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A scoping review of street homelessness: What can Papua New Guinea learn from South Africa?

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Abstract: Homelessness is a global social issue that has affected various nations around the world, including South Africa. The instances of homelessness began during the apartheid era in South Africa and have since risen to alarming levels in provinces such as Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal, as reported in the 2022 census. Despite the lack of comprehensive research on homelessness in South Africa, this study conducted a scoping review to evaluate research completed on homelessness from independence to 2020 in the country. The scoping review followed the Preferred Reporting Item for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and involved a systematic search of the Development Southern Africa and Urban Forum databases. A total of 72 research articles were identified, with 10 meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review, which were then analyzed using thematic analysis. The study identified several key themes, including homelessness as a reflection of patriarchal systems, gender-based conflicts leading to homelessness, proactive and reactive interventions by non-state actors for homeless individuals, and the quantitative focus of research on homelessness in South Africa from independence to the present day. The study presents the applicability of these findings to tackle homelessness in Papua New Guinea and recommends the use of mixed methods approaches to research homelessness in South Africa to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions of homelessness in the country.

Keywords: drain dwellers; geography; homelessness; Papua New Guinea; PRISMA; scoping review; South Africa

1. Introduction

Homelessness is an international social issue affecting societies worldwide. Research has shown that homelessness, especially among children and families, is a growing phenomenon in the United States (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; United States Department of Education, 2011). Scholars emphasize that homelessness is a global security problem affecting both developed and developing nations (Mnkandla et al., 2023; Tenai and Mbewu, 2020). Developing countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are currently struggling with high rates of homelessness. Abbas (2024) reports that Nigeria has 24,400,000 homeless people, making it the most affected nation. Pakistan has 20,000,000; Egypt has 12,000,000; Syria has 6,568,000; and DR Congo has 5,332,000 homeless individuals as of 2024, according to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The situation in South Africa is similar, with Mpedi (2023) stating that the 2022 census reported 55,719 homeless people, including 39,052 men and 16,667 women. Mpedi (2023) analyzed the census data further, finding that most homeless individuals

are in Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces, with 44,512 living on the streets and 11,207 in shelters. Despite the census data, estimating the homeless population across provinces in South Africa remains challenging. Jones (2023) highlighted the Borgen Project's findings, stating that nearly 200,000 people in South Africa lack access to shelter. The study conducted a scoping review on street homelessness in South Africa, exploring the dynamics and unpacking philosophical discourses surrounding homelessness through a conflict theory lens, which holds society accountable for the consequences of homelessness. The findings on homelessness in South Africa are used to propose practical strategies to tackle the issue, which is also prevalent in Papua New Guinea.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Conflict theory

The theoretical assumptions on homelessness have influenced policies and provisions for homeless people worldwide. Neale (1997, p. 49) argues that these policies are implicit, contradictory, and inconsistent. Despite these inconsistencies, some recurring themes are evident. Among the diverse theoretical perspectives on homelessness, conflict theory has been found to be appropriate for explaining instances of homelessness in systematic reviews. Frances (2018) suggests that conflict theory indicates that social issues such as homelessness stem from individual shortcomings and personality flaws rather than societal inadequacies.

Frances (2018) further suggests that conflict theory affirms that society exists in a state of conflict due to competition for scarce resources. In the context of this study, this theory that housing is a scarce resource, and the inability of people to effectively compete for living spaces has rendered them homeless. Another important aspect of conflict theory is the attribution of stratification and poverty to inadequate opportunities resulting from discrimination and prejudice against poor women and people of color (University of Minnesota, 2020). This aspect of conflict theory applies to this research since the homeless population in South Africa includes women, children, elderly men, and people of colour.

2.2. Concept of home

In different nations and cultural groups around the world, 'home' is a concept with varied meanings. Gram-Hanssen and Darby (2018, p. 95) identify ten popularized meanings of 'home' in reviews by many researchers. Gram-Hanssen and Darby (2018, p. 95) categorize the ten concepts of 'home' into four broader categories:

- 1) Home as security and control.
- 2) Home as an activity site.
- 3) Home as a habitation for relationships and continuity.
- 4) Home connotes identity and values.

