A cohort study on homeless ways of life and happiness in Bangkok

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Abstract

Homelessness is one of the most concerning socio-economic problems in Thailand. It is a sad phenomenon that is noticed by millions of tourists annually as the visit the country. Although there has been research done on the issue of homelessness in the past, very little of it focused on the group of the new homeless people known as (NHL) which consists of those who are in the early stages of homelessness (less than 5 years). This research hypothesized that the behavior, way of life, and emotions of the people just becoming homeless should significantly differ from the group of people experiencing homeless life for a long time. Therefore, this research aimed to study behaviour and the way of life for people recently made homeless, and to evaluate social-economic factors affecting them. This research was not only based on data from a questionnaire given to this target group but also from a cohort study carried out in order to track their way of life over a period of around 5 months. We found that their way of living varied and depended on the place they chose to sleep. Moreover, the evidence clearly implied that 1 year could be considered as their turning point. The samples who were homeless people for less than 1 year showed a significant intention to come back to a normal life when compared to others. We also presented an econometric binary choices model indicating socio-economic factors significantly relating to the happiness of homeless people. Last but not least, we also suggested the policy implication for the case of homeless people in Thailand.

Keywords: Homeless, way of living, happiness, Bangkok, social deprivation.

Introduction

For a long time homelessness has been one of the worst socio-economic problems occurring in Thai society, and this is especially true in the capital city of Bangkok. This phenomenon could be seen as another indicator of poverty, disparity, society, along with the ineffectiveness of the social welfare system. It causes a group of vulnerable people to have no rights of housing and results in them spending an uncertain way of life in public places. Homeless people not only suffer from their own socio-economic problems, but are also seen as revolting by many ordinary people. The study of Chaiwat, Tangtammaruk, Praiwan, and Mai-ngam (2018), which used a survey investigating an opinion of ordinary people on homeless people, found that the first thing people thought about homeless people was that they are lunatics, followed by being dirty, and beggars. In addition, in terms of helping or supporting homeless people, this study also indicated that even though most employers are willing to help homeless people with money or a donation of clothes or food, they do not trust them, and are not willing to hire them for work. Therefore, it could be said that ordinary people are often ignorant when

it comes to homeless people and also have a negative perspective about them. Hence, the first step of studying issue of homelessness in Thailand, is to better understand the nature, behavior, way of life, attitude, as well as feelings (happiness) of homeless people in Thailand. Moreover, their information will be useful for developing further strategic policy preventing, supporting, and also helping homeless people get off the streets.

However, homeless people are another group of Thailand's hard to reach population. Visetpricha (2009) stated that homeless people are afraid of, and do not trust other people because many of them used to be discriminated against and treated with violence. In order to reach homeless people, gaining recognition and trust from them is crucial. In Thailand, there is still no national time series database for the homeless. The available sources of data are only cross sectional surveys from previous research and related organizations which were collected from different methods and not consistent with each other.

Therefore, this paper also uses results of a non-random convenience sample of a survey conducted in 2017 involving 90 homeless people in the Bangkok area. We focused on the group of people who become homeless in the early stage, or so called 'new homeless people' (NHL). We hypothesized that there should be a difference in the way of life, attitude, and emotion between the group of new homeless and the group of people who had experienced homelessness for a long time. Although there were some previous literatures studying homeless issue in Thailand in many various ways, few of them focused on the group of new homeless people, and none of them did a cohort survey tracking their way of living as well as using an econometric model as a tool indicating the relationship between their related socio-economic factors and their feelings.

This paper offers three main contributions to the literature. Firstly, since this research uses a cohort study, it provides a cross-sectional behavior and way of living at intervals through 5-6 months. Secondly, an econometric binary choices model with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation is used to identify socio-economic factors affecting their happiness or emotional state. Additionally, related literatures and secondary data were used to compare and analyze the results from primary data. Last but not least, the main findings forming this paper are analysed, applied, and presented as a strategic policy supporting homeless people and also returning them back to normal life. We hope that an objective take on Thai homeless peoples' way of life and their mental wellbeing (happiness) will better our understanding and clear many myths and unfounded issues usually associated with them.

