

“They Keep Returning to Chow Kit Road After Being Released From Prison” - Exploring the View of Professional Government Officers and Volunteers Towards the Internal Migration of Homeless Former Prisoners in Malaysia

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Abstract

In Malaysia, the migration and the concentration of homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road are not new, given that they choose to return to Chow Kit Road each time they are released. Government agencies and NGOs are aware of the concentration of homeless former prisoners from different states within Malaysia in Chow Kit Road because the NGOs around Chow Kit Road distribute food aid to help them. Hence, a qualitative method was employed in this study by interviewing two groups of samples, namely nine professional government officers and nine volunteer informants who serve around Chow Kit Road. Experienced government officers and volunteer informants divided the findings into two superordinate themes. The views of professional government officers lead to the formation of four sub-themes, namely the personal, social, economic, and urban infrastructure and services offered. In comparison, the superordinate themes determined by the volunteer informants included four sub-themes: economic, social, and personal factors, together with urban infrastructure and services. This study provided an overview of factors that attract these former prisoners to continue to migrate and concentrate in Chow Kit Road based on the perspectives of a professional government officer and volunteer informants.

Keywords

Homeless former prisoners; economic factor; personal factor; social factor; urban infrastructure and service factor

Introduction

Homeless former prisoners are part of the group of homeless people in Malaysia. Thus, the homeless that exist are no longer homogeneous. Apart from homelessness, these former prisoners also experience other complicated issues (Jasni, Ah, Omar, et al., 2022). Their living conditions and composition are very complex, while several overlapping risk factors lead to bad living conditions. Many local studies have reported homeless concentration in urban areas (Alhabshi & Abdul Manan, 2012; Jasni et al., 2018). Two such studies examined the pull and push factors (Jasni et al., 2018) and personal factors (Jasni et al., 2021) that led to the migration of former prisoners from their town of residence to Kuala Lumpur. Jasni et al. (2018) discussed societal discrimination and family exclusion as push factors, while employment opportunities and peer support were the pull factors for their concentration in Kuala Lumpur. A more recent study claimed that personal characteristics such as self-choice, job opportunities, friends, access to food, and being in an area familiar to them attracted internal migration (Jasni et al., 2021).

This study employed a different qualitative approach by interviewing nine professional government officers and nine volunteers. This sample group allows the compilation of different perspectives regarding internal migration factors among homeless former prisoners. Government agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM), Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), and the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) realized there would be a problem of homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road. This notion was also seconded by the Malaysian Prisons Department. However, the constraints faced due to the lack of locus standi (i.e., the legal capacity to sue or approach courts, the lack of a post-rehabilitation program after released from prison, and the ambiguity of Destitute Persons Act 1977) to give them the power to intervene in the issue of homeless or former prisoners who ended up homeless. There is a lack of jurisdiction in the Malaysian Prisons Department to address the concentrating issue of former prisoners becoming homeless. Hence, this study provides new perspectives through professional government officers and volunteers in assessing the issue of internal migration among homeless former prisoners.

Migration is a significant driver of urbanization, industrialization, and economic development (Dingle & Drake, 2007). Internal migration has also contributed to the rapid population growth in urban areas and has become a relevant topic on the public agenda of governments and institutions. Although migration can impact the urban on a regional or global scale, there needs to be more known and explored, including the factors at the desired destination. As a fundamental component of change in a population, migration refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another to live permanently or temporarily. Migration is a complex phenomenon in which various probable factors of ‘macro,’ ‘meso,’ and ‘micro’ nature are linked to influence an individual’s decision to migrate (Castelli, 2018). The ‘macro’ factors, including political situation, demographics, socioeconomic, and environment, are significant drivers of forced migration, international or internal. It primarily occurs due to something beyond the control of an individual. While communication technology, land grabbing, and diasporic relations are among the ‘meso’ factors that influence the decision-making for internal migration, education, religion, marital status, and personal attitudes are ‘micro factors’ that also play an essential role in migration.

Studies at the international level consistently report that the homeless form a large number of prisoners (Johnson & Moschion, 2019). The same situation also applies to prisoners, who make

up many homeless who have been caught. Another study also reported that former prisoners were ten times more likely to be homeless than the average population, based on data collected by the Prison Policy Initiative during a 2008 survey (O'Donoghue, 2019). Based on the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) statistics in the United States in 2016, as many as 67% of released prisoners ended up homeless and returned to committing crimes (Walker, 2019). The exact number of homeless former prisoners is unknown because no systematic data reports the number of prisoners after being released. No official statistics from the Malaysian Prisons Department or the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM) indicate the number of homeless former prisoners. Therefore, this situation creates a gap in knowledge regarding the issue of homeless former prisoners. This study aims to focus on homeless former prisoners as a research subject.

