

An Approach to Addressing Homelessness in Hong Kong: Life Story Approach

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Abstract : Homelessness has been a popular and controversial debate in Hong Kong, a city which is densely populated and well-known for very expensive housing. The constitution of the homeless as threats to the community and environmental hygiene is ambiguous and debatable in the Hong Kong context. The lack of an intervention model is the critical research gap thus far, aside from the tangible services delivered. The life story approach (LSA), with its unique humanistic orientation, has been well applied in recent decades to depict the needs of various target groups, but not the homeless. It is argued that the life story approach (LSA), which has been employed by health professionals in the landscape of dementia, and health and social care settings, can be used as a reference in the local Chinese context through indigenization. This study, therefore, captures the viewpoints of service providers and users by constructing an indigenous intervention model that refers to the LSA in serving the chronically homeless. By informing 13 social workers and 27 homeless individuals in 8 focus groups whilst 12 homeless individuals have participated in individual in-depth interviews, a framework of LSA in homeless people is proposed. Through thematic analysis, three main themes of their life stories was generated, namely, the family, negative experiences and identity transformation. The three domains solidified framework that not only can be applied to the homeless, but also other disadvantaged groups in the Chinese context. Based on the three domains of family, negative experiences and identity transformation, the model is applied in the daily practices of social workers who help the homeless. The domain of family encompasses familial relationships from the past to the present to the speculated future with ten sub-themes. The domain of negative experiences includes seven sub-themes, with reference to the deviant behavior committed. The last domain, identity transformation, incorporates the awareness and redefining of one's identity and there are a total of seven sub-themes. The first two domains are important components of personal histories while the third is more of an unknown, exploratory and yet to-be-redefined territory which has a more positive and constructive orientation towards developing one's identity and life meaning. The longitudinal temporal dimension of moving from the past - present - future enriches the meaning making process, facilitates the integration of life experiences and maintains a more hopeful dialogue. The model is tested and its effectiveness is measured by using qualitative and quantitative methods to affirm the extent that it is relevant to the local context. First, it contributes to providing a clear guideline for social workers who can use the approach as a reference source. Secondly, the framework acts as a new intervention means to address problem saturated stories and the intangible needs of the homeless. Thirdly, the model extends the application to beyond health related issues. Last but not least, the model is highly relevant to the local indigenous context.

Keywords : homeless, indigenous intervention, life story approach, social work practice

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