Literature Review

Recent research has studied the plight of the homeless in Thailand in 2 main ways which are the cause of homelessness, and the way of supporting and returning homeless people back to society. Beginning with the causes of homelessness, Chutapruttikorn, Intapantee, Nooseng, Kanchanapan, and Yawilard (2015) stated that from surveying 33 samples of homeless people in Bangkok, it was found that unemployment and family problems were the two main reasons that samples decided to become homeless people. This was also supported by Pitukthanin (2016) who did a survey of 379 homeless people in Bangkok, and concluded that economic and family problems are crucial factors causing homelessness in Thailand. Additionally, in Chaiwat et al. (2018)'s study, homelessness is not only caused by either economic or family problems, but also caused by an overlapping of both problems, one as a necessary condition and another as a sufficient condition.

Since the type of family culture in Thailand is a dependent family in which all members stay together, the family problem is still a major cause of homelessness. In contrast to the cases of South Africa, Japan, England, Australia, and other Western countries, where the main reason for people becoming homeless is economic problems such as becoming unemployed, retirement, housing problems and house prices, etc. (Department for Child Protection and

Family Support, 2016; Dobie, Sanders, & Teixeira, 2014; Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley, Wilcox, & Watts, 2017; Okamoto, Hayakawa, Noguch, & Shinya, 2004; Panya, 2012; Patterson, 2017; Shelter, 2007; Shimokawa, 2013; Walsh, 2014).

Regarding the issue of supporting and returning homeless people back to society, we found that in other countries supporting economic and livelihood factors are the main policies for solving the homeless problem, while most literatures in Thailand indicated in the same way that having a house, or a shelter, while necessary, is not sufficient to fulfil their lives. In Japan, Panya (2012) presented a case study of Japanese homeless people who had managed to get off the streets and return to normal life in two cases. The first case in 2002 was a homeless person who was able to have a career again by getting a job as a hospital officer, and the second case in 2008, was concerning ten homeless people who got together to set up a flower shop in Nishinari District, Osaka, with funding from an Assistance Organization.

In England, Fitzpatrick et al. (2017) proposed a macro-economic perspective on solving the homeless problem by using economic as well as homeless data in 2011-2015. They found that reducing unemployment, solving housing and real estate problems, and solving rental prices were significant factors in helping homeless people to return to work, and earn enough income to rent a place and live like a normal person. Reeve and Batty (2011) also suggested that besides supporting economic and livelihood factors, government agencies or related agencies should provide psychological help and job counselling for homeless people. Even though a homeless people are able to find a permanent jobs, basic accommodation, financial support, and counselling are also necessary for them in the early stage of working, these supports should be provided in a specified period of time.

On the other hand, regarding the case of Thailand, Visetpricha (2009) found that apart from the demand for housing, the homeless group also has various social, mental and physical needs in line with the research of Phithakmahaket (2009) which offers solutions to the problems of homeless people by giving importance to dignity, humanity, life and working potential. McDonagh (2011) added that apart from poverty, many homeless people have traumatic pasts, such as being abandoned, kidnapped, attacked, banned or have and on top of this often suffer from unusual mental conditions. Therefore, the turning point to normal life may not have only one factor.

In Chutapruttikorn et al's (2015) study, they gave the sample of homeless people to draw an image of each person's ideal home, and then used the principles of liberal arts and psychology to interpret the meaning. They found that in addition to the demand for housing, the house image drawn by homeless people reflected a house in terms of independence and mental safety, including a home with family members and within a peaceful community.

Another interesting piece of research is from a study of Boonyolyad and Makarabhirom (2012) which conducted a survey of homeless people in Phra Nakhon, a district located in central Bangkok. This research suggested that when it came to homeless people experiencing issues relating to their families or mental problems, the government's assistance regarding food and shelter is counter-productive as it encourages them to become permanently homeless. They may feel that society and their families have a negative attitude towards them, so when sufficient food and shelter are provided by the government, they may decide not to return to their families or communities.

To conclude, the mission of returning homeless people to normal life in Thailand is not only about socioeconomic factors, but equally understanding their way of life, while feelings are also necessary. Since there is still no literature studying the ways in which homeless people live, as well as their happiness in Thailand, this paper aims to use a cohort study as well as an econometric analysis to better our understanding about this issue for the case of Thailand.