The definition of home provided by Gram-Hanssen and Darby (2018) seems holistic as it describes homes across geographical boundaries and disciplinary conceptions. Dowling and Fitzpatrick (2012) agree that 'home' is a concept that spans natural and social sciences, including the habitats of animals and plants. Dowling and

Fitzpatrick (2012) also align with Gram-Hanssen and Darby (2018) in suggesting that the conception of ‘home’ involves feelings, values, cultures, and practices associated with physical structures of human dwelling, making it a multidisciplinary affair.

Moore (2007, p. 145) highlights in planning research that the concept of ‘home’ is made vivid and fragile when contrasted with homelessness. According to Moore (2007, p. 145), defining what constitutes a home becomes complex as social scientists struggle to interpret the significance of home. Scholars suggest that without homelessness, society would not contemplate the meaning of home, and the contrast between home and homelessness highlights the value of home (Dovey, 1985; Moore 2007). The differing opinions on what constitutes a home lead Moore (2007, p. 146) to conclude that the distinction between home and homelessness enhances the understanding of home’s value.

2.3. Homelessness: A hydra-headed social problem

The concept of homelessness

The incidences of homelessness present a complex phenomenon in South Africa. The sight of men and women sleeping in uninhabitable open spaces in various cities in South Africa underscores the multifaceted nature of this social issue. Arum et al (2021, p. e310) adopt the definition provided by the Institute of Global Homelessness, which states:

“Homelessness connotes the lack of access to adequate housing and unstable housing, typically defined as being without fixed housing.”

The definition from Arum et al. (2021) identifies the fundamental feature of ‘homelessness,’ which aligns with evidence from relevant literature. However, the conception of ‘homelessness’ in terms of ‘unstable housing’ in South Africa could be challenging when applied to rural areas where communal living is common. The dynamics of communal living in rural areas, where family members, immediate and extended, and friends share spaces or live in a single house, differ from urban areas where young urbanites co-purchase property due to high house prices (Gordon, 2019).

In the United States, discussions on ‘homelessness’ are prominent. Aron (2020) asserts that poverty and homelessness are significant issues in various locations in the United States. For example, Aron (2020) notes that in Ward 8 in Washington DC, factors such as violence, poverty, trauma, and others have increased the risk of adverse experiences and toxic stress in the public housing system. Morton et al. (2018, p. 15) point out that youth homelessness is a pressing concern in the United States. They define ‘homelessness’ as inhabiting places not meant for human habitation, in shelters or transitional housing, or living with others without a safe and stable housing arrangement. The definition of homelessness by Morton et al. (2018) seems to be specific to the United States context. In Los Angeles, Ijadi-Maghsoodi (2020) reports 19,000 homeless youth in the Los Angeles Unified school district. While resilience is a unique characteristic of homeless families, Ijadi-Maghsoodi (2020) acknowledges that these families are at risk of mental health issues, substance use disorders, academic challenges, and involvement with Child Protective Services. Scholars in the United States have concluded that homelessness is a significant challenge and humanitarian crisis with far-reaching effects on youth and families. The Human

Sciences Research Council (2016, p. 1) recommends the term ‘street living’ as a more appropriate term to describe a “homeless person” due to the stigma associated with the term.

2.4. Statistics on homelessness in South Africa

Based on the scholarly evidence reviewed for this study, homelessness appears to be on the rise in South Africa. Olufemi (1998, p. 223) suggests that there could be anywhere from 100 million to one billion or more homeless individuals, depending on how homelessness is defined in a specific context. Olufemi (1998) argues that estimating the number of homeless people in a country is challenging due to the varying definitions of homelessness.

According to Mitchley (2020), the issues surrounding the homeless population have become more apparent since the national lockdown for the Coronavirus was implemented on 27 March 2020. Mitchley (2020) reports that there are approximately 15,000 homeless individuals in Johannesburg and about 10,000 in Tshwane, as identified and gathered by the Guateng Social Development to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus.

In 2016, the Human Services Research Council reported 3933 homeless and shelter-dwelling individuals during a headcount conducted by the Safer Cities Unit in the eTheKwini municipality in February 2016. Hills et al. (2016, p. 1) note that the majority of homeless youth in South Africa are black males. They also state that these youth tend to stay on the streets longer in South Africa compared to developed nations, where social development programs and funding are more robust.

