable form of privately rented housing. Since only few have air-

conditioning or even proper ventilation installed, a considerable amount of the residents prefer the open air during the hot and humid summer.

Both categories have been the focus of first the voluntary, later followed by governmental intervention, which resulted in assistance framework centered on outreach, transitory housing and livelihood assistance (public assistance - CSSA). Ever since street sleeping has been identified as a social issue, it has been framed as an issue of social welfare, which falls under the purview of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Following the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s and the subsequent increase of visible homelessness in Hong Kong's prime public areas (Kornatowski, 2008), public measures and the materialization of organized NGO assistance was set out in the 2001 "Three-year Action Plan to Help the Street Sleepers". Below is a summary of the background of this Plan and the results it brought forth after its initiation (see also table 1).

1) Emergence of the "Street Sleeper Issue" (1977 - 1985)

The earliest documented surveys on street sleepers and cagehome dwellers were conducted through university students projects between 1977 and 1979, and dealt mostly with the existing number of street sleepers and their daily life conditions[1]. The estimated numbers hoovered between 800 and 1,000 (University of Hong Kong, 1977). The number of cagehome dwellers was estimated to be around 10,000 (Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 1983), yet since both surveys were conducted as minor pilot research projects, these estimations were most probably an underestimation of the situation at that time. However, following these two surveys, the SWD initiated its own survey ("Annual Street Sleeper Survey") in 1980 and set up the registry in 1981 to officially keep track of street sleeper cases. Moreover, although being supposedly a housing issue, the SWD conducted a cagehome survey in 1983 and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)[2] also followed with a survey on street sleepers with mental disabilities.

It is important to note that the street sleeper and cagehome issue was not considered to be a "housing issue", yet mostly an issue of welfare, making both issues accessible for SWD

[1] These surveys also mentioned some available services for street sleepers that were managed by NGOs. Around that time there were three shelters for street sleepers older than 55 managed by Street Sleepers Shelter Trustees Inc. (established in 1933), which together held a capacity of 314 persons. There was also a small-scale shelter for women run by the Salvation Army (SoCO, 1999).

[2] The HKCSS is statutory umbrella organization of welfare related NGOs and serves as a platform between NGOs and SWD.

services. By conducting their own survey, the HKCSS commenced demanding improved services on part of the SWD and advocated for more professional resources on part of the NGOs. This caught the attention of several NGOs and well as related District Council members, which increased the overall awareness on homelessness. According to a survey conducted by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1982, there were primarily two kinds of street sleepers. One kind comprised those suffering from forms of addiction, mental diseases, high age and who were lacking sound family ties. The second kind were those who gather early in the morning in Hong Kong's inner city areas such as Kennedy Town in HK Island and Sham Shui Po in Kowloon looking for day labor jobs. These men often sleep rough in the close vicinity of these areas (HKCSS, 1983). Crucially, since the SWD is only in charge of welfare issues, it could only hand out daily necessity items and/or social allowances for elderly singletons, which meant that street sleepers were not eligible for any rehousing benefits.

The United Nations' "International Year of Shelter for the Homeless" in 1987 increased awareness for more public effort[3]. As a result, the scope of assistance services was broadened and new steps were taken toward the development of an assistance framework.

2) The Advent of Assistance and Street Sleeping as a Social issue (1985 - 1993)

The narrow scope of public assistance for street sleepers became increasingly criticized after 1985. It was a time when the number of street sleepers was rising and evictions for redevelopment projects in the old urban areas were intensifying. This situation urged the NGOs to step up their services. One illustration is the case of the Salvation Army (SA) based in the old urban area of Yau Ma Tei. One staff member established a pressure group in order to advocate for improved public assistance services (the SA kept a "politically" neutral relationship with the HK government). Together with other NGO key persons, he established "Street Sleepers Action Committee: SSAC" in reaction to the redevelopment-related evictions and the complicated procedures for street sleepers to apply for public security. While demanding public funding, they also started outreach programs and soup kitchens. Their action did not remain tied to these demands. Because the street sleepers were not eligible for any rehousing program at that time, SSAC started experimenting with the concept of

[3] The promulgation of 1987 as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless had the objective 'to improve shelter and neighborhoods of some of the poor and disadvantaged by 1987, and to demonstrate by the year 2000, ways and means of improving the shelter and neighborhood of the poor and disadvantaged' (Legco, 1987, 1888)

transitory housing. And so, the first "urban hostel" program for singletons was initiated, an idea that wanted to counter the inferior living conditions of the existing shelters at that time and that the very act of street sleeping ran counter with basic human dignity. As a result, the SWD gradually opened up more funding for NGOs like the SA. In turn, the SA commenced its first publicly funded day center, urban hostel and outreach service in 1987. The SWD also began conducting outreach services, yet mostly limited its target to the so-called "hardcore cases", street sleepers with severe mental disabilities.

Other NGOs followed suit. That same year, St. Barnabas' Home & Society (SBHS) in HK Island and the Christian Concern for the Homeless (CCHA) began their own street sleeper services in dialogue with the government. Finally, in 1991, the SWD established the "Central Coordinating Committee on Street Sleepers", which was in charge of re-examining concept of homelessness and reviewing the SWD's welfare services for the street sleepers.

