

CHAPTER TWO

DISCOURSES OF HOMELESS YOUTH AND THE ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THESE DISCOURSES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Youth is a developmental stage of life extending from adolescence to adulthood. Physical, psychological and emotional changes characterise this stage of life. To set age limits for youth is impossible, since it varies from country to country and culture to culture. For the purposes of this research I limit the age group to between 18 and 30 years of age. The lower level is chosen because people this age are at the ebbing of their teenage years and in many ways and for many purposes are already youth. An upper age limit above 30 will include people who no longer share many of the assumptions, emotional reactions and attitudes of youth, people who are actually more adults, which would not serve the purpose of this research and distort our understanding of the discourses of homeless youth. This will also affect our evaluation of the possibilities facing these youth.

Adolescence is a term used interchangeably for youth in the general sense. Adolescence is a period of transition. The adolescent experiences new freedom and renegotiates power and control with his/her parents. Physical and developmental changes take place that generate questions about the self. Relationship issues take on an emotional intensity that demands new behaviour and increasing accountability. Adolescents experiencing these struggles have to be listened to. "It is often necessary to let them speak about their struggles within a dominant culture" (Shelton 1995:52). When working with homeless youth I

have found it helpful to reflect with them on their cultural, racial or ethnic origins, to pose questions about how these associations have made them “who they are” and “what they are grateful for”, in their background and current life situation. It is often necessary to let these young people speak about their struggles within a dominant culture. It is better to allow them to interpret their experiences. Thus this chapter offers an overview of youth in general and youth in the South African context in particular. The discourses of the youth and the economic impact on these discourses are also discussed.

2.2 YOUTH IN GENERAL

The ‘welfare nation’ is a slogan used by many governments all over the world. The developmental strategies planned in such a nation are based on the social, economic and infrastructure developments in various sectors of the country, in which the role of young people in this development process cannot be ignored. The years of youth, as mentioned above, are the years of development of a person. The well-being of the nation depends on the well-being of its community, and so on the well-being of its youth. The youth are the power of tomorrow. If they suffer undue struggles and bondages, the future of the society is at stake.

However, definitions of ‘youth’, ‘young people’ or ‘adolescent’ vary according to different human perceptions. These perceptions find their different shading in relation to different cultural and social settings. The understanding of youth may also vary between rural and urban conditions, and vary in different tribal cultures. Within urban communities, variance exists between rich city people and poor street people. “[A]lthough most people have some idea of who and what the adolescent is, perception of adolescents differ radically and are largely determined by people’s respective frames of reference and their experience of adolescents in their cultural and social setting” (Gouws, Kruger & Burger 2000:1). When different communities treat and envision youth differently, the experiences of the youth themselves are important in their own specific contexts. Listening to

and understanding the youth is thus vitally important. If they can be helped to tell hopeful alternate stories of their lives, the youth can surely develop into the strength of today.

2.2.1 General definition of youth

“Youth is the state of being young; the period between childhood and adult age” (Allen 1993). Although it is difficult to define the youth phase in terms of chronological age, it is generally limited to the age between 20 and 30. These age limits differ from country to country, but generally demarcate the age at which the person gets a job or is settled in life. This is the period when the person acquires the ability to live by him/herself and lead a successful life. But because of changing social scenarios and unhealthy competition in society many youth are deprived of the opportunity to achieve their goals of life. Some young people go through periods of intense ‘storm’ and stress while others experience their youth as placid and free from serious emotional and social problems. Psychological development, cognitive growth, social development and economic maturity are some other factors important in defining youth. Adults are relatively sure about their identity, emotionally independent of their parents, have developed their own value systems and are able to have an adult love relationship (Gouws, Kruger & Burger 2000:5, 6). Youth is a transitional stage, which is very close to but not yet the stage of adulthood. The struggles faced by youth both inside and outside are enormous. The struggles to reach psychological, economic and emotional maturity are some of these, as youth try to come to terms the values of the adult world around them. As an anonymous poem puts it,

They ask you to enhance your abilities,
Learn from other disabilities
But when you really show your capability,
They ask you for credibility.