This study discusses the issues of concentrating on homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road. Various factors contribute to the congregation of homeless former prisoners in Chow Kit Road. Khairul Azmir Ahmad, the Director of the Corporate Planning Department of Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), added that homeless people come to the capital to obtain food aid, especially when they learn about the various court aid missions broadcast on television and social media. Teruya (2019) added that homeless people as immigrants in the city could enjoy several social and legal advantages, such as assistance from government and non-governmental organizations. This assistance covers all aspects of the necessities required. Internal migration can significantly impact the migrant and their family (Prashad et al., 2016). Migration could occur from rural to urban areas with a high level of urbanization (Setiawan, 2020). The migration of former prisoners could also happen due to better employment opportunities for a better life. Although big cities are perceived to offer job opportunities, the possibilities are different from what is described. If the jobs do not suit their qualifications, many still hesitate to return home to their families and eventually choose to live on the streets (Bernama, 2017b).

Migration is an inevitable part of the development process. The changes in the population's demographics will eventually lead to socioeconomic differences. Inbound and outbound migration from and to destination locations is an essential contributor to the economic prosperity of a state. As the existing supply has attracted migration to destination locations, the number of internal migrations in the country is expected to increase. Internal migration is a significant geographical phenomenon in metropolitan areas that contributes to urbanization and rapid growth. In this case, Chow Kit Road is often the city's attraction for these homeless former prisoners. However, large-scale internal migration without adequate planning and assistance results in urban problems, including squatter colonies, squatter areas, and traffic congestion. These impacts are to be borne by the government and society when non-strategic internal migrations occur. The existence of structural and social inequalities, growing poverty, and the absence of opportunities and space could force these homeless former prisoners to move to the city in search of a new way of life. Homelessness in the city is on the rise and has been a primary concern for the government in terms of providing basic amenities, safety, and security. Homelessness refers to those unable or unwilling to maintain orderly and suitable housing facilities. This issue is faced in both developed and developing countries, as it can affect various levels of society. Hence, this study gathered the perspectives of professional government officers and volunteers regarding this issue. Their views can significantly contribute to filling the gaps that exist in the current literature. The findings from this study can be compared with previous studies that have discussed migration factors based on the perspectives of the ex-prisoners themselves (Jasni et al., 2021; Jasni et al., 2018).

Literature review

Understanding internal migration

Migration is essential in generating population distribution through demographic shifts (Bell et al., 2015). Internal migration can lead to a significant urbanization process within an area (Todaro & Smith, 2015). In contrast, the presence of various individuals due to migration concentrated in an area can lead to rapid urbanization. Migration could occur due to socioeconomic, demographic, political, and environmental factors (Alam & Al Mamun, 2022). All the elements present have strengthened one's decision to migrate internally to a new area (de Haas, 2021; King, 2012). Several theories were developed since Ravenstein's (1885) first effort (migration law) from the perspectives of sociology, economics, political science, geography, and various disciplines. Most of these resulting theories are categorized into two types: a) functionalist or b) structural-historical (de Haas, 2021). Human migration involves many movement processes of individuals from one place to another, intending to settle permanently or to a new location targeted as a destination of choice. The results of human migration that have taken place over time have changed aspects of lands and continents along with the racial, ethnic, and linguistic compositions of their populations.

De Haas (2021) stated that migration is a fundamental social change in shaping the history and development of an area or country. It also has the potential to accelerate the development process, especially the economic growth in the region. The supply of something of a financial nature attracts the migration of humans. Migration can be divided into two types, namely internal and external migrations. Internal migration focuses more on what happens within one country, while outward migration occurs across multiple countries. However, internal migration is most prevalent in homelessness (Hunter, 2015). It can be further divided into inter-provincial migration (permanent movement from one national territory to another) and intraregional migration (permanent movement within one national region). The migration to other states or from the countryside to the city is mainly to generate income for a better life. The pull and push factors, including economic, cultural, or environmental grounds, greatly influence the decision to migrate. Push factors are events and circumstances that force an individual to move from a location. In comparison, pull factors influence migrants to move to a particular area. The primary reason for migration is economical because people are either “pressed” from their residence due to a lack of job opportunities or pulled because other places offer more job opportunities or higher-paying jobs.

Internal migration has far-reaching implications for migrants and their families (Saoumya, 2021). This study focuses on internal migration, in which homeless former prisoners repeatedly migrate to Chow Kit Road for a better life. Migration is usually associated with increased social capital at individual and household levels and increased access to metropolitan areas. Migration provides many benefits to infrastructure development and the dumping of labor into various sectors in urban areas. It will also add to the high population density in the metropolitan region due to rapid expansion, abundant employment opportunities, and higher living standards compared to rural areas. Consequently, communities become more concentrated in urban areas in search of better lifestyles with higher salaries.

Nevertheless, some things could be improved by internal migration. The presence of socioeconomic inequalities, the rise of poverty, and job competition in urban areas are among

them. Despite the advantages, migration can also lead to adverse effects, including difficulty covering daily expenses such as food, clothing, and housing. These effects could lead to an increasing rate of homelessness. However, the high volume of internal migration without adequate planning and support could create urban problems like squatter settlements, squatter areas, and traffic congestion, urban poor. This study focuses on the homeless former prisoners concentrated in Chow Kit Road.