3) Temporary Housing Measures (1993 - 2001)

Hong Kong's Public Assistance (PA) changed into the current Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and the HK government engaged itself towards an overall improved social welfare system in the run to the handover of Hong Kong to China. In 1993, the Central Coordinating Committee published a report on the current state of services (and the lack of temporary housing) for street sleepers and the lethal fire incidents in cage home tenement buildings at the time were causing public concern. As a result, homeless policy in general became more geared towards the use of transitory housing such as urban hostels. For street sleeper services, the report also focused on more structural issue such as housing policy, and examined the role of NGOs within the services framework. Even the development of a legal policy framework was suggested (CCCSS, 1993). Especially suggestions for fast admission into public rental housing in the main urban areas of Hong Kong and the non-criminalization of the act of street sleeping according to international human right standards were certainly to be considered progressive at that time. Unfortunately, although there was a general understanding that homeless had few choices but to dwell in the urban areas in order to secure job opportunities, prioritized access to public housing did not come through as there was a peculiar concern whether this scarce housing resource would not be fit for admitting ex-street sleepers. Yet, such geographical awareness was taken up by the government as suggestion were made to establish hostels in all main urban areas. A flow of services was laid out where the street sleepers would first make use of emergency shelters and then get

assessed into hostels where they would receive professional care and services from the NGOs in charge. The only thing lacking, and obstructing this system, was the insufficient attention to the needs of the street sleepers themselves. For instance, the high rejection rate among street sleepers to make use of the substandard shelters and poor availability of information on hostels impeded the desired operation of this system (SWD, 1996).

For cagehome dweller services, a swift rehousing program was created. Influenced by the 1990 bedspace apartment fire, the Home Affairs Department (HAD), in order to protect public safety, issued an ordinance in 1993 to regulate this form of housing. However, out of concern that the ordinance would trigger a rent hike, the HAD copied the SWD's funding framework for urban hostels. The first small-scale project was commissioned to the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS). In total, they managed 39 hostels in total with a capacity of 539 units. The rent was kept as low to HK$ 430 and all hostels were located is easy accessible urban areas. Later, to increase the overall capacity, the HAD funded two large-scale hostels, to be managed by SA (1998) and Neighbourhood Advice Action Council (NAAC) in 2001. Both facilities held a capacity 580 units. These hostels became to be known as "singleton hostels" and their concept and design became the general standard.

Emergence of "Street Sleepers Issue"	1977	"Street Sleeper Survey Project Report" by Hong Kong University
	1979	"Cagehome Survey" by Hong Kong Chinese University
		"Report on Street Sleepers Issue" by HKCSS
	1980	First Annual Street Sleeper Survey by SWD
	1981	Street Sleepers Registrar
	1983	"Cagehome Survey" by SWD
		"Survey on the Needs of Street Sleepers with Mental Disabilities" by HKCSS
Advent of Street Sleeper Assistance Street Sleeping as a Social Issue	1985	Start of Soup Kitchen by SSAC
		Pilot Hostel Program by SSAC
	1987	International Year of Shelter for the Homeless
		Salvation Army Establishes a Day Center
		Outreach Activities on Hong Kong Island by SBSH
		Street Sleeper Survey by HK Polytechnic University and Shamshuipo District Office
		"Survey Report on Street Sleepers in Central Western District" by YWCA
		Establishment of "Central Coordinating Committee on Street Sleepers"」by SWD
		Start of SWD Outreach Team
		(New) Street Sleepers Registry (digital)
	1991	"Street Sleeper Survey" by CCHA」
Temporary Housing Measures	1993	Report by "Working Group on Street Sleepers" (Appointed by SWD in 1991)
		First SWD Subvented Hostel (3 Hostels for Singletons older than 55)
		"Cage Home Survey" by SoCO
		Bedspace Ordinance by HAD
		Small Scale Hostels by AVS (Commisisoned Project by HAD"
	1994	CCHA Establishes Day Center and Shelter
	1996	St. James' Settlement Establishes Day Center and Emergency Shelter
		Medical Outreach Pilot Program (Subvented by SWD until 1999)
	1998	"Position Paper on the Cagehome Issue" by SoCO
		Establishment of Sunrise House (Urban Hostel Subvented by HAD)
	1999	"Hong Kong Street Sleepers Survey" by SoCO
	2001	Establishment of Highstreet House (Urban Hostel Subvented by HAD)
Professionalization of Street Sleeper Assistance	2001	"Three Year Action Plan"
	2002	"Cagehome Survey" by SoCO
	2004	「"Intergrated System" (Outsourcing by SWD to the Three Integrated Team NPOs)
		"Survey on Cagehomes and Cubicles" by SoCO
	2008	"The 2008 Cagehome Survey" by SoCO
	2009	Opening of "Soup Kitchen Center" by SSAC
		"Professional Assitance to Street Sleepers with Mental Diseases" by CCHA
	2010	"2010 Street Sleepers Survey" by SoCO
	2011	"Survey on Wooden Partioned Apartments" by SoCO

Table 1: Chronological overview of events in homeless services. The ones in gray are highlighted as rather important.

4) The Professionalization of Street Sleeper Services (from 2001 onward)

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 had a disastrous effect on Hong Kong's economy. The employment rate rose steadily and those especially from the lower income brackets suffered from underemployment. A remarkable increase in the number of street sleepers was to be witnessed from 1999 onward. This increase, however, was not that obvious in official data, as the SWD seized their annual count and based their statistics solely on that of the Street Sleepers Registry. The NGOs at that time estimated the actual number to be at least threefold. What was remarkable was that street sleeping proliferated in a very visible way, since many were seeking refuge in Hong Kong's prime public spaces. The average age of the street

sleepers declined, many were capable of working but yet fell without an income, and also a considerable number had a first-hand experience with unsheltered conditions.