These struggles can create role confusion in young people. A patient ear to their stories, proper understanding of their struggles, meaningful interactions and supportive facilitation are needed at this juncture. These can help the youth to find the immense possibilities and talents that lie within in them and so that they can develop these in a proper and useful way.

2.2.2 Economic factors and youth

Young people are very susceptible to financial factors. Many homeless youth are on the streets because of unemployment. Others were employed, but lost all they had because of changing trends in consumerism, loans, debt and bankruptcy. The 'Money Matters' column in the *City Press* newspaper often offers advice such as, 'You should not incur new debt if your salary is not going to increase proportionately with your new monthly financial commitment' (Diale 2006:11). Many people do not heed such advice and fall into debt traps without knowing their consequences. When these people face financial crises, financial institutions and banks give them loans without helping them manage their debt. Unpaid loans lead to seizure of assets, and finally these young people end on the streets. Once they are homeless, there is nobody to help them. Thus economic factors are vital to understand in the experiences and discourses of homeless youth.

2.2.3 Development of youth

"Young adults are significantly affected by crime, poverty, and lack of formal education. They also experience a higher-than-overall official unemployment rate" (Perrow 2004:367). These factors badly affect the development of youth in South Africa. This does not mean that all the possibilities for development for youth are at risk. The National Youth Commission has announced plans to help create employment and develop skills to benefit thousands of unemployed youth

in South Africa. “The government would compile a register of unemployed graduates to link them up with relevant institutions as well as help them start their own businesses and get jobs” (Sakoana 2004). Through the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the organization is creating a platform for job creation, skills development and transfer for South Africa’s young people. According to Malose Kekana, “the contact, information and counselling programme should reach more than 730 000 young people over the next three years” (Kekana 2003).

The Youth Development Trust and the International Youth Foundation have announced a three-year extension to the Make a Connection programme, based on a joint commitment from Nokia, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Embassy of Finland in South Africa. The Youth Development Trust is a leading organisation in the provision of solutions to the youth sector in South Africa. The new programme addresses one of the most critical challenges facing South African Youth, namely employability and entrepreneurial skills (Helping Young People Develop 2004).

The Joint Enrichment Project (JEP) is another leading youth development organization based in Johannesburg. It was started before 1994 as a militant organization, but later changed its strategies according to the social changes after apartheid.

As the external political and social climate changed, JEP underwent corresponding discursive shifts in each of these periods: from a discourse of collectivity and resistance; to a discourse of systemic capacity-building and individual skill-development; to a ‘development discourse’ of productivity, accountability, and efficiency, to a self-reflexive discourse of individuation and strategising in a competitive free market. (Perrow 2004:371)

The change from the discourse of resistance to the discourse of construction of youth is relevant and contributory to post-apartheid South Africa. The changing discourses of market and competition raise new challenges for youth development programmes and society as a whole.

The government has several developmental measures and policies in place for the development of the youth. One of the goals of the National Youth Policy of South Africa approved by the National Youth Commission is to “enable young men and women to initiate actions which promote their own development and that of their communities and broader society” (National Youth Policy 1997). But the government faces many struggles in this effort to help the youth towards development. One major problem is rural-urban migration. Despite the many dangers of city life, the trend of migration to urban centres in search of economic survival continues worldwide. Perceptions of diverse economic opportunities, greater freedom, varied social roles, excitement and improved public and health facilities all add to the appeal of city life. The young people migrating to the city however are a big source of uncertainty for the government.

2.2.4 Housing and youth

Youngsters are increasingly leaving home at a young age because of family instability, poverty, overcrowding in large families and various other reasons. The South African government has instituted various measures to assist those youth that have to find homes of their own. The land reforms have made access to land more convenient for the poor. Housing schemes should theoretically help poor youth. From time to time, the government announces housing policies specially aimed at the development of the youth, such as the policy announced on 13th January 2005, but these efforts are not enough, resulting in increasing rates of informal settlement and homelessness. As Ike Diale rightly points out, “it must make our hearts bleed to see our communities in shacks of tin, timber and paper in urban centres, villages and on white farms” (2006:11). Economic imbalances in society accelerate this trend, with globalization and its effects impacting on the poor, including the youth, of South Africa. The result is more shacks and more people on the streets. Setting up more shelters in urban areas is not the solution for this problem. More practical measures are needed to address the problems of housing and joblessness. The youth should be helped to create some kind of

positive outlook to the problems of society as a whole and to their personal problems of joblessness and homelessness.