The phenomenon of internal migration among homeless people

This study focuses on a group of former prisoners who chose to migrate to Chow Kit Road due to various factors. The mass congregation also resulted in a competition which led to the occurrences of urban poor who ended up homeless former prisoners on the streets. Despite possible drawbacks, attraction towards migration is still present due to the factors at the destination area. As noted earlier, there are several reasons for the migration of homeless former prisoners to a place. As such, internal migration shifts are caused by industry, population growth, and other social and economic changes. Such modifications affect the demography in which homeless former prisoners often concentrate in an area that offers a variety of advantages. The issue of homelessness in the country has become a social phenomenon that is increasingly attracting public attention (Ramli & Dawood, 2017). Homeless people often make sidewalks, under bridges, crevices of buildings, parks, and bus stop as places to shelter rest, and sleep (Mohamed et al., 2017). Various questions arose about the presence and concentration of this group en masse around Chow Kit Road. The media also reported the issue of homelessness occurring across urban areas, especially in Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Selangor, Sarawak, and Penang (Drani, 2016). The phenomenon of internal migration among the homeless stems from various factors such as economic problems, psychological problems, family issues, and failure to find employment in the current city.

This study focuses more on the factors that influence former prisoners' move to Chow Kit Road by exploring the benefits of the migration process. According to Gaetz et al. (2014), many developed and developing countries have conducted studies on the phenomenon of homelessness because it is closely related to the issue of development and sustainability of a nation.

Research methodology

Research design

This interpretive study focuses on the process or phenomenon of migration and the concentration of homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road; hence, this study employed interpretism. This study could give or interpret a meaning for the phenomenon under investigation (Myers, 2008; Saunders et al., 2012). This philosophy allowed this study to delve into the views of professional government officers and volunteers on the migrating factors of these former prisoners around Chow Kit Road. The philosophy of interpretism can unravel the problems to be explored and aid in answering the objectives of the study. Researchers can explore the experiences and knowledge of government officials and volunteers dealing with homeless former prisoners. Thus, this study adopted a qualitative framework to explore the research questions.

Location of the study

This study focuses on the locality around Chow Kit Road because this area is often the focus of homeless former prisoners. Several studies concentrating on Kuala Lumpur classified Chow Kit Road as a hotspot for homeless people, including former prisoners (Jasni et al., 2021; Jasni et al., 2018; Ramli & Dawood, 2017). Thus, Chow Kit Road was selected as the study location for this study because Kuala Lumpur is home to the highest number of homeless people, especially former prisoners. However, there is no accurate population count on the number of homeless former prisoners in Chow Kit Road. Based on the statistics released by the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM), 4,842 homeless citizens were estimated throughout the five years from 2017 to 2022 (Jasni, Ah, & Nasir, 2022). However, there is no specific data on the number of homeless former prisoners out of the total of 4,842 homeless people, including former prisoners, drug addicts, the poor, the elderly, abandoned youth, the disabled, sex workers, transgender people, and many more.

Sampling

This study involved two groups of samples, namely professional government officers and volunteers. The first group to be studied involves experienced government officers, directly and indirectly, helping homeless former prisoners. This group of government officers is full-time staff in government agencies. The professional government officers who participated in this study were from several government agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (JKM), the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), the National Anti-Drug Agency (NADA), the Malaysian Prisons Department, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), and the National Welfare Foundation (YKN). They consist of welfare officers, counselors, therapists, and anti-drug officers who gather information about homeless former prisoners in rehabilitation, management, and enforcement. Their input can help fill the void in existing knowledge, as previous studies discussed from the point of view of homeless former prisoners. An official permission letter was delivered to the respective government departments and agencies for approval. Every government agency approved each letter of application to conduct the study. However, the approval was only received from nine professional government officers who agreed to participate in this study.

The following sample group includes volunteers who move individually, in groups, or through NGOs and associations. These volunteers have interacted directly with the homeless on the streets; hence, their views are valuable for this study. The inclusion of two samples allows triangulation of the data. Triangulation exists when the equation of the findings is almost similar between the two samples. In this study, volunteers who have conducted outreach work in caring for homeless people on the streets were identified and selected to participate.

Additionally, the nine volunteers were selected through purposive and snowball techniques and interviewed on their views of the factors causing homelessness among the former prisoners who often migrate and concentrate along Chow Kit Road. Various NGOs in Chow Kit Road facilitated the identification of volunteer informants who could participate in this study. Only volunteers operating around Chow Kit Road were identified to participate in this study. Several volunteer informants introduced other colleagues who shared similar characteristic traits.