It was this increased visibility that draw the attention of the media and the general public, making it a "key social issue". Under these social conditions, one of Hong Kong's most famous grassroots organizations, the Society for Community Organization (SoCO), conducted their own critical survey of the new street sleeper situation, and began using its political leverage to pressure the government for more public services. As a result, the SWD issued a new, detailed survey which led to the enactment of the "Three-year Action Plan to Help the Street Sleepers" in 2001. This policy-like Plan consolidated the official public service framework, and put special focus on the re-employment instead of a mere use of CSSA. To realize this, a cooperation with the Labour Department (LD) was set up to introduce Employees Retraining Board (ERB) vocational training programs and job offers within the existing framework.

Like before, the SWD took responsible of developing a services framework for the street sleepers, yet the actual provision was soon to be outsourced to the established NGOs. Under such partnership, three NGOs became responsible for conducting outreach programs and running transitory housing facilities (hostels and shelters). As "Integrated Teams", each team was designated their own operational territory, with the St. James' Settlement (SJS) being in charge of HK Island and the outlying islands (mainly the HK International Airport), SA of the Yau Tsim Mok District in Kowloon, and CCHA of the rest of Kowloon (mainly Sham Shui Po District) and the New Territories. In addition, other subvented as well as non-subvented NGOs were to fulfill auxiliary roles (see also Kornatowski, 2010).

With the Plan coming to an end in 2004, the official number of street sleepers had decreased to less than 1,000 persons. As a result, the SWD decided to retire its own outreach team and to leave the Integrated Teams fully in charge of service provision. The budget of the Plan was to be extended yearly to the Teams in order to run their "one-stop services" of outreach programs, emergency shelters and hostels. On the other hand, the budget did not include day centers, and some closed down due the lack of funding. Yet, it did mean that sufficient funding was allocated which in turn caused the further professionalization of NGO street sleeper services. The overall situation would remain more or less unchanged until the international financial turmoil of 2008.

So what happens after exiting homelessness? The next section will focus on the common housing resources for the ex-homeless. They may live there temporary, while awaiting admission to a public rental housing unit, or may choose to remain there due to the favorable location in the old urban area inner-city areas.

Common Forms of Substandard Private Housing

The most easily accessible forms of private housing are the unstable and substandard apartments that have been identified to be correlated to homelessness. As of 2011, the number of renters has been estimated to be about 100,000 persons, of which about half has applied for a public rental housing unit (SoCO, 2011: 3). In general, the apartments are characterized by their extremely tiny living spaces and exorbitantly high rents per square meter. An average household would be paying 37% of their disposable income to cover these rents (SoCO, 2008).

	Average ㎡	Average Rent (HK$)	Residents	Period
・Rooftop Huts	12-50㎡	2011	Singletons and Families	1950s
・Subdived flats				
Bedspace Aparment	4.5㎡	700-1,500	Singletons, CSSA recipients	1960s
Coffin Room	4.5㎡	1,000-2,000	Singletons, CSSA recipients	2000s
Cubicle	12-18㎡	1,800-3, 000	2 person households, CSSA recipients	1950s
Self Contained Room	30㎡	2,000-3,000	Singletons, families	1990s
Factory Flat	40㎡	1,500-2,400	Families	2000s

Table 2: Summary of Substandard Private Rental Apartments (as of 2011)

In general, we can divide these apartments into two categories[4]. The first one is comprised of illegal structures on rooftops, commonly called "rooftop huts". This type of housing was mostly constructed in the 1960s and 1970s on middle-high rise apartment buildings, without any building permit. These are thus illegal structures, yet in practice their purchase/sale and renting is officially acknowledged and subjected to government rent & rates. The second category may be lumped together as "subdivided flats". The most known flats have been the

[4] The terminology used here slightly differs from local media terminology etc. but this will be indicated throughout the text.

cagehomes as already mentioned in this chapter and "cubicles" or "wooden partitioned rooms". Recently, other types have gaining popularity, such as "coffin rooms", "suite rooms" ("self-contained rooms") which are commonly known under the term "subdivided flats" and "factory flats". All these types are modification to existing apartments by subdividing spaces into several smaller rooms and subletting them on the market. Subdividing itself is not illegal, yet many of these apartments do not have the required safety permits etc. Below is a more detailed description of all types.

1) Rooftop Huts

As with the old types of subdivided flats, the rooftop hut phenomenon originates from the overcrowded conditions in Hong Kong's old urban areas in the periods after WWII and the pre-1998 rent controls. Although they are illegal constructions (by the owner of the apartment), they are tolerated to a certain extent (Chui, 2009). The Building Department can issue the removal of these structures, yet it is believed to be using a double standard toward apartment building with only one or more than two staircases for fire safety reasons. The buildings with one staircase are often old Chinese tenement buildings and the huts themselves are more than often flimsy structures made out of wood or corrugated material, which make them vulnerable to fire and water leaking. The structures on newer buildings with multiple staircases however may be better in quality, which make them less prone to disaster.

