



# The Vicious Circle of Homelessness and Urban Health: A Study of Homeless People in Lahore, Pakistan

Presenter: Dr.-Ing. Atif Bilal Aslam

Institution: University of Engineering and Technology Lahore-Pakistan

**Abstract:** Urban homelessness is a common issue faced by both developed and developing countries due to the interplay of various causes, thus inviting a contextualized response mechanism to deal with the issue. In Germany, low income and medical issues have been reported as the two most dominant causes of homelessness<sup>1</sup>. In a recently concluded study (2021: unpublished) by the author on Multilocational Householding, it has been learnt that 91% of such homeless people found in Lahore were economic migrants. Another study (2022: unpublished) by the author about the homeless people staying in the Shelter Homes (locally known as Panah Gahs) of Lahore depicted that medical issues have been the cause of around 18% of all such homeless people. On the other hand, urban health is also impacted by urban living arrangements. More closely, the physical environment, social structures, and access to social services and health facilities affect urban health the most<sup>2</sup>. Many of the urban homeless people live in unhygienic conditions, have disconnected social lives and at times, have been denied access to social and medical services for not having valid identity documents. All such issues significantly affect the physical and mental health of homeless people. This postulates a situation where poor health conditions not only contribute to urban homelessness, but also further exacerbate urban health, and together, they form a vicious circle in which homeless people get trapped. By applying a mixed-methods research approach, 100 face-to-face interviews of homeless people through random and convenience sampling were conducted in Lahore to find out the socio-economic dynamics of their daily urban life. 94% of the homeless people were found living either on roadsides/medians or in parks/open spaces, thus becoming vulnerable to harsh weather conditions and epidemics such as COVID-19 and Dengue. Around 90% of the respondents disclosed that their household members live outside of Lahore, and they are not very much connected with their household members, which is putting a toll on their mental health. Around one-third of the homeless people were also found not to have valid identity documents, which hindered their access to government-established Shelter Homes and other social services. The evidence provides a clue to the endangered health of the homeless people in Lahore. The study recommends, among others, an inclusive planning character that is sensitive to the needs of the homeless people with respect to their living/ housing, and accessing social and healthcare services.

References: 1 Busch-Geertsema, V., Henke, J., & Steffen, A. (2020). Homelessness in Germany. European

Journal of Homelessness, 14(1), 81-91.

2 Galea, S., & Vlahov, D. (2005). Urban health: evidence, challenges, and directions .