Data collection technique

Each informant was interviewed separately. Due to the informant's time constraints, the interview was chosen as the data collection method. Since this study was conducted during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period, the interviews were held online. Through the interview sessions, the perspectives of the respective informants were explored without any restrictions or interruptions. The online interview process went smoothly due to the cooperation of the informants and a good internet connection. Prior to the interview, an interview protocol was set. The interview protocol was developed based on previous studies and had undergone expert review. These interview questions comprised several parts, namely the demographics of the informants and their views on the migration factors among homeless former prisoners. This study was conducted from June 2021 to May 2022.

Instrument and interview protocol

Two types of interview protocols were employed for the government officers and volunteers. The interview protocol contains three parts. Part A includes questions on the socio-demographics of the participants. On the other hand, Part B comprised questions on the participant's views on the migration of homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road. While the final part, part C, is a closing that will ask questions about the participants' reflections on migration among homeless former prisoners occurring on Chow Kit Road before ending the interview session.

Data validation and triangulation

This study used data triangulation to ensure balanced and supported research findings. In qualitative studies, triangulation combines several methods to study a phenomenon (Bogdan & Bikle, 2006). Triangulation can involve multiple data (i.e., several samples) or multiple methods (i.e., using several methods cumulatively: interview, observation, focus group discussion) (Rothbauer, 2008). Combining these methods can reduce the bias and weaknesses of using a single procedure. Hence, this study employed two samples, namely government officers and volunteers, to increase the study's credibility. Data from two sample groups (government officers and volunteers) were utilized to answer the study's objectives. This step allows triangulation, as more than one method was used to collect data. This study triangulated the research findings obtained from both study samples. Triangulation is employed when the research field is new and involves difficult research participants. Since using a group of government officers was perceived as insufficient to answer the study's objectives, two sample groups were selected.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee University of Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) (COA No: JEP-2021-316).

Data analysis technique

Before coding, the recorded sessions were converted into written form (verbatim transcript). The transcripts were then entered into the Atlas.ti software where any verbatim that described the study's objectives was coded. The codes were then named based on previous studies and grouped to become the central theme (also referred to as a superordinate theme or also known as a main theme). Coding was done based on the sample groups (one file for nine government officers and another for nine volunteers) in the Atlas.ti software for all the informants. Since various codes were identified in the two sample groups, they were grouped according to appropriate sub-themes. For the professional government officers sample group, the codes were grouped into personal, social, and economic, together with infrastructure and service factors categories. At the same time, the categories for the volunteer sample include economic, social, and personal, together with infrastructure and service factors. Each of the codes was grouped according to the set factor theme. Each sub-theme from the professional government officer sample group was placed in one superordinate. Likewise, the volunteer informant sample sub-themes were placed in one superordinate. The clustering results indicated almost similar themes in both groups. Once all the superordinate themes and sub-themes were determined, the findings were interpreted and discussed.

Results

Social demographics of professional government officers

The professional government officers in this study consisted of officers from several government agencies. The study involved one National Welfare Foundation Officer, two Department of Social Welfare Malaysia Officers, two Kuala Lumpur City Hall Officers, two Malaysian Prisons Department Officers, one National Anti-Drugs Agency (NADA) Officer, and one Lance Corporal from the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM)). The results of the study conducted with professional government officers were categorized into Superordinate 1. The names of each informant have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity and confidentiality. Table 1 lists the social demographics of professional government officer informants.

Social demographics of volunteer informants

As for the nine volunteer informants, five were females, three were males, and one was a transgender person. Of the nine, three were students, one lecturer, two employees from the private sector, one part-timer, and two unemployed individuals. All nine volunteers had served voluntarily for more than three years. Of which, one informant had 20 years of experience. On the other hand, five volunteers were bachelor's degree holders, one with a Doctor of Philosophy, one with a Diploma, and two with master's degrees. The level of education also played an essential role in enabling the volunteer informants to provide insights into the study conducted. The survey results conducted with volunteer informants were linked to the themes of Superordinate 2. Likewise, with volunteer informants when their names have also been changed to pseudonyms to ensure identity protection and confidentiality. Table 2 summarizes the social demographics of volunteer informant.

Table 1: Social Demographic Profile of Professional Government Officers

Informants Demography	Gender	Employer	Job Position	Work Experience	Job Scope
Hilman	Male	National Welfare Foundation	Case Officer	33 Years	Helping clients (homeless) at Anjung Singgah
Mirzan	Male	Department of Social Welfare Malaysia	Assistant Community Development Officer	14 Years	The Enforcement Unit
Syakira	Female	Malaysian Prisons Department	Prison Officer	22 Years	Carrying out tasks involving the execution of punishment, rehabilitation, and treatment of prisoners.
Muzafar	Male	Kuala Lumpur City Hall	Psychology Officer	6 Years	Managing a homeless transformative Center, rehabilitation, changing the transfer of the client (homeless), forming a mindset
Pusparatna	Female	Malaysian Prisons Department	Deputy Director, Prisoner Management Division	29 Years	Rehabilitation program planning for prisoners
Linda	Female	Kuala Lumpur City Hall	Administrative Officer	6 Years	Managing placement of homeless people in temporary centers and taking care of the welfare
Karim	Male	Department of Social Welfare Malaysia	Assistant Community Development Officer	14 Years	The Enforcement Unit
Syamir	Male	The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP)	Lance Corporal	12 Years	Crime Patrol
Wildan	Male	The National Anti-Drugs Agency (NADA)	Assistant Director of Enforcement	8 Years	The Enforcement Unit