The situation in Cape Town regarding homelessness was concerning based on headcounts conducted in 2015 and 2018. The Western Cape Provincial Government reported 4862 homeless individuals in Cape Town (Bradpiece, 2021). This figure contradicted the 14,000 homeless individuals reported in a recent study by non-profit organizations like Turn, Khulisa Streetscapes, and MES in November 2020 (see aljazeera.com). The Cape Town Project Center (2015) also noted that not all individuals facing structural challenges in South Africa end up homeless, as personal circumstances can also contribute to homelessness.

2.5. Homelessness in Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is a culturally diverse country in the South Pacific, inhabited by more than eight hundred and forty ethno-linguistic groups (The World Bank, 2019). Kuman (2023) reported that homelessness is on the rise in Papua New Guinea, especially among marginalized communities. The assertion by Kuman (2023) regarding the vulnerability of marginalized populations to homelessness bears a striking resemblance to the dimensions of homelessness in South Africa. In Papua New Guinea, homeless people are also referred to as ‘Drain Dwellers’, while in the Western Cape they are known as ‘Pavement Dwellers’ (Broughton, 2023).

According to Singh’s report (2023), there were close to 222 men and women excluding children who have made the drain area in Port Moresby their permanent abode for decades. An interesting feature of the homeless people, also known as ‘Drain Dwellers’ in Papua New Guinea, is their representation of different cultural groups.

Unlike in South Africa, homeless people in Papua New Guinea are visited by politicians during election campaigns, and they do cast their votes.

2.6. Summary of literature review

Homelessness in South Africa and Papua New Guinea are complex social issues with different dimensions. The current studies reviewed in this research indicate a lack of reliable statistics on the homeless population across different provinces in South Africa and Papua New Guinea. This lack of data makes it challenging to establish a comprehensive framework for defining homelessness or streetism or drain dwelling, as personal challenges can lead to homelessness.

The unreliable statistics on homelessness in South Africa and Papua New Guinea may contribute to misconceptions about homeless individuals in these countries. Despite the limitations in scholarly discussions on homelessness, there is consensus among scholars on what constitutes a 'home'. The literature also highlights gaps in research on homelessness and inequalities in the housing system in South Africa, and what constitutes drain dwelling in Papua New Guinea. The following chapter will discuss the methodology used for this systematic and meta-analytic review of homelessness in South Africa, addressing the need for a comprehensive review due to the unreliable statistics and research gaps.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Introduction

This section presents the methodology and approaches adopted for this scoping review. The chapter exhaustively documents the approaches of this scoping review and answer the research questions.

3.2. Research design

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was utilized to conduct this systematic review and meta-analysis. PRISMA is based on an evidence-based minimum set of items used to report systematic reviews and meta-analyses (<https://www.prisma-statement.org>). PRISMA is appropriate for this study because it is known to be effective in reporting systematic reviews with objectives that are not interventions (<https://www.prisma-statement.org>).

The goal of this study is to comprehensively review research publications on homelessness in South Africa from 1994 to 2020. This will allow the researcher to collect data and analyze the dynamics of homelessness in South Africa, as well as interpret the objectives and questions aimed at understanding the complex issue of homelessness in South Africa during the reviewed period. The research articles systematically selected for this study were taken from the research published in *Development Southern Africa* and *Urban Forum*.

3.3. Data collection procedure

Two journals, namely *Development Southern Africa* and *Urban Forum*, were purposefully selected for this systematic and meta-analytic study. These journals were

chosen because they publish research works on human geography, are featured on Scopus and Web of Science, and are considered leading journals in the field of human geography. Seventy-two research outputs were searched from Development Southern Africa and Urban Forum using the terms and keywords “CCC’ homelessness” (Mesh terms) OR (homeless” (All Fields) AND “South Africa” (All Fields). Additionally, the reference lists of research articles from the electronic databases of Development Southern Africa and Urban Forum were searched to identify suitable articles on the phenomenon of homelessness in South Africa.