Buildings with rooftop huts usually house three to six households, although there are also cases of more than 30 households (Wu et al, 2008). Compared to subdivided flats, households tend to be more than 2 persons, yet many of these are elderly, new immigrants, CSSA recipients etc. In 2008, the total number of household living in these structures were estimated to be around 4,000 persons, with 32% being single households and 56% being nuclear families. On the other hand, several NGOs estimate the total number around 10,000 persons (SoCO, 2011)。

One of the most reported hardships are the lack of elevators in old tenement building. The rooftop may be as high as the 10^{th} floor, which makes going out a strenuous effort, especially in case of elderly households.

2) Subdivided Flats

These are extremely tiny rooms, or mere bedspaces, which are often sublet by a main tenant. Recently new forms have emerged, and are stirring public concern due to their unsafe environment and high rents (SoCO 2008; 2011).

Cubicles

Cubicles are often apartment spaces subdivided into smaller rooms with wooden boards, and thus often called "wooden partitioned rooms". This practice dates from the 1920s and 1930s when Hong Kong was experiencing rapid population influxes (Cheung 1979). Most current cubicles have double bunk beds in order to house multi-member households as well. Since the apartments are subdivided to hold as many rooms as possible, the hallways are narrow and the upper part of partition is left open for ventilation purposes. Only few rooms in the front part of the flat have windows and these generally more expensive in rent. The rooms lack air-conditioning and most residents endure the heat in the humid summer months with fans. During these months temperatures in these rooms easily rise to an average of 38°C. Electric wiring etc. is often primitive, making the living environment hazardous. Kitchen and toilet is shared among as many as 15 households.

Many of the current residents are elderly singletons and new immigrants (SoCO, 2011). Most are eligible for public rental housing, yet often they choose to remain as available unites are often located in far-away estates in the New Territories. Data from 1991 estimated the total population living in cubicles to be around 70,000 persons. Rents were up to HK$520 per month, but in some places this had almost doubled in the following years (Wu et al., 2008）。

Bedspace Apartments

As mentioned before, bedspaces are mostly known to the public as “cagehomes” because of their original appearance as steel wired cages. These wires serve as protection for personal belongings and ventilation.

It is also the most documented form of housing poverty. For instance, Blundell (1993) describes the geographical concentration of cagehomes close to the harbor and industrial areas, where opportunities for cheap labor most abundant. The main areas are the old urban areas of Mong Kok, Yau Ma Tei, Tai Kok Tsui, Sham Shui Po, To Kwa Wan and Kowloon City (*Ibid*.: 38), where many basic facilities such as markets and cheap eateries are located (*Ibid*., 4). On the other hand, these is the worst form of housing in terms of living

environment, health and security. Basic amenities often have to be shared by more than twenty persons.

In average, the size of each unit varies from 1.4 ㎡ to 3.4 ㎡, and smallest ever reported was around 1.0 ㎡. Rents were around HK$280 on 1999 but these have tripled by 2010. Currently, the residents are elderly singletons with an average age of 55 and 90% male with a disposable income of HK$2,400. Those that are employed are so in the manufacturing sector (23%), service sector (20%), security guard business (17%) and construction sector (17%) (SoCO, 2011).

Suite Rooms (Self-contained Rooms)

In addition to the traditional forms of housing poverty, new forms emerged after the 2000s and became known to the general public due to safety hazards such as fires. Most known are the “suite rooms”, also commonly known as “subdivided flats” (in Chinese: “cut rooms”) (see, for example, Hui, 2011 and Lee, 2011). In contrast to cubicles, most have their own toilet and kitchen installed, making them “self-contained rooms”.

Initial surveys on resident profiles, such as the Sham Shui Po District Council Transport and Housing Survey (2011), revealed that 65% are married households, 20% are singletons and more than half had been living in Hong Kong for less than 7 years. All rooms were installed with toilets, yet only half had showers. When asked for the reasons of choosing this type of housing, 65% replied "cheap rents" and 50% stated "close to work". More than 65% found their unit through real estate companies. 60% was on the Housing Authority's waiting list for a public rental housing unit. Only 22% were CSSA recipients and 40% had temporary jobs. The average income was HK$7,000.

Lastly, the report also delved into the background of the emergence of this housing and concluded that "the demand for cheap housing rose during the economic downturn of the 2000s, which caused the phenomenon of subdividing". This practice is mostly found in old buildings (from the 1960s), because they allow for interior changes and are less regulated. However, after the fire and collapse incidents made the news in the late 2000s, the government stepped up building inspections.

Coffin Rooms

Just as the former cagehomes, recent pressure on the existing housing stocks in Hong Kong's inner city areas has precipitated more extreme forms such as the "coffin rooms". Resembling the Japanese "capsule hotels", these rooms are mere subdivided bedspaces, yet with a more modern look to it than the former cagehomes (Li, 2011).

Some rooms comprise of three level rooms, which are in violation of the bedspace ordinance which states that the maximum amount of stacked rooms can be two. Residents of this type of housing have been characterized as new immigrants from China, persons suffering from forms of addiction, CSSA recipients and even illegal immigrants (*Ibid.*)

Factory Flats

Lastly are the factory flats. Following Hong Kong's deindustrialization, numerous inner-city industrial buildings, such as in Kwun Tong and Tai Kok Tsui, have been vacated and left underused. During the late 2000s, some of these premises have been appropriated and subdivided in flats (SoCO, 2011). In relation to their average size, these have been reported as one of the cheapest forms of private rental housing (Ngo 2011). However, these rooms are often ill-equipped in terms of electrical wiring etc., which means they are lacking in safety. Moreover, the apartments are illegal due to industrial zoning rules and several fire incidents have made these apartments prone to government-led investigations (Hui, 2011).