Table 2: Social Demographic Profile of Volunteer Informants

Demographics of Volunteer Informants	Gender	Age	State of Origin	Job	Level of education	Duration of volunteering
Athirah	Female	27 Years	Sabah	Student	Currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the University of Malaya	3 Years
Faisal	Male	40 Years	Kuala Lumpur	Translator	Bachelor's Degree in Multimedia (Multimedia University, MMU)	3 Years
Lily	Female	27 Years	Kuala Lumpur	Student	Currently pursuing a master's degree in Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) at the University of Malaya	6 Years
Rafeah	Female	47 Years	Johor	Lecturer	Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work (Gerontology) (University of Malaya)	20 Years
Melissa	Transgender	48 Years	Kuala Lumpur	Unemployed	Diploma in Business Management (Primary College)	10 Years
Hayati	Female	33 Years	Terengganu	Student	Currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Sociology at the University of Malaya	5 Years
Muna	Female	33 Years	Terengganu	Digital Marketing Executive	Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration (Universiti Utara Malaysia)	12 Years
Iskandar	Male	25 Years	Terengganu	Barista (Starbucks)	Bachelor's Degree in International Relations (University of Malaya)	5 Years
Burhanudin	Male	45 Years	Kuching, Sarawak	Unemployed	Malaysian Higher School Certificate (SPM)	10 Years

Superordinate Theme 1: The views of government officers on the former prisoners' return to Chow Kit Road

The first superordinate theme was related to repeated selection factors for Chow Kit Road. The first superordinate theme accumulated all the sub-themes obtained from the professional government officers sample group. The division provides a better understanding of the codes and sub-themes received from each sample group. Based on the observation, the homeless prisoners migrated to Chow Kit Road repeatedly. Based on the interviews, eight sub-sub themes identified were divided into four sub-themes: personal, social, economic, and urban infrastructure and service offer factors.

Sub-theme 1a: Personal factors

For the first sub-theme, five sub-sub-themes were determined for personal factors when these homeless former prisoners chose Chow Kit Road. The professional government officers clarified that the congregation of homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road was due to the personalized offers in Chow Kit Road. The personal factor sub-theme involves several codes.

Existence and presence of drugs

According to six professional government officers, one of the reasons for the migration of former prisoners to Chow Kit Road was the easy availability of drugs. Mirzan, Linda, and Karim added that the easy access to drugs was the main reason for the repeated return of the homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road every time they were released. Karim added that the sale of drugs in various areas and the convenience of obtaining drugs would make homeless former prisoners more likely to be concentrated around Chow Kit Road. Wildan mentioned that drug selling has become active due to the accessibility of drugs around Chow Kit Road. The excerpts from interviews in support of this sub-theme are as follows:

"That's a factor; most of the homeless people who come to Kuala Lumpur are former drug addicts, most of them."

(Mirzan/ 2nd Professional Informant/ Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia)

"Maybe they feel easy to get drugs. It's easy to buy drugs without being noticed around here."

(Linda/ 6th Professional Informant/ Kuala Lumpur City Hall)

"Maybe it's easy to get drugs that are sold everywhere, hence, became a factor. Drug addicts sell waste items that can be recycled to get money to buy drugs."

(Karim/ 7th Professional Informant/ Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia)

Released from a nearby prison

This sub-theme was quite different from the existing sub-themes in the volunteer sample. Karim stated that among the migration factors of former prisoners to Chow Kit Road could be the location of the prison that is close to Kuala Lumpur. Interestingly, this factor was one of the reasons the homeless former prisoners chose Chow Kit Road as a destination to go to when they were released. Many of these homeless former prisoners were released from prisons near Kuala Lumpur.

“Besides that, in Kuala Lumpur, most of those I interviewed were freed from the nearby prison. They think all they can do is stay around Chow Kit Road because it’s close.”

(Karim/ 7th Professional Informant/ Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia)

Cheap rental

According to Syamir, cheap rental offers were also an option for these homeless former prisoners to migrate repeatedly to Chow Kit Road.

“Because some budget hotels are very cheap. Some hotels offer rooms at RM15, RM 20, or RM 50 per day. This is why they love to come and stay here.”

(Syamir/ 8th Professional Informant/ The Royal Malaysia Police)

It is fun to live on Chow Kit Road

Syamir also added that it is fun to be around Chow Kit Road. According to him, Chow Kit Road’s history can attract former prisoners to concentrate around Chow Kit Road.

“This is because Chow Kit Road is a fun place to stay. They have easy access to drugs, abundant food aid, a concentration of friends from prison, a free life, and live without any rules. They have a history of living here previously. That is why they still choose Chow Kit Road Every time released from prison.”