Research Methodology

In order to study the ways in which homeless people live, as well as their feelings, this research conducted a non-random convenience sampling survey in the Bangkok area in 2017. Since this research hypothesizes that the way of living as well as the feelings of people who have just becomes homeless (the new homeless) it should significantly differ from the group of permanently homeless people, therefore; we mainly focus on the group of the new homeless people and scope our target group to be a people being homeless for no more than 5 years. In addition, we apply the 5 months cohort study in our data collection so as to track their way of living as well as life changes.

The government shelter (so called Bann Im-Jai), the NGOs shelter (so called Suvit Wat-Nu shelter), and public places (places where homeless people usually spend the night, or places where offer free foods) are 3 main sources of our data collection. The methodology used for our cohort study was to often (every week) visit her/him at the place we firstly met her/him, and the data collection was based on interviews. The time frame for the cohort study was around 5 months. Fundamental statistical analysis were used to study their living pattern, while an econometric binary choices model was used to study factors affecting homeless feeling or happiness.

Happiness = f(Personal factors, Relationship factors, Way of living factors, and Income and Economic factors)   [1]

Equation [1] presents the function that we use to estimate factors affecting homeless people's happiness.

At the beginning, we aimed to use the Thai Mental Health Indicator from the Thai Department of Mental Health to evaluate homeless happiness, however, during our pilot survey we found that this evaluation form is too difficult to use with homeless people due to the vulnerability and complexity of this group. According to the suggestion of government officers and NGO officers working with the homeless, we therefore simplified our question in an interview form, to directly ask about their happiness comparing it to ordinary people (non-homeless). Thus, the happiness of people sleeping on the streets is a dependent variable which is equal to 1 when the homeless person indicates that he/she is as happy as, or happier than an ordinary person (non-homeless), and equal to 0 when he/she feels that an ordinary person (non-homeless) is happier than him/her. While, the independent variables are divided into 4 main groups which are [1] Personal factors (Age, Gender, Hometown, Having an identification card, Homeless duration, and Cause of homeless), [2] Relationship factors (Martial status, Number of children, Number of brothers/sisters, Having couple, Having a close friend), [3] Way of living factors (Places where people mostly spend the night, Sleeping problems, Food consumption, Snack consumption, Smoking, and Alcohol drinking), and [4] Income and Economic factors (Years of education, Occupation, Income, Working hours per day, and Having sufficient income).

Results

This section presents the results from the field cohort survey conducted in 2017 in Bangkok. A total of 90 new homeless people (homeless duration during 0-5 years) samples were surveyed. 40 were homeless people who mainly spend the night in a public place, another 14 were homeless people who live in the NGOs shelter (named Suvit Wat-Nu), and the last 36 were homeless people who live in the government shelter (named Bann Im-Jai).

Beginning with brief characteristics of the samples surveyed (Table 1), we found that most of them were middle aged with an average age equal to 48 years old. 66.7% were male and

most of them chose to live and spend the night in public places, while many female homeless people chose to live in the shelters due to safety concerns. In addition, regarding the year of homelessness in Table 2, for those who had just become homeless (less than 1 year), they preferred to spend the night in the shelter (either the government or NGOs shelter) rather than public places. While, more experienced homeless people tended to live in public places because there are no rules or restrictions compared to the shelters. 42.2% reported that they were unemployed. The group of homeless people who lived in public places had the highest percentage of unemployed (50%), followed by the group of homeless people living in NGOs shelter and government shelter, respectively. For those who were working, we categorized their jobs into 4 main types. Firstly, 46.15% were part-time or temporary labourers such as brochure and newspaper distributors, commercial sign holders, and people employed to wave commercial flags. These part-time jobs are the most popular job for homeless people in Bangkok because [1] the jobs do not involve many obligations, [2] there is no need to interact or communicate with colleges or other people, and [3] the payment is around 300-400 THB (32 THB = 1 USD) per day which is quite enough for their daily living costs. Secondly, 30.76% were full-time labourers such as cleaners, a security guards, and a construction workers. These kinds of job require skills or educational degrees and we found that almost all of them were people who had just become homeless for no more than 1 year. Thirdly, 13.46% were merchants as amulets traders, old and second-hand goods traders, and trash (bottles, paper, plastic, etc.) traders. Finally, 9.63% are uncategorized labourers such as freelance massage providers, fortune tellers, sex workers, and spies.