3.4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria study design

The criteria for including manuscripts in this research project are as follows:

- 1) The research must have used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches.
- 2) The participants were homeless people.
- 3) The research must be a primary study and peer-reviewed.
- 4) The research must focus on South Africa.

Research conducted on homelessness outside South Africa was excluded from the study. Peer-reviewed manuscripts published in disciplines other than Human Geography were also excluded from this systematic and meta-analytic review. Peer-reviewed articles published in Development Southern Africa and Urban Forum on ‘Homelessness’ were identified and screened based on their titles and abstracts using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The full text of the articles that met these criteria was evaluated to identify the ten most appropriate for the study.

3.5. Data extraction

An independent manual extraction was conducted from eligible journal repositories. Following the PRISMA guidelines adopted for the study, a set of predefined data extraction was carried out from the studies deemed appropriate for this research. This information included the authors’ details, setting and design, data analytic tools used, publication year, sample size, and results/findings on homelessness. Information gleaned from Bandaiko et al. (2021) for this study included study objectives, implications of key findings on homelessness in South Africa, and citation information.

3.6. Data analysis

The data extracted from the research articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the study was coded on Microsoft Excel and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Omodan (2020) describes thematic analysis as a data categorization inclined method of qualitative data analysis (Safarpour et al., 2020). To extract the data from selected research articles for analysis, the coding was designed to capture data related to:

- 1) Authors of the research article.
- 2) Setting where the study was conducted.
- 3) The design and methods selected or adopted or used by the study.
- 4) The sample size selected by the study.

- 5) The key findings on the current state of research on homelessness in South Africa.
- 6) The number of references consulted to finalise the research manuscripts on homelessness.
- 7) Key findings on current debates on homelessness research in South Africa.
- 8) Primary findings on leading theories/paradigms on homelessness in South Africa.
- 9) Key findings on dynamics of homelessness in South Africa.

The data coded using the aforementioned criteria that used PRISMA as a design was analysed to explore the dynamics and unpack philosophical discourses surrounding homelessness in South Africa. The research articles selected for the study were represented with SRS1, SRS2, SRS3, SRS4, SRS5, SRS6, SRS7, SRS8, SRS9.

3.7. Ethical considerations

This ethical clearance for desktop or literature study was submitted to the General/Human Research Ethics committee (GHREC) for this research project. The application was approved on this ethical clearance number, UFS-HSD2021/1046/21.