Compared to the suite rooms, factory flats house multi-member households and are mainly inhabited by new immigrants from China (Ngo, 2011).

Figure 1: Illustration of rooftop huts (left) and a cubicle apartment (right)

Reverse trend of increasing homeless after 2008

After the establishment of pilot homeless service teams operated by three NGOs from 2001 to 2004, the number of homeless persons in Hong Kong reduced significantly from 2002 to 2007 (see table). According to the official Street Sleepers Registry managed by the Social Welfare Department, the number of street sleepers in Hong Kong witnessed a significant decrease from 1,320 in 2001 to 327 in 2007, almost a 75% decrease in merely six years. This promising situation, however, reversed after 2008 when the number of street sleepers sharply rose to 811 in 2015, similar to the situation of 2002. We can therefore observe a U-shape curve of the number of street sleepers from 2001 to 2015 in figure.

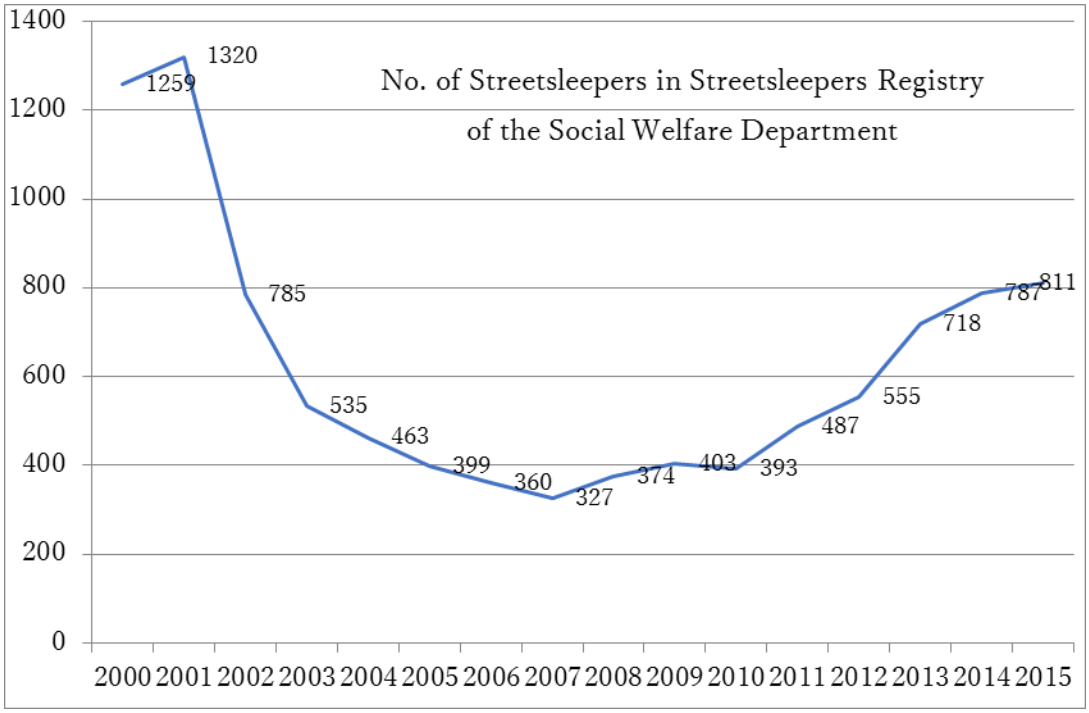

Figure 2: Number of Street Sleepers registered in the Street Sleeper Registry between 2000 and 2015.

In reality, the situation proved to be worse as the figures in the official registry only reflected those most visible homeless persons in Hong Kong, being those sleeping in the street as they were only identified by the Integrated NGOs or CSSA recipients. Ultimately, the staff of the SWD Social Security Office reports their street sleeping status to the Registry. In other words, the homeless persons who did not receive services from the Integrated Teams or CSSA benefits scheme were not recorded in the official registry.

On the other hand, academics and other NGOs in Hong Kong, tend to estimate the scope of homelessness by conducting census surveys on the homeless rather than just relying on the statistics of the official registry. Crucially, the official registry does not include those homeless persons sleeping in 24-hour fast food shops and transitory housing facilities as homeless persons sleeping in the streets or public spaces are officially counted. For example, Wong, Li and Sun (2004) estimated the total number of homeless persons being 898 through a census survey in 2004, which was nearly double of the 463 persons in the registry. To this extent, universities and NGOs initiated a cooperation to conduct two census surveys, named Homeless Outreach Population Estimation (H.O.P.E) Hong Kong, to estimate a more precise number of homeless in 2013 and 2015. The estimation reached 1,414 and 1,614 persons in 2013 and 2015 respectively. Like previously, these figures were also about double of the figures in the official registry.