Table 1. Average age, Gender, and unemployment status of the Homeless

	Public Places	Government Shelter	NGOs Shelter	All
Average Age	47.94	48	50.28	48
No. of male (%)	32 from 40 (80.5%)	22 from 36 (60%)	6 from 14 (42.9%)	60 from 90 (66.7%)
No. of Unemployed (%)	20 from 40 (50%)	12 from 36 (33.3%)	6 from 14 (42.9%)	38 from 90 (42.2%)

Table 2. Number of years homeless

	Public Places	Government Shelter	NGOs Shelter	All
Homeless less than 1 year	13 (32.5%)	18 (50%)	6 (42.9%)	37 (41.1%)
Homeless between 1 and 2 year	4 (10%)	5 (13.9%)	3 (21.4%)	12 (13.3%)
Homeless between 2 and 3 year	9 (22.5%)	3 (8.3%)	4 (30.8%)	16 (17.8%)
Homeless between 3 and 5 year	14 (35%)	10 (27.8%)	1 (4.9%)	25 (27.8%)
All	40	36	14	90

Note: Percentages are calculated vertically.

Homeless ways of living

Regarding our 5 months cohort study, we can conclude on their ways of living in 3 important points. First, they still have a routine lives similar to many non-homeless people. Basically, many ordinary people (non-homeless) have a routine life which causes their ways of living quite stable. At the beginning we hypothesized that an employed homeless person would have a routine life, while an unemployed homeless persons' life would involve being flexible, varied, and include a lot of wandering about on a daily basis. However, this was not the case as the findings contradicted our assumption. We found that most of them even the unemployed still had a routine life. For instance, they always spent nights at the same place. They usually ate 2 meals (lunch and dinner) per day. They received free food from the government or visited NGOs lunch support centers and preserved leftovers for dinner every day. Moreover, each

also has his/her own regular resting place for a nap, watching public television, as well as for charging a mobile phone battery in the afternoon in places such as a public park, train station or a shopping mall food court. They mostly spend their lives on the streets like this every day except the day that there is a charity event where free food and supplies are provided. However, among many of those who have a routine life, a group of homeless in the early stage (being homeless not more than 1 year) is the only group that has varied ways of living. Most of them spend a night in a government shelter called "Bann Im-Jai". We found that their daily life had changed almost every time we met them. We found one case in which [1] someone went back to visit family or relatives in order to ask for support, [2] attempted to apply for a job in many different places in the first and second months and finally got a job in the fourth month, [3] changed many jobs and went to many places during 5 months. To conclude, the group of people who are just becoming homeless are in a life changing process which causes them [1] to look for solutions (jobs, help, or support) which in turn can possibly get them back to, or [2] to adapt and prepare his/her ways of living for being a permanent homeless.

Second, a sleeping place is referred as a safe zone. Since we surveyed about their ways of living, we were able to know the places where each homeless person slept and visited in one day. We found that most of them not only have a routine life (always sleep and visit the same places), but also spend a day time around their sleeping place. According to our interview, there are 2 main reasons explaining this behavior. Firstly, travelling costs, so basically a homeless person usually travels on foot, a government free bus, or free trains. Secondly, since homeless people live lives which put their wellbeing at risk, preventing uncertainty is one of their most important missions. Therefore, if they can find a safe place to sleep, they will continually search for nearby places for food, drink, and facilities to wash. These 2 reasons also support their routine life behavior. Nevertheless, since our sample focuses on people recently made homeless, these behaviours may differ from those of a permanently homeless person or someone who has lived on the streets for more than 5 years and are already familiar with homeless life.

Third, a sleeping place can represent status and types of homeless people. This research divides homeless people into 3 groups based on their sleeping places which consists of a group that spends nights in a government shelter (named Bann Im-Jai), NGOs shelter (named Suvit Wat-Nu) and public places. These 3 places also have different characteristics as well as regulations which significantly affect the behavior and condition of those who sleep there.