4. Results and discussion

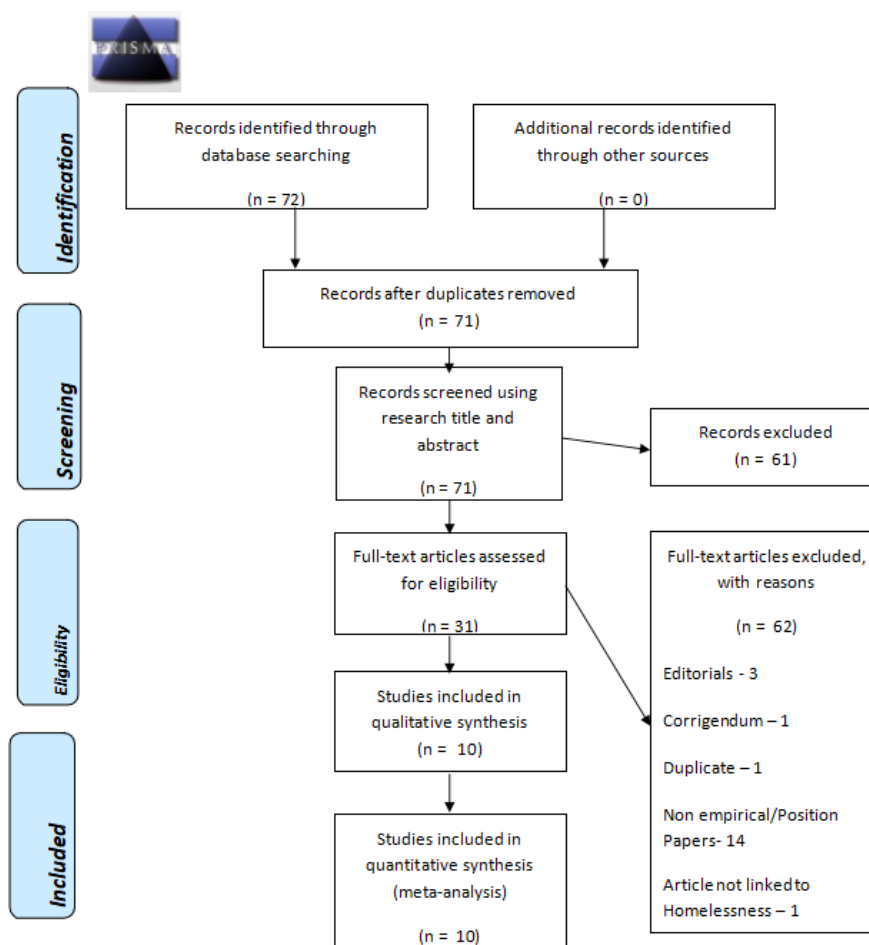


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the systematic and meta-analytic reviews.

PRISMA layout was adapted from: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG, The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *PLoS Med* 6(6): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097.

This chapter presents the electronic search results of research articles that identified in “Development Southern Africa” and “Urban Forum”. The trends in the selected research articles are presented in this section. The systematic search results identified 72 research articles closely or loosely related to the phenomenon of homelessness in South Africa. After removing duplicates, 71 research articles remained and 31 research articles were selected for full-text review. The 10 research articles that met the inclusion criteria were systematically and meta-analytically reviewed in this research project. In total, there were 2863 respondents consisting of women, men, young children, and civil societies who participated in the selected homelessness research in South Africa. The age of the respondents ranged from 8-90 years, and the studies included in this research project were conducted in South Africa. The characteristics of the research articles that met the inclusion criteria are presented in **Figure 1**. Analysis of the Qualitative Data.

The data collected from the ten research articles were subjected to thematic analysis. The qualitative data was used to address the two main objectives of this research project: to deconstruct the dynamics of homelessness in South Africa and to unpack the key philosophical discourses on homelessness in the country. The major themes were synthesized into sub-themes, such as: homelessness as a testimony of patriarchal systems in many societies, homeless individuals having families, gender-based conflicts being responsible for homelessness, and Christian-based and local non-governmental organizations providing proactive and reactive interventions for homeless people in South Africa. The Department of Social Development (DSD), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Swiss Agency for Development, and the Gauteng Department of Social Development funded research on homelessness in South Africa.

4.1. Deconstructing the dynamics of homelessness in South Africa

Table 1. Thematic representation of Data Gleaned from the selected research articles.

Research Objectives	Analysis of Sub Themes
1) To deconstruct the dynamics of testimonies of homelessness in South Africa in many societies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Homelessness are patriarchal systems 2) Homeless people have families. 3) Christian-based and local non- governmental organisations provided proactive and reactive interventions for homeless people in South Africa. 4) Gender-based conflicts was responsible for homelessness 5) 5. Department of Social Development (DSD), Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Swiss Agency for Development, and Gauteng Department of Social Development funded homelessness research in South Africa.
2) Unpack the key philosophical discourses on of homelessness in South Africa among the most	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) A quantitative study homelessness is difficult research tasks. 2) Olusola Olufemi (Consultant in Urban and Regional Planning in Nigeria, South Africa and Canada) and Jennifer Wolch (UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design, United States) are the most cited scholars on homeless- related research in South Africa.

Source: Analysis of data from the ten selected research articles on homelessness.

One of the dynamics of homelessness in South Africa is its attachment to patriarchal system. Mshweshwe (2020, p. 2) states that the broader patriarchal

structures in South Africa contribute to shaping the uneven power distribution between men and women. Homelessness seems to be a product of inequality in power distribution between men and women in some societies across the world. This snippet supports the claims presented in **Table 1** on the strong attachment between homelessness and patriarchy:

A1: A shelter was a half-way home. Women Shelter in Tshwane have restrictive regulations and not protective regulations. Shelter signifies hope that is a matter of survival. Homelessness are testimonies of patriarchal systems in many societies. Homelessness could give rise to multi-faceted social problems (Homeless Women in Tshwane Shelters, 39 References).