(Syamir/ 8th Professional Informant/ The Royal Malaysia Police)

Non-receiving families

The non-accepting families were another factor forcing the repeated migration of the homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road. The absence of family members to depend on left them with no choice but to migrate back to Chow Kit Road. According to Hilman, the low level of family acceptance is primarily due to feelings of shame or fear. This situation has caused some family members to take much longer to accept the family member returning from prison. Involvement in drugs and repeated imprisonment were among the reasons for the rejection of these family members. Family members' difficulty in accepting the homeless former prisoners is unchanging and persistent with the involvement in crime and drugs. Wildan

added that rejection from family also caused a majority of the former prisoners to choose to concentrate on Chow Kit Road.

“Ah, the acceptance of family is still low; this family still has feelings of shame or fear. So, there are times when this family takes a certain period to accept members again. It may be the family’s problem as there is no understanding.”

(Hilman/ 1st Professional Informant/ National Welfare Foundation)

“When asked why not return to their hometown, they claimed that the family did not accept them; hence, to build a new life out of prison, they concentrated in the city of Kuala Lumpur.”

(Wildan/ 9th Professional Informant/ The National Anti-Drugs Agency)

Sub-theme 1b: Social factor

The social factor also influences homeless former prisoners to migrate to Chow Kit Road based on the perspective of professional government officers.

The concentration of peers at Chow Kit Road

Five professional government officers mentioned that friends concentrating on Chow Kit Road were the focus factor for their repeated migration to Chow Kit Road. Mirzan and Wildan added that homeless former prisoners migrated to the same area when their fellow inmates from successive prisons gathered around Chow Kit Road.

“They are so interested in being here because of the concentration of friends around Chow Kit Road. They feel happy being around their friends who are also concentrated in Chow Kit Road.”

(Mirzan/ 2nd Professional Informant/ Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia)

“Most of them out of prison head to Chow Kit Road to find old friends, and if there are no friends, make new friends.”

(Wildan/ 9th Professional Informant/ The National Anti-Drugs Agency)

Sub-theme 1c: Economic factors

Economic factors were also perceived to influence the migration of the homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road.

Finding a job

Employment opportunities were described as a sub-theme for the repeated migration of former prisoners to Chow Kit Road. They chose to return here because Chow Kit Road was

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able to offer them job opportunities. Hence, Chow Kit Road is a preferred destination. Pusparatna and Muzafar supported this notion. However, their failure to adapt to city life led to their involvement in crimes.

“Originally, they came to the big city to find jobs and a better life than in their hometown, but when they failed to adapt to the life in the city, they got involved in crime.”

(Pusparatna/ 5th Professional Informant/ the Malaysian Prisons Department)

“Most of them come to Chow Kit Road looking for a job, no matter what kind of job it is.”

(Muzafar/ 5th Professional Informant/ Kuala Lumpur City Hall)

Sub-theme 1d: Urban infrastructure and services factor

There was one code identified under this sub-theme as follows:

Food aid

Access to food aid was another factor for the repeated selection of Chow Kit Road for migrating former prisoners. The available food aid in Chow Kit Road was a pull factor for the homeless former prisoners. Syamir mentioned this factor when he explained the existence of various NGOs that provide food aid around Chow Kit Road. Their food needs can be easily met at Chow Kit Road, making it a suitable area for them. The excerpt from the interview in support of this sub-theme is as follows:

“They come to Chow Kit Road due to the food aid that is easily available and provided by NGOs. There are many NGOs around the city that provide a lot of food aid until late in the afternoon.”

(Syamir/ 8th Professional Informant/ The Royal Malaysia Police)

Superordinate Theme 2: The views of volunteer informants on the former prisoner’s return to Chow Kit Road

This observation is parallel with that of the group of professional government officers, with nine sub-subthemes arranged into four sub-themes.

Sub-theme 2a: Economic factors

The sub-themes below were based on the existence of economic supply factors.

Job opportunities

The repeated migration of former prisoners to Chow Kit Road was due to the area’s job opportunities. Volunteer informants added that Chow Kit Road was perceived to offer many job opportunities. Homeless former prisoners often seek job opportunities upon returning to Chow Kit Road.

"They come here because maybe because Chow Kit Road promises a lot of job opportunities."

(Athirah/ 1st Volunteer Informant)

"It's easy to find a job at Chow Kit Road. People in Chow Kit Road always say that there are many job opportunities near the market. They can easily get a job at the market."

(Iskandar/ 8th Volunteer Informant)

Sub-theme 2b: Social factors

This study discovered sub-themes related to social factors based on the interviews with the volunteer informants. The following is a theme under the social element:

Concentration of peers

The repeated return of homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road is due to the concentration of like-minded friends. The presence and concentration of these like-minded friends make the homeless former prisoners congregate with the majority.

"They have old friends (referring to friends from prison), most of whom live here. That's why they prefer to go to Chow Kit Road."