2.3 YOUTH IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The understanding of youth in South Africa is still in transition. In 1994 all South Africans gained political freedom, but the apartheid era left a devastating legacy. Many of the country's youth lack self-confidence and life skills. The influx of weapons into the community and increasing poverty push many black youth to socially deviant behaviour such as crime and violence. Seeking a better life, many of the rural poor in outlying villages began to move to the cities, worsening problems of accommodation and work. All these situations contribute to the decay of family bonds and so to homelessness among youth. The numbers of street children and youth are increasing alarmingly. However, despite all these negative trends, the youth of South Africa have opportunities to overcome these problems. The diversity of African culture is promising and offers possibilities for innovation. Proper understanding of freedom and independence need to be developed in South Africa's young people, to help them liberate themselves from economic and social oppression.

2.3.1 Traditional youth

Traditional African communities were rural and lived mostly by agriculture, livestock raising, hunting, fishing etc. "African societies were organised around a territory, which might be integrated into either a politically centralised or a decentralised system.... Young Africans grew up within the collectivistic structures of the lineage-based family and the age-class system" (Ly Boubakar 1988:150,152). Traditionally, young people were responsible for agricultural work, maintaining dwellings and policing the community. They found their identity within the lineage and community to which they belonged. Ideas of freedom and

independence were integrated into the system of rules and taboos structuring their community. In this system there is no question of homelessness or joblessness. Everyone has his own responsibilities in his community and have a place to stay. African society is based on tribal settings. There are enough tribal, traditional ways to orient and equip youth for a community life. Each tribe has their own initiation ceremony to receive a boy from young age to adulthood. “The initiations transmitted to the young people the community understanding of sex and reproduction, and the role wife and husband were expected to play towards each other, their offspring, other children and elders in the family, their in-laws, brothers and sisters, etc.” (Mpolo & De Sweemer (eds) 1987:83). The responsibility and their clinging to the community gave them a feeling of togetherness and that becomes an empowerment for the youth. The apartheid regimes shattered the togetherness of the commune systems and used the manpower and resources for their benefit. The people were brought away for mining and commercial farming. This caused breakage of the commune system and a deterioration of the value system. The identity and the dignity of the selfhood of the youth were at stake.

2.3.2 Modern youth

Demographic figures show that the youth comprises the majority of the population in almost all countries. It is not different in the case of South Africa. “Persons 35 years of age and younger constitute 75 percent of the population of South Africa” (Mokwena 1999:1). In the modernist perspective, youth is seen as the resource for production and supportive forces of the market economy. “Colonization introduced the market economy throughout Africa and with it, a new division of labour; its modification of traditional social structures and value systems and its reorganisation of social space opened the way for the emergence of towns” (Ly Boubakar 1988:153). Modernity is the result of industrial revolution and technological advancement. It promoted the importance of the individual over and above the system. “The industrial revolution was the

start of modern-day life as we know it. It led to the process of urbanisation together with technological and scientific progress. This in turn gave rise to the information revolution and globalisation” (Prins & Van Niekerk 2001:2). Modernist view brought human beings to the centre and to the prominent position of the world. Young people became the strength of the world. The increase of unemployment, alarming rate of urbanization and extensive use of drugs put the modern youth in a distressful and hopeless situation. Because of such unemployment; crime, violence and suicides increased. The urbanization caused an uprooting from the families and losing of social taboos which created social deviants. Some people made profit exploiting the distress of youth, by selling drugs to the young people. “The economic changes, the transformation of the employment structure, and the increase of state regulations have naturally influenced the attitudes and the motives of the young” (Allardt 1988:136). That change in attitude creates restlessness, laziness and rebelliousness; as a result the youth becomes unproductive.