Beginning with the government shelter in Bangkok named Bann Im-Jai, this shelter offers common toilets, common shower rooms, common rooms with bunk beds, and 2 meals (dinner and breakfast) per day. It works functionally as an emergency shelter that requires homeless people to register in and out every day. A homeless person can register in the shelter during the period between 3PM to 9PM in order to receive dinner and a bed number (which is randomly given to them) for a night, and they must sign out of the shelter the next day at 9AM after breakfast which means that they must spend their time outside the shelter from 9AM to 3PM. We found that most of the samples who were homeless for no more than 1 year spent this afternoon time looking for jobs, contacting their relatives, or working, while many of those samples experiencing life on the streets for more than 1 year had a routine or stable life as mentioned before. Regarding Table 3, since living in government shelters is costless but has no ownership, the government shelter plays the same role as an emergency shelter. Therefore, a homeless person who chooses to live in the government shelter is considered as someone in the early stages of this transition. They require primary support and are either trying to find a way back to normal life or adapting his/her ways of living to that of a homeless person.

The second group stays at the NGOs shelter in Bangkok named Suvit Wat-NU. Unlike at the government shelter, a homeless person living in Suvit Wat-Nu shelter has to pay monthly rent at 350 Baht per month (32 THB = 1 USD) which is around 10 times cheaper than a private

apartment rental rate in Bangkok. They sleep in a common room with partitions which provides them with a private space for living as well as a place to store their things and some small furniture. They have ownership of their space and can spend all day and night at the shelter. They share common bath rooms and the shelter provides food on a daily basis, however, this typically only consists of steamed rice so each homeless person has to prepare or buy other side dishes himself/herself. In addition, they can receive food and drink at a nearby Buddhist temple named Wat Zhao-Arm (10-15 minutes' walk from the shelter) which provides free lunch for people every day. Therefore, homeless people living in the NGOs shelter represent a group that are able to find a cheap place to stay as well as being able to secure a portion of small permanent income to compensate this cheap monthly rent. We found that this group has a stable way of living with most of them working as amulet traders, old and second-hand goods traders, trash (bottles, paper, plastic, etc.) collectors, part time labourers as brochure and newspaper distributors and commercial sign and flag staff.

People working in these jobs usually receive around 300 Baht per day. This also means that working only 2 days per month is enough for their monthly rental costs. As long as they can afford 350 Baht per month, they are able stay and secure a private sleeping place in this shelter. Some indicated that they had already decided to be permanently homeless and wished to stay in this shelter for the rest of their life. Moreover, since the NGOs shelter has a limit space, and during the time of our cohort study the place had already reached full capacity so it was quite difficult for new comers to enter the shelter unless someone already left it.

Finally, compared to the government and NGOs shelter, which have closed-spaces with high security, public places are open spaces with high risk but are costless without any restrictions or regulations. Moreover, if a homeless person sleeps in the same place every day, he/she might have ownership feelings for the place (Table 3). Referring back to Table 2, we found that the majority of those who lived in both government and NGOs shelter had been homeless for less than 2 years, while 57.5% of those who spent a night in public places were people who had been surviving on the streets more than 2 years. Hence, most homeless people living in public places tend to be a type of homeless people who had substantial experience of this way of life, are nearly or already permanently homeless, or want to spend their lives freely without rules. According to the cohort interview, some of them reported that they used to live in either a government or a NGOs shelter before, but that they decided to quit since both shelters did not allow them to drink alcohol.

Table 3. Types of homeless sleeping place

Sleeping Placed	Cost	Ownership	Risk
Government Shelter (Bann Im-Jai)	No	No	Closed space Low Risk
NGO Shelter (Suvit Wat-Nu)	Yes, but low cost	Yes	Closed space Low Risk
Public Places	No	Yes	Open space High Risk

Factors affecting homeless happiness

We now present the results from the econometric binary choices model. Table 4 shows the effect of personal, relationships, ways of living, income and economic factors on homeless happiness. Beginning with personal factors, the probit estimation shows that the duration of time spent homeless is a factor that significantly affects their happiness at 90% confident interval. We found that if the duration of homelessness increased over 1 year, the probability that he/she will feel happier with his/her life than the previous year increases 0.0772 or 7.72%.