(Athirah/ 1st Volunteer Informant)

"Where else will they go except to go closer to friends who are also concentrated in Chow Kit Road."

(Melissa/ 5th Volunteer Informant)

"It's good to go to a friend who is always there for them. The prison department is not there after they are released. We also do not provide any place for them, so when they get out of prison, they have to go on their own. Often, they choose to find friends around Chow Kit Road."

(Muna/ 7th Volunteer Informant)

Sub-theme 2c: Personal factors

This factor led to six codes as follows:

Wanting to leave the family due to feelings of shame

The shame around their family members causes former prisoners to migrate to Chow Kit Road.

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“They came to Chow Kit Road because they were ashamed of themselves around their families. This situation caused them to choose to live independently by migrating to Chow Kit Road.”

(Faisal/ 2nd Volunteer Informant)

“They will also be ashamed to return to their families. That is why many of them will choose to stay in Chow Kit Road.”

(Rafeah/ 4th Volunteer Informant)

No direction

Former prisoners with no direction often return to Chow Kit Road. They have nowhere to go every time after being released from prison. Hence, they choose to return to Chow Kit Road. The excerpts from interviews in support of this sub-sub-theme are as follows:

“Even if they are released, they have no direction. They will return to being homeless in Chow Kit Road.”

(Faisal/ 2nd Volunteer Informant)

“I often see when they have no direction, they will return to their original place. They have no direction once released from prison. They don’t know where to go, so they come to Chow Kit Road.”

(Muna/ 7th Volunteer Informant)

Not accepted by the family

Some former prisoners returned to Chow Kit Road because their families did not accept them. This situation forced them to migrate to Chow Kit Road.

“They migrate to Chow Kit Road when they are released from prison because they return to their families. It is not certain whether families would accept them or not. So, when a former prisoner has no clue as to where to go after being released from prison, they often choose Chow Kit Road as their next destination after released.”

(Melissa/ 5th Volunteer Informant)

“They came to Chow Kit Road because the family do not necessarily want to accept them.”

(Muna/ 7th Volunteer Informant)

Concentrating on areas that have become a commonplace

Some return to Chow Kit Road due to a sense of familiarity. Their previous experiences of living in Chow Kit Road made them feel that Chow Kit Road was their destination of choice to go. The excerpts from interviews in support of this sub-sub-theme are as follows:

“Surely a former prisoner will go to the usual place they once lived to continue the same life unless he has other stronger interventions.”

(Melissa/ 5th Volunteer Informant)

“They will come to places they are used to. They will return to Chow Kit Road, in return, will get involved with drugs and return to the homeless life. When people get out of prison and have nowhere to go, they will go to places they are used to before.”

(Hayati/ 6th Volunteer Informant)

Access to drugs

The drug access also attracted the homeless former prisoners to return repeatedly to Chow Kit Road. Since Chow Kit Road is synonymous with the presence of drugs, their return to this place is very strategic. They decide to return to Chow Kit Road due to their addiction problem, as it is easy to procure drugs here.

“They will always go to a place that is easy to find the goods (referring to drugs).”

(Hayati/ 6th Volunteer Informant)

“They still come to Chow Kit Road due to easier access to drugs.”

(Iskandar/ 8th Volunteer Informant)

Released from a nearby prison

Finally, these homeless former prisoners return to Chow Kit Road after being released from a nearby prison. The lack of money also left them with no choice but to return to Chow Kit Road upon release.

“They concentrate in Chow Kit Road. If you ask me, they will go to Chow Kit Road after getting out of prison. This is because they see Chow Kit Road as the nearest destination from the newly released prison (referring to Kajang prison). They choose to come to Chow Kit Road from Kajang because they have no money. And because it is closest to them.”

(Burhanudin/ 9th Volunteer Informant)

Sub-theme 2d: Urban infrastructure and services factors

Urban infrastructure and service factors also influenced former prisoners’ return to Chow Kit Road. The code is as follows:

Accessibility to food aid

The factor that caused the homeless former prisoners to repeatedly return to Chow Kit Road was the accessibility to food aid provided by NGOs around Chow Kit Road. Hence, Chow Kit Road becomes a suitable destination for these former prisoners.

“Accessibility to food aid makes them feel comfortable to be in Chow Kit Road. The homeless in Kuala Lumpur can get food aid from NGOs. Many organizations provide food aid. So, they are comfortable moving to Chow Kit Road after being released from prison.”

(Iskandar/ 8th Volunteer Informant)

Discussion

This study revealed the internal migration among homeless former prisoners from rural and remote areas to concentrate around Chow Kit Road. Various factors influenced the former prisoners who were released from prison to end up homeless on the streets. Internal migration plays an essential role in the well-being of a country because it impacts economic, social, and demographic changes and has a significant role in the formation of population growth and categorizing around a city, in this case, Chow Kit Road. In general, internal migration refers to the movement of people across certain boundaries that involves changes in their usual place of residence. It can be in a state or province, or even a city.