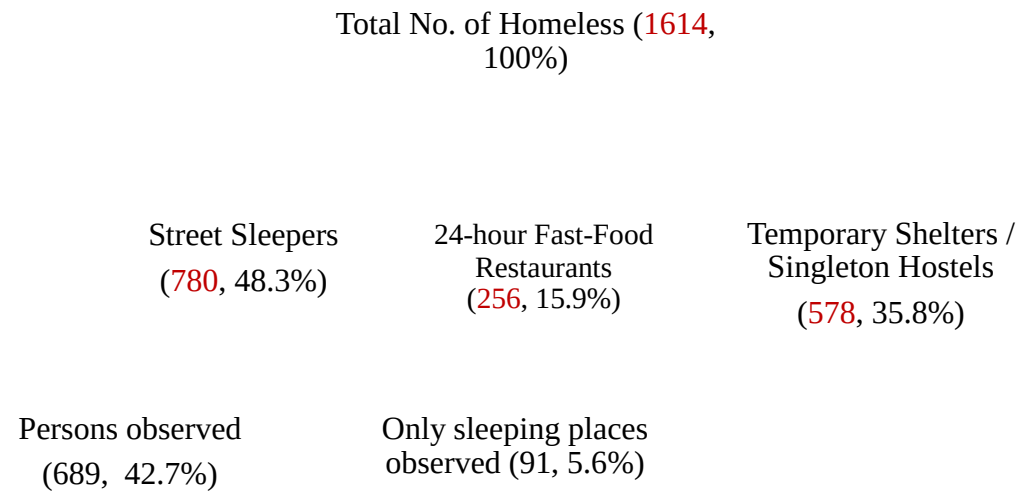

Figure 3: Categories of homeless persons found in H.O.P.E Hong Kong 2015. Source: H.O.P.E. Hong Kong (2015) p.10

A closer look at the statistics of the H.O.P.E 2015 survey reveals that, among the 1,614 homeless persons in Hong Kong, about half (48.3%) were street sleepers, about one in six (15.9%) of them slept in the 24-hour fast food shops, and more than one-third (35.8%) was staying in shelter and singleton hostel facilities. According to these statistics, the official registry just recorded about half of the homeless population, who were only street sleepers.

	2013	2015	% Change

Street sleepers	942	780	-17.2%
Homeless sleeping in 24-hour fast food shops	57	256	349.1%
Temporary shelters and singleton hostels	415	578	39.3%
Total	1414	1614	14.1%

Table 3: Different group of homeless persons in Hong Kong, 2013 & 2015

If we compare the figures from H.O.P.E 2013 and H.O.P.E. 2015, the total number of homeless persons increased from 1,414 in 2013 to 1,614 in 2015, which accounts for a 14.1% growth in two-year time. The most significant growth was among the category of homeless persons sleeping in 24-hour fast food shops, a significant increase of 349%. Another increase could be seen in the homeless persons residing in temporary shelters and singleton hostels (+39%). Only the category of street sleepers showed a decrease (-17.2%). This illustrates a tremendous increase of less visible homeless persons such as those staying in 24-hour fast food shops.

However, the increase of this figure did not relate to first-time and younger homeless persons, who are not yet accustomed to sleeping in the streets. According to the H.O.P.E surveys, the average age of homeless persons in Hong Kong was 54.9 in 2013 and 54.5 in 2015, which was nearly the same. Nevertheless, the duration of being in a state of homelessness increased significantly. The average and median duration of being homeless was 3.9 years and 30 months in 2013, and the average and median duration of being homeless increased to 5.1 years and 96 months in 2015 (Figure 3). This prolonged duration signifies the fact that short-term homeless persons were not able to secure housing and became subjected to medium-term and long-term homelessness.