A2: The primary reasons for women's homelessness were retrenchment, alcohol abuse, divorce and domestic violence, mental illness, HIV infection or AIDS (in a few cases. Premature deaths of homeless especially youth caused by violent injuries was a common occurrence (Cape Town, Johannesburg, 31 References).

From these snippets, it was evident that evident that homelessness-fostered patriarchy has relationships with diverse social problems such as divorce, domestic violence, mental illness, and alcohol abuse. The research that produced these snippets was implemented in 2017 and 2010 at different geographical locations in South Africa. The years this research conducted, and the geographical notwithstanding, the assumptions of the effects of patriarchy on homeless were justified.

Another key theme that features in this research is “Homeless people have families” shown in **Table 1**:

A3: Homeless people do not want their children to suffer like they did. Homeless people are illegal immigrants that are employed but have no recourse to the mechanisms that protect the rights of South African workers. Homeless people have families. For instance, Magonya has two wives and seven children that are in Mozambique. Divorce is one of the factors responsible for homelessness in South Africa (Mpumalanga, Limpopo, and Gauteng; 18 References).

This snippet shows that contrary to popular beliefs that homeless people are destitutes, this group has established family system in South Africa. Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba (2016, p. 309) affirms that the family is an institution subject to transition and responsible for socialization in South Africa. Hall and Mokomane (2018, p. 32) define family as social groups that are related by blood, marriage bonds, non-marital union, adoption, and other means of affiliation that endure over time and space. The story presented in Morrow (2010, p. 57) on Magonya that attended school until Standard 3 shows that despite the vagaries of homelessness, homeless people are capable of supporting the members of their immediate family.

4.1.1. Unpacking the key philosophical discourses on homelessness in South Africa

Regarding the current philosophical discourse on homelessness research in South Africa, it seems this assertion “A quantitative study of homelessness is among the most difficult research tasks” is on the front burner. A snippet from another systematically reviewed research article featured in **Table 1**:

A9: “A quant study of homelessness in South Africa is among the most difficult research tasks. The research was designed by HSRC to reflect the priorities and

needs of research partners that implemented or funded it. Homeless population in South Africa was dominated by male street adults, and boys and girls aged 16-17 years. The researchers concluded from the data analysed that the homeless population in South Africa is made up of older children and working age adults. The adult participants have been homeless for 6.4 years. The study was funded by the National Department of Social Development, Human Sciences Research Council, and the Swiss Agency for Development (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo; 11 References).

The difficulties associated with the adoption of quantitative approach to research the incidences of homelessness in South Africa were manifested in the designs of the ten research articles that were systematically reviewed in this research project. Eight of the research articles that met the inclusion criteria specified for this study adopted qualitative research approaches, while two adopted mixed methods and survey designs to study homelessness in South Africa.

Another key discourse that featured in the 230 sources consulted by the scholars that wrote the ten research articles that met the inclusion criteria is the emergence of Olufemi (15 citations) and Jeniffer Wolch (7 citations) as the most cited scholars on homelessness research in South Africa.

4.1.2. Unpacking the key philosophical discourses on homelessness in in Papua New Guinea

Attachment to the patriarchal system does not seem to be a factor in homelessness, also known as “drain dwelling,” in Papua New Guinea. The patriarchal system is not foreign to Papua New Guinea, with women conforming to traditional cultural practices in local communities where tribal discipline and power are predominantly held by men (The United Nations Population Fund, 2024). However, unlike in South Africa, there is no direct link between the patriarchal system and homelessness in Papua New Guinea. In this country, homelessness is closely tied to poverty. A niche study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (2002) provided a definition of poverty from the perspective of impoverished citizens in Papua New Guinea as follows: “When people have limited access to jobs and cash, land, education, services such as healthcare and water supply, transport, and roads” (p. 7).