The migration of homeless prisoners to Chow Kit Road is referred to as internal or domestic migration. Internal migration usually occurs for education or economic upliftment, natural disasters, or civil disturbances (Teruya, 2019). In a process described as categorizing, the general movement trend from rural to urban areas also resulted from internal migration (Prashad et al., 2016). Researchers have documented that migration can be perceived as a form of social adjustment in response to economic and social needs. Based on the perspectives of professional government officers and volunteers, the migration of homeless former prisoners is due to the expected benefits in Chow Kit Road. The presence and gathering of homeless former prisoners in the same area resulted in their growing numbers. The concentration of former prisoners in big cities can also occur in developing and developed countries. Homelessness can happen in various walks of life. Several factors for a person to become homeless include poverty, drug abuse (Ku Yaacob et al., 2017), mental illness, aging, prostitution (Ismail et al., 2018), and disability (Drani, 2016; Ghee & Omar, 2015; Jasni, Ah, & Nasir, 2022; Jasni, Ah, Omar, et al., 2022; Yildirim & Yildirim, 2014).

Homeless former prisoners internally migrate after being released for specific reasons, such as improving life and employment opportunities. Various factors also lead to internal migration among homeless former prisoners released from prison who chose to concentrate on Chow Kit Road. The congregation of former prisoners in an urban area en masse is a matter

that is less talked about nowadays. Those who focus on the metropolitan area end up living life as homeless when the opportunities negate them. This study successfully explored the factors that influenced homeless former prisoners to migrate from rural areas or prisons to urban areas like Chow Kit Road. Over the past three decades, previous studies indicated that homelessness encompasses demographic diversity like age, gender, ethnicity, and family background (Grant et al., 2013).

Based on the findings of this study, the professional and volunteer informants reported relatively similar views. Sub-themes drawn from the discussions with these two groups include personal, social, economic, urban infrastructure, and service factors. Both groups expressed similar views when categorizing sub-sub-themes. The professional government officers and volunteer informants believe that the internal migration of former prisoners to Chow Kit Road was mainly due to the personal factor obtained at the destination of choice. Both groups also reported similar sub-themes on the concentration of friends around Chow Kit Road. The groups agreed that the economic factors were about employment opportunities (Jasni et al., 2021). Finally, they also decided that access to food aid (Bernama, 2017a; Sarawakvoice, 2021; Utama, 2021) and other necessities are classified as sub-themes under the urban infrastructure and services factors that lead to the concentration of former prisoners in Chow Kit Road. However, other factors have also led these homeless former prisoners to decide to relocate and concentrate in big cities. The NGOs actively channel various basic needs and assistance to the homeless as a vulnerable community in the big cities (Utama, 2021).

On the other hand, the mass concentration also raises the problem of urban poverty, which contributes to social issues such as homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2014; Ghee & Omar, 2015; Teruya, 2019; Watson et al., 2016; Zufferey, 2022). This situation causes the internal migration among homeless former prisoners to be given attention to not impact the well-being of the environment, especially in urban areas. The sudden migration of former prisoners to specific regions of the big cities occurs when they believe that these areas can offer many opportunities such as economic, infrastructure, and social (Castelli, 2018; de Haas, 2021; Hunter, 2015; Jasni et al., 2021; Prashad et al., 2016). The homeless people moved from rural to urban areas, among the cities of their choice, including Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, and Georgetown. From their perspectives, large cities offer more employment opportunities due to the growing economic and industrial factors (Fakta, 2021). Former prisoners who fail to secure a job in their home state will move to the city because they think they can successfully land a career there. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor areas are preferred due to industrial policy, which guarantees more job opportunities, access to public facilities, quality education, and political peace.

Since internal migration is the cause of the increasing prevalence of homelessness in the city, it is time for certain parties to focus on this social problem to come up with a solution (Teruya, 2019). The homeless former prisoners who are not given full attention led to unresolved homelessness issues as their welfare is neglected because homeless people choose to migrate from rural to urban areas for a better life (Ramli & Dawood, 2017). However, an urban population increase limits employment opportunities and residential spaces leading to social problems like homelessness. In short, internal migration is an issue that occurs worldwide, even in developed countries like the United States and Europe (Hussain et al., 2015). Thus, it is undeniable that the diversity and rapid economic growth, coupled with the availability of complete and conducive infrastructure and facilities in large metropolitan areas, attract the homeless from rural areas to migrate to the city.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most of the internal migrations of these homeless former prisoners to Chow Kit Road occur due to the economic, social, and demographic factors upon release. Each individual manages the influence differently. The mass congregation of former prisoners around Chow Kit Road has indirectly changed the landscape of population density in major cities like Kuala Lumpur. Chow Kit Road is an area that accommodates chronically homeless people, including former prisoners, drug addicts, and those with criminal records. The phenomenon of homeless former prisoners concentrated in a site en masse is an issue that has never been resolved and has become a protracted social problem, especially in the cities.

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