In other word, regarding the case of recently made homeless people, a person experiencing this kind of life longer will be happier than a person just becoming homeless. This proves that a person will initially suffer both physically and mentally from homelessness in the early stages, but she/he will recover over time and adapt his/her life to cope with the harsh environment. Being married, having children, having a close-friend are three relationship factors that significantly increase the probability of homeless people feeling as happy as, or happier than ordinary people (non-homeless). According to our interview, these three factors make them feel the same as ordinary people who basically have family and friends. Therefore, having a relationship is better than spending a life alone.

Table 4. Factors affecting Homeless happiness

Factors	Probit Model Dependent Variable: Homeless Happiness Y = 1, When a homeless person feels that she/he is as happy as/ or happier than other ordinary people (non-homeless). Y = 0, When a homeless person feels that other ordinary people are happier than her/him.	Marginal Effect	Level of Significance
	Constant	-3.122	***
Personal Factors	Age (Years)	-0.00516505	
	Gender (Male =1)	0.110395	
	Hometown (Bangkok =1)	0.128669	
	Have an ID card (Have = 1)	0.0521309	
	Duration of homelessness (Years)	0.0772565	*
	Cause of homelessness (Economic = 1)	0.0774879	
Relationship factors	Married (Married =1, Single is a based variable)	0.309043	**
	Divorced (Divorce =1, Single is a based variable)	-0.292268	
	Widowed (Widowed =1, Single is a based variable)	0.00796645	
	Number of Children	0.187519	***
	Number of brothers and sisters	-0.0156302	
	Have a couple (Have = 1)	0.362618	
	Have a close friend (Have = 1)	0.475507	***
Way of living factors	Living in the NGO shelter "Suvit Wat-Nu" (Mostly spend a night at public places is a based variable)	0.366370	**
	Living in the government shelter "Bann Im-Jai" (Mostly spend a night at public places is a based variable)	0.184918	
	Cannot Sleep (Often cannot sleep = 1)	-0.152658	
	Difference in sleeping hour between before and after being homeless (hours)	0.0141322	
	Having sufficient food per day (Yes = 1)	0.197979	
	Having snacks everyday (Yes =1)	0.666971	**
	Smoking (Yes = 1)	-0.519593	***
	Drinking Alcohol (Yes = 1)	-0.0279287	
Income and Economic factors	Year of education (Years)	0.0367562	*
	Currently working as a Part time labor (Unemployed is a base variable)	0.376924	**
	Currently working as a Full time labor (Unemployed is a base variable)	0.406458	**
	Currently working as a Merchant (Unemployed is a base variable)	-0.0706479	
	Income Per month	3.12400e-05	
	Working hour per day	-0.0795270	**
	Having sufficient income (Yes = 1)	0.693784	***
	Mean dependent variable	0.607143	
	S.D. dependent variable	0.325873	
	McFadden R-squared	0.466049	
	Number of observations	84	
	Number of cases 'correctly predicted'	70 (83.3%)	

Note: *,**,*** mean statistically significant at 90%, 95%, and 99% confident interval, respectively.

Regarding ways of living related factors, living in the NGO shelter, having snacks every day, and smoking are three significant factors affecting homeless people's happiness. Beginning with living in the shelter, the binary choices model estimated that a homeless person living in the shelter tends to be happier than one who mostly spend a night in a public place. This is especially true for the probability to be happy for a homeless person living in NGO shelter "Suvit Wat-Nu" as it significantly higher 36.63% compared to those who live in a public place.

As mentioned above in part 4.1, based on a characteristic of shelter, homeless people who are able to live in the "Suvit Wat-Nu" shelter are more likely to already have some permanent source of income and are able to pay rent for cheap accommodation, which means their lives and working conditions are possibly better than that of those who spend the night in public places and government shelters.

Secondly, in terms of having snack every day, we found that those who indicated that they consumed some type of small meal every day is 66.69% happier than a homeless person who does not have snack every day. As we know, food and drink are vital factors required to stay alive, while snacks can be considered as an additional treat or a luxury for the case of homeless people. Thus, being able to consume a small treat every day reflects a better way of living, and also has a positive relationship with happiness.