Participants in the Asian Development Bank (2002) poverty study in Papua New Guinea further described the poor in settlement communities as individuals who “use waste materials to build their houses, lack decent clothing, fear for their personal security due to crime, have little to no money or food, and are barely surviving.” In the scoping review, the common factors between homelessness in South Africa and Papua New Guinea are poverty and the residents’ living conditions in houses constructed with scrap materials, known as ‘Shacks Houses’ in South Africa. Ige et al. (2023) pointed out that one of the challenges in understanding homelessness is the lack of a clear definition and its evolving nature. Despite these challenges, homeless individuals can be operationally defined based on the findings of the current study as:

- 1) People without homes.
- 2) People residing near water drains in urban areas.
- 3) People living in houses built with waste materials or shack houses.
- 4) People living in bush settlements.

5) People residing in squatter camps or informal settlements.

In Papua New Guinea, most homeless individuals live with their families, unlike in South Africa where some believe homeless individuals are destitute. The experiences of a 38-year-old female key informant interviewed in the Asian Development Bank (2002) study confirmed the importance of family ties among homeless individuals. The key informant shared her story:

“Shortly after moving here, I met my husband who was then an apprentice at Fletcher Morobe. We had five children. My eldest son passed away; he was shot by the police at the dump site last year. My second son is a widower - his wife and child recently passed away. My third child finished Grade 10, but we can't afford to keep sending her to school. My younger children are in primary school. I still miss my eldest son very much.” (p. 2)

Based on the information provided, it appears that homeless individuals in Papua New Guinea have stronger family connections compared to those in South Africa, where many live alone.

Studies conducted in Papua New Guinea have shown a lack of quantitative approaches to studying homelessness, a trend also observed in research in South Africa. Reports on poverty and homelessness by the Borgen Project and the Asian Development Bank have predominantly used qualitative approaches. Major reports on homelessness in Papua New Guinea are found in newspaper articles, editorials, and research conducted by international and non-governmental organizations, as well as the public think tank known as the National Research Institute (PNGNRI).

5. Conclusion

The research systematically unpacks homelessness as an international social issue. The introductory section utilized the 2022 South African National Census data to identify Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces as havens of homeless individuals in South Africa. The conflict theory adopted as the theoretical lens for the study enables researchers to track homelessness from the perspective of racial segregation and poverty. The analysis of the research articles selected using PRISMA identified patriarchy, challenges of using quantitative approaches to study homelessness, and gender dimensions as the primary themes in most cited research on homelessness in South Africa. The identified themes, such as patriarchy, suggest that women are marginalized in South Africa and other developing countries due to societal beliefs about their eligibility to own homes. The patriarchal system, as indicated in one of the snippets, seems to be linked to homelessness, leading to various societal problems such as mental illness and alcohol abuse.

From the evidence produced in the scoping review, it is clear that homeless people in South Africa have families. The findings also show that the relatives of homeless individuals reside both within and outside of South Africa, including immigrants among the homeless population. Insights on the need for the adoption of mixed methods designs to study homelessness in South Africa became apparent in the scoping review due to the limitations of quantitative approaches in fully capturing the homeless population. Further research is recommended to validate the findings of this scoping review since it was based on secondary data.

The findings from this systematic review have implications for practical interventions and policy-making on housing in South Africa. In this study, “Homeless people have families,” this avenue should be explored to reorganize the program on social assistance or living grants given to homeless people by the Department of Social Development (DSD). A component of these grants should be allocated to reuniting homeless people with their families wherever they reside in any part of South Africa. Homelessness stemming from gender-based violence, a widespread problem for women and children in South Africa, was featured in the findings of this study. The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence, launched in February 2021 and signed into law on 24 May 2024 (See <https://www.justice.gov.za/vg/gbv/NSP-GBVF-FINAL-DOC-04-05.pdf>), did not address the situation of children and women living on the streets in South Africa due to gender-based violence. The next amendment of the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Bill in South Africa should cater to people who became homeless due to gender-based violence. The Government of South Africa should nationalize the Somerset West Family Shelter program for homeless families, an initiative of the Western Cape Provincial Government that allows homeless families to live together (See <https://groundup.org.za/article/shelters-for-homeless-families-a-rarity/>). In Papua New Guinea, state and non-state actors should provide support for LifePNG Care, which has cared for six hundred vulnerable and street children since 2023. According to PNG Business News (2023), LifePNG Care is a non-governmental organization that operates two programs: Strongim Pikinini Family Home Care and Strongim Pikinini Education Program.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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