

Phenomenon of (in)visible unhoused persons in Welfare States17th Sept 2025, 15:00 – 18:30**Title**

Homelessness and Climate Vulnerability in Japan: Coping Strategies Against Extreme Heat

Hiroshi GOTO

Abstract

In recent years, the number of people experiencing street homelessness in Japan has gradually declined. However, many individuals continue to live in highly precarious conditions, especially in urban areas such as Tokyo. This presentation begins by outlining the current state of homelessness in Japan, providing context for the broader social and environmental challenges faced by this population.

As global climate change progresses, Japan has been experiencing record-breaking heatwaves. Previous studies have shown that climate change increases the risk of homelessness and amplifies health vulnerabilities among people living without stable housing. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how this population copes with extreme heat in order to develop inclusive and effective public health and social support strategies.

This study presents the findings of a questionnaire survey conducted with 170 people experiencing homelessness in Tokyo. The results show that many engage in adaptive behaviours, such as resting in shaded areas or using public facilities like libraries. However, a significant proportion reported being turned away from large commercial and public buildings when trying to cool down. Additionally, social stigma related to appearance and body odor discourages many from entering shared spaces.

These findings highlight the urgent need for accessible, stigma-free cooling shelters and inclusive urban policies. Future research should involve national-scale surveys to better understand the diverse strategies and unmet needs of people experiencing homelessness amid intensifying climate conditions.

Short bio

Dr. Hiroshi GOTO, Japan, is a professor at Rikkyo University in the College of Community and Human Services. He started his career as a social worker for a homeless support non-profit organization (San-Yu-Kai) in Japan. He is currently interested in both local-level and global-level research on homelessness. The former focuses on analyzing case records from homeless self-reliance support centers (transitional housing) in Japan, while the latter is a comparative study of public assistance in the US and Japan.

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Experiencing Home in Communal Housing First in Finland

Nienke Boesveldt, Max Huber, Nikkie Buskermolen, Marieke Smit en Floor Burger

Housing first- and led policies lead to 80% success, though 20% of the unhoused with more complex need remain unstably housed in shelters and institutions. Having a secure home, provides a sense of ontological security and permanent housing is a human right. Communal elements of supported housing programs, are an alternative form of housing, which have the potential to provide a home. However, they often don't follow housing first criteria, like permanent housing tenure. Communal Housing First (CHF) programs do, but are criticized, though often without empirical evidence.

Therefore we studied how residents and professionals experience CHF, as a home for people with a history of chronic homelessness, in Helsinki. We used semi-structured interviews, that were focused on their experience of home, independence, choice and social and professional support. These themes are derived from the scientific debate on the potential pitfalls (not a home, hinders independence) and benefits (stable housing, proximity of social and professional support) of CHF.

We provide a first-person perspective on the programs residents lived and staff worked in. Residents felt (somewhat) at home, because of independence they experienced and stable housing that ended their homelessness. However, residents were ambivalent about elements they controlled less, such as house rules or behavior of fellow residents. While many are (for now) content to live in CHF, others would rather live independently in a scattered apartment. Although support was offered within the program, this was mainly focused on housing stability and safety, and less on specialized care, supporting recovery. Social support among residents was experienced as quite limited.

Our research highlights ambiguities in CHF, when it comes to making a home. Creating more small-scale communal housing first, might create room for residents to feel at home, as a base for independence, social support and access to professional support.

Short bio

Dr. Nienke Boesveldt is researcher on re-housing homeless persons at Vu University. Nikkie Buskermolen is a PhD candidate at Leiden University and researcher in Boesveldt's Team. Dr. Max Huber, Marieke Smit and Flore Burger are researchers at HVO-Querido, a homeless care provider in Amsterdam. Boesveldt and Huber are also part of a national scientific program at Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, focused on housing the unhoused.

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Rethinking Conditions for 'Unconditionality': A Former Homeless Woman and the Supporting Practices of Housing First in Tokyo

Teruhiro Yamakita

Abstract

The Tokyo Project is a support project aiming to provide immediate residence to homeless people with severe mental illness by applying the Housing First approach. Housing First approach is being adopted in most advanced countries after the 2000s. However, it is not widely practiced in Japan where the conventional approach is still predominant in the governmental policy. Therefore, the Tokyo Project needs to advocate implementation without the support of official policy at this stage. As a result, clients are required to adjust to the conditional rules of private leases, which often become oppressive and create dilemmas in implementing Housing First's principle of 'unconditionality'. To rethink the conditions for 'unconditionality', this presentation uses ethnographic approaches and focuses on the experiences of Tokyo Project service providers who have cared for a former homeless woman.

Short Bio

Dr. Teruhiro Yamakita is a Japanese sociologist and professor in the Department of Sociology at Nihon University, Japan. His academic work primarily focuses on homelessness, social exclusion, and the sociology of support systems. Dr. Yamakita's work is instrumental in advancing the sociological understanding of homelessness, offering critical insights into the effectiveness and limitations of contemporary support models.