Thirdly, we found that if a homeless person is a smoker, the probability that he/she will be happy decreased by 51.95% compared to a non-smoker who is homeless. In contrast to a snack, cigarettes are an addictive drug which becomes a necessary product for a smoker. Due to the limitation of homeless person's income, having more necessary goods also increases their expenditure burden. According to our interview, some of them reported that sometimes they had to trade-off their expenditure between foods and cigarettes. This is still true with the case of alcohol consumption; although, this factor is not statistically significant. Last but not least, regarding income and economic factors, we found that education, working, and having sufficient income are important factors affecting homeless people's happiness. If a homeless person has more education, the probability that he/she will be happy is 0.0367 or 3.67%. While, a homeless person who reported that he/she has a sufficient income tends to feel happier with his/her life than those who do not have a sufficient income at 0.6937 probability or 69.37%.

Additionally, types of job also reflect their happiness. If a homeless person works as a full-time and a part-time labour, the probability which she/he will feel as happy as, or happier than ordinary people (non-homeless) increase by 0.40 and 0.37, respectively compared to those who are unemployed and living on the streets. However, working as a merchant can have a negative effect on their happiness. Working full-time or part-time can make them feel the same as other ordinary people (non-homeless). While, the samples working as merchants told us that there were only 3 types of low cost goods that they can trade which are amulets (Temples in Thailand always give amulets for free on many special occasions), old and second-hand items (from charity), and trash(bottles, paper, plastic, etc.). Therefore, working as these kinds of merchants is another symbol that indicates homelessness which makes them differ from others. Finally, working hours can have a negative impact on their happiness because the more they work, the less time to they have to relax.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Using a cohort study to understand our subject's way of life as well as applying an econometric analysis to analyze factors affecting homeless people and its relationship with their happiness/feelings, enables us to conclude the characteristic of Thai homeless people, and also recommend a strategic policy supporting homeless people in Thailand. Firstly, the cause of homelessness in Thailand has a unique and specific pattern which involves both economic and family problems, one as a necessary condition and another as a sufficient condition.

Unlike many countries in the West, Thai families are typically extended ones in which members and relatives live dependently and take care of each other. During our 5 months cohort study, some samples focusing on those just becoming homeless tried to contact their relatives in order to ask for financial or job support. Additionally, regarding our regression analysis, being a homeless person but having family, a wife, husband, children, and friends helps them to feel happy and feel the same as non-homeless people. This pattern differs from western countries where economic problems, housing prices, welfare systems, and refugees, are the main causes of homelessness. Thus, the family relationship is a crucial factor for case of Thailand. Strengthening the family relationship might be considered as an effective homeless prevention policy alongside with economic and social security policies.

Secondly, the length of homelessness significantly affects both homeless happiness and ways of living. Regarding to our study, most samples who have been homeless for less than one year struggle to find possible ways back to normal life, while those who have become homeless for more than 1 year seem to accept their situation and fit into a routine. Furthermore, if the duration of homelessness increases to 1 year, the probability that they will be less depressed with his/her life than last year increases by 7.72% which means that basically homeless people might suffer from their situation in the early stages and the intention to fight or find a way back to normal life is still strong in this period. In order words, the more they suffer, the more willingness they have to return to normal life. In addition, Thailand has a plenty of free food and drinks provided by many organizations. Obtaining this free support, not only makes a difference to their quality of life, but also gradually helps them to be familiar with a permanent homeless life. This might lead them to be satisfied with their life, and decrease the intention or willingness to return to normal life, and if this happens they are likely to lose hope and accept a life on the streets. Therefore, the duration of 1 year may be considered as a possible turning point, and the suitable time for policies supporting them is to reach out or help them as quickly as possible. The more time spent homeless, the less probability there is of them returning to a normal life.

Last but not least, we found that types of sleeping place also affect homeless behavior and happiness. In Bangkok there is still no conditional shelter and each shelter performs many roles at the same time. Even though the government shelter (Bann Im-Jai) works functionally in a similar way to an emergency shelter, it also plays the role as permanent shelter because the place does not have length of time restrictions for homeless people which means they are able to spend a night and receive free food as long as they can. This means 50% of the sample are those who struggle for a job and a way back to normal life, and another 50% are the group who have been homeless for more than 1 year (1) still stay and receive support, (2) try to move to fewer shelters with fewer regulations such as NGOs shelter, and (3) decide to be permanently homeless and move out to the public places. Moreover, most of the sample in both NGOs shelter and public places stated that they used to live in the government shelter before deciding to leave and be permanently homeless. Furthermore, the NGOs shelter currently offers a cheap private sleeping place without time conditions which supports homeless life and could be considered as another obstacle when it comes to the incentive for returning to society.