2.3.3 Post-apartheid youth

Freedom is the birthright of every individual. In South Africa, the apartheid came into a closure by 1994 and the people of Africa got back their birth right. Before freedom, in 1985 Nelson Mandela wrote from prison to the people in Soweto about the freedom. “Not only I have suffered during these long, lonely, wasted years. I am not less life-loving than you are. But I cannot sell my birthright, nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free” (Asmal, Chidester & James (eds) 2003: 46, 47). In the post-apartheid South Africa rainbow has become one of the unifying symbols. It urges the young people, and all South Africans to be in a new covenant for a peaceful life in a common nation.

The freedom experience opened the gates of possibilities for the youth to develop and to be fruitful in the nation. The youth policies of the government and the youth empowering programmes aim at the total development of the youth.

The philosophy behind the national youth development trust reads: “The development of the South African Youth in international perspective-and within the boundaries of the Global Environment-is a critical success factor to ensure accomplishment” ([Philosophy](#) of National Youth development Trust 2006). The government is envisioning the youth development in an international perspective which opens immense possibilities for development. “One set of adolescents have their lives enhanced by a wide range of new technologies, including genetic counseling, new computer-driven devices, and sophisticated prosthetic aids, while another, larger set falls further into poverty” (Saraswathi & Larson 2002:359). In the apartheid era the job opportunities and accessibility to the economic resources are only to the whites. The political freedom offered complete accessibility for all South Africans to the resources of the society. Black empowerment and affirmative action are the policies of the post apartheid governments. But the lack of industries and the lack of job opportunities in the rural areas pushed the young people to migrate to the towns, in search of jobs and other life opportunities. As a result, everyday, young, jobless people are coming to the cities and towns. But there is no sufficient jobs and sufficient accommodation for all the people coming to the cities. Thus many find the streets as their shelter or night shelters for a temporary relief.

2.3.4 Youth and HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is a reality in the African community, especially among the youth. Government is taking various measures for preventing more infections and caring the infected and affected. Non-governmental organisations are also active in this field. “The battle to reduce new HIV infection among South African youth is to be intensified following the launch of Youth 4 Life (Y4L) a new non-governmental organisation in Pretoria” (Sebelebele 2003). The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund began in 1995 as a programme to address the needs of young people facing homelessness, joblessness, poverty, and HIV/AIDS is doing a better job. HIV/AIDS is no longer simply a health concern. It is more than

that. It is directly related to poverty, economics, youth development, social stigmas and psychological effects.

Many young people are particularly at risk of becoming infected with HIV because of the situations in which they live; as a result of the behaviour they adopt or are forced to adopt because of social, cultural or economic factors. A study held at the University of Copenhagen reveals the facts about the economic impact of HIV/AIDS. "There are 16 African countries with an adult HIV prevalence of more than 10%. Of these Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia have prevalence rates of over 15%, Zimbabwe and Swaziland over 20%, while Botswana rises to at least 36%. In South Africa, the total population decline by around 10million between 2002 and 2015 as a result of HIV/AIDS" (Farham 2005:62, 63). This is a discouraging message to the developing economy of South Africa. However the government is taking preventive measures and creating awareness, the South African people do not realise the consequences of this problem.

Some people still have inhibitions and stigmas in relation with the disease AIDS, that it is directly related with sex. The stigmas in connection with that tempt the people to avoid the treatment for this disease. For this they will bring the mask of traditions and its rituals. Even some traditional healers try to make people believe that AIDS occurs because of some bewitching of others from jealousy. The people having the stigma related with sex will be satisfied with such diagnosis. These types of traditional beliefs and practices will spoil the society. The traditions should be redefined or rewritten in the light of contemporary realities. "The only way to allow traditions to survive is incorporation into a newer tradition or language" (Orr & Patient 2004:13). The traditional practices should be redefined and the morality of the community should be re-established to save the young people from this traumatic condition of AIDS. When I met some young people in the street centre they were very energetic and enthusiastic. After some months I noticed that, their health is deteriorating. Along with that their

enthusiasm and level of hope also diminished. The pleasant laugh turned to a pale smile. Even then they could smile and that was the message of hope involved. When listening to