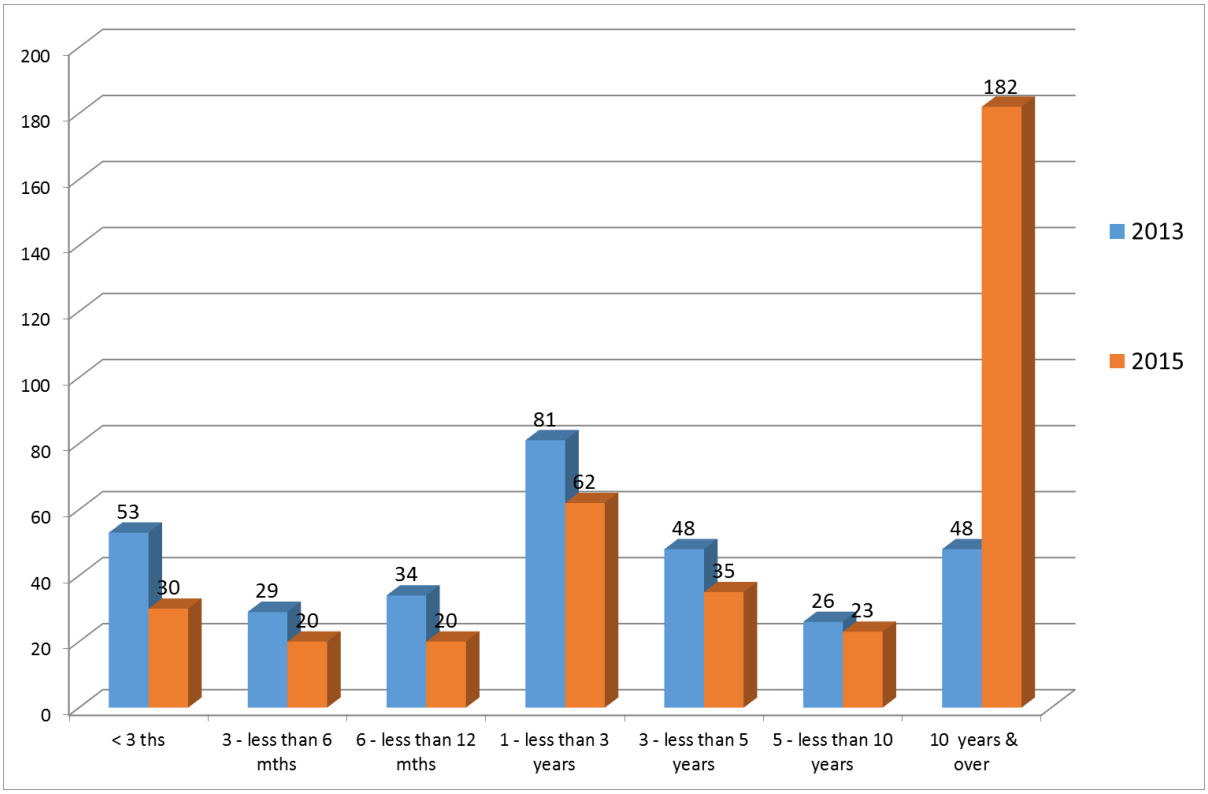

Figure 4: Duration of homelessness in 2013 and 2015

In the H.O.P.E. 2015 survey, among the 372 respondents who successfully completed the face-to-face survey, 92.5% of them were male and 7.5% were female, while 42.6% were single and 37.1% were divorced or separated from their spouses. The majority (89.9%) of the homeless are Hong Kong Chinese. Among the non-Chinese (10.1%), 55.6% are Vietnamese and 18.5% Nepalese. The highest education level attained of most of the respondents (46.6%) was primary and below.

Relating to the respondents' working and economic conditions, 127 (35.5%) has income through employment. For those unemployed, among the 201 respondents who responded on their length of unemployment, 65.7% was unemployed for more than 2 years, 10.9% for 1 to 2 years and 23.4% for less than 1 year. All in all, most of Hong Kong's homeless are long-term unemployed for more than 2 years.

When asked about the amount of their present or latest monthly income from employment, 208 respondents responded and the median of their monthly income was HK$6,377, which is slightly less than the monthly income of a full-time minimum wage worker. 39.4% of those

who reported their income, stated it was less than HK$5,000. About half (48.3%) of the homeless persons receive CSSA. 29.4% receive regular pay from their employment while 9.7% gathers an income through waste picking. 9.1% stated they receive financial assistance from NGOs.

Before becoming homeless, most were living in substandard low-rent housing forms as described above. About one-third (31.3%) was living in cubicles, bedspaces or even cagehomes; about one-fourth (23.0%) resided in public housing and about one-fifth (17.8%) lived in subdivided self-contained roomst (see Table).

		Frequency	Valid Percentage
	Private owned housing/ Home Ownership Scheme housing	27	7.8
	Private rental housing (whole flat)	5	1.4
	Private rental housing (subdivided self-contained flats)	62	17.8
	Private rental housing (cubicles/ bedspaces/ cagehomes)	109	31.3
	Public rental housing/ Emergency shelters	80	23.0
	rooftop huts and aother forms of substandard housing such as boat-houses	9	2.6
	workplace (e.g. restaurant/ factory/building site)	1	.3
	Other	55	15.8
Total		348	100.0

Table 4: Type of Accommodation before Street Sleeping

regarding the conditions of their previous housing, the average size of their accommodation was 245 square feet (22,76 m2), the rent median and average ware $1,700 and $2,067.80 respectively. 34.6% of their monthly income, a very high proportion, was spent to rent. Such expensive and ever-escalating rent pose a heavy financial burden for the working poor, thereby becoming an imporatnt structural cause for the current increase in homelessness.

About one-third (33.8%) of the homeless moved home during the two year period before becoming homeless. In this period, the average number of moving is as high as 2.6. This

illustrates that low-income groups have to frequently move around in Hong Kong's old urban areas to find affordable accommodation. However, eventually, a considerable number found that they cannot secure any affordable accommodation and thus ended up on the streets or in 24-hour fast-food shops.

Reason	Responses		% of Respondents
	Frequency	%	
1. Unemployed and cannot afford rent	80	13.4%	23.7%
2. Cannot get along with relatives/ roommates	59	9.9%	17.5%
3. Personal choice	38	6.4%	11.3%
4. Overcrowding/ extremely bad housing conditions	35	5.9%	10.4%
5. Saving money	29	4.9%	8.6%
6. End of rent contract/ evicted by andlord	19	3.2%	5.6%
7. Bug infestations in previous housing	19	3.2%	5.6%
8. Locational convenience (work/ living)	14	2.3%	4.2%
9. Drug additictions, alcoholism	12	2.0%	3.6%
10. Cannot find housing after discharged from hospital/jail/anti-drug centers	13	2.2%	3.9%
11. Excessive gambling	8	1.3%	2.4%
12. Health-related issues	7	1.2%	2.1%
13. Cannot find housing after redevelopment	7	1.2%	2.1%
14. Family in China/ immigrate to overseas	5	0.8%	1.5%
15. Forced to move out from emergency shelters	3	0.5%	0.9%
16. Other	82	13.7%	24.3%
Total	597	100.0%	177.2%

Table 5: Reasons for becoming homeless (multiple responses)

Concerning the reasons of becoming homeless, 23.7% of the respondents claimed to be "unemployed and cannot afford rent", 17.5% claimed "having problems getting with relatives/ roommates", 11.3% claimed because of "personal choice", 10.4% because of "overcrowding/ bad housing conditions " and 8.6% in order to "save money". In total, more than one-third (34.1%) of the respondents mentioned economic reasons such as unaffordable rents to be the main reason of becoming homeless.