Therefore, we suggest Figure 1 as a policy for rehabilitating recently made homeless people in Thailand. Figure 1 represents 3 different shelters with different roles as well as systematic homeless support policies. This begins with an emergency shelter which offers only necessary help and support in order to focus on both physical and mental health. Then, we introduce a conditional shelter which mainly aims to upgrade their working skills that supports them to obtain work. Under this model the shelter plays an important role in returning them back to normal life or preventing them from becoming a permanently homeless, and one year to still be considered as a possible turning point. While, a group that fails to enter the labour market or needs long term care will be transferred as a last resort which functions as a permanent shelter. In order to solve the issue of homelessness, it is necessary to focus on the problem

as a structural one, including economic problems, family problems and social problems rather than individual issues. The policy mentioned above is just a trial proposal from the existing overview that still needs further improvements in terms of detail. This is because in Thai society there are knowledgeable experts including direct practitioners who have a great deal of experience working with homeless people. An effective policy formulation also requires suitable cooperation and division of work from every related organization.
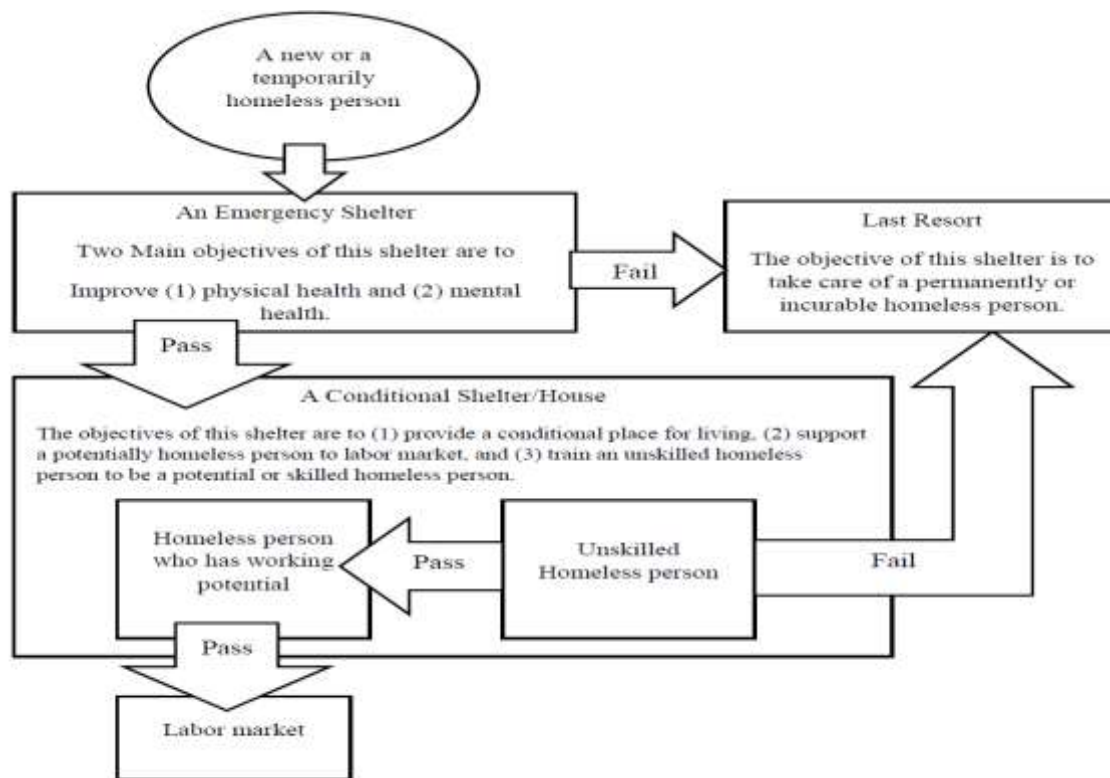

Figure 1. Policy for homeless people in Thailand

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