When the respondents were asked about what reasons impedetheir exit out of homelessnes, more than half (52.4%) stated that “rents in private housing are too high” , one-third (29.8%) stated the “lack or instability of jobs”, “income too low” (15.6%), “waiting time for public housing too low” (21.3%) and “rent allowance of CSSA too low” (12.4%).

The survey also examined the scope of social interaction and service utilization among the respondents. Only 44.8% upholds frequent contacts with relatives and friends; and just more than half (59.9%) are in contact with social workers or social service organizations. However, numerous respondents mentioned about special needs other than the lack of affordable housing and low incomes. About 32% reported that they are suffering chronic illness which requiresfrequent checkups. Among the 110 chronicly ill respondents, 20 (5.8%) are psychiatric patients. Moreover, 15.6% reported that they are physically disabled. 26.6% respondents reported that they have gambling addictions; 28.7% excessively consume alcoholand; 13.3% abuse drugs.

Alcoholism, substance abuse and addictive behavior are the primary personal causes for long duration homelessness. These problems are more complicated than the ones due to economic reasons. Many of the respondents has been previously rehoused through the assistance services by theintegrated teams, yet had relapsed again into homelessness. Other than securing housing and finding employment, these “hardcore” homeless with special needs require appropriate rehabilitation services in order to assist them out of the trap of homelessness.

In short, over 80% of homeless had housing needs. Most of them are singleton. About half are receiving CSSA, with the rent allowance being capped at $1,735. The average monthly rent for the cheapest froms of private rental housing such as cubiclesand bedspacesis about $1,800 - $2,000. Because toilets and kitchen are shared with other tenants (which is often the source of dispute between tenants) and the hot, humid and poor hygienical environment during the summer months, many ofthe homeless consider it not worth to use more than 30% of their income for these substandard accommodations. In other words, it forces them (back) into homelessness. In 2013, the average relapse rate was 2.8 times, but in 2015 had already increased to 4.18 times.

The only other option than living in private rental housing would be a referral by social workers to singleton hostels. However the service periods of these hostels are relatively short

and the quotas limited. There are about 280 bed units in these hostels and the duration is one to three months. The maximum period of subsidized hostel places for homeless persons is six months which is based on the assumption of the Government that a homeless person should be able to return to a self-dependent housed life after this duration. However as stated above, in reality, the living conditions in the private rental housing are most of the time even worse than living in the streets. Moreover, the existing quota system for singletons applying for public rental housing is disadvantageous as average waiting times for singleton can be as long as twenty years. This also relates to the fact that a number of homeless persons relapse to street sleeping after being discharged from the hostel.

In some instances, structural and individual issues go hand in hand. Those who are long-term unemployed for more than two years loose contact with former employers and colleague workers, and a re-entry into the labour market becomes increasingly difficult. More than half of the long-term unemployed had also lost contact with their families and friends, and have severed social support networks. According to the social workers, some homeless persons previously engaged in crime and drugs are prone to recommitting crime and are jailed for multiple times. All these problems formed a viscous cycle and made these people trapped in the homeless situation.

Conclusion

Starting from the historical background of homeless assistance services, this chapter has attempted to shed light Hong Kong's homelessness issue by putting focus on public policy, substandard housing conditions and current trends. While a one-stop service in the form of a public - NGO partnership has been put in place since the early 2000s, structural barriers have been unsuccessfully addressed and exacerbated after the 2010s. Even though several NGOs are providing professionalized services and in many instances still take on an advocating role, too low wages and unaffordable rents are crucially impeding exits to homelessness. Since casual and easy accessible forms of employment concentrate in Hong Kong's central areas, many feel necessitated to find accommodation in the old urban areas, however often in substandard conditions and overpriced. Recent rounds of redevelopment projects in these areas also pose a threat to the remaining numbers of substandard, yet accessible housing.

Apart from these structural issues, also more individual-related issues remain underaddressed, such as mental issues and the need of personalized care services. Many of

the so-called hardcore cases have been unsuccessful in exiting homelessness due to inadequate services that could keep them housed or sheltered.

Following the 2015 H.O.P.E survey, the following recommendations have been put forth: First, transitory housing should have a minimum duration of more than three years. Other than accommodation services, a more extensive one-stop service of integrated support including resources for mental rehabilitation services, counseling and employment assistance should be set up to actively solve the homeless' social, psychological and rehabilitation needs . Second is to extend the duration of singleton hostels to at least one year or one and a half year. Third is to encourage the HKSAR Government, real estate developers, NGOs and private landlords to release unoccupied buildings/ flats to the NGOs or social businesses as temporary forms of (social) housing in order to practically address the housing problem in the next few years. Fourth is to establish outreach health services for homeless persons by subsidizing mobile health service units that can take care of the physical and mental health of homeless persons in all districts in Hong Kong. Fifth recommendation is to the Government to reinitiate the Homeless Census annually or bi-annually and conduct official surveys that more accurately can estimate the number of homeless persons and obtain a better understanding homelessness situation. The last recommendation is the formulation of comprehensive government policy for the homeless overarching different departments together with service agencies and the homeless interest groups. Such policy should state clear objectives in tackling homeless to which it can be held accountable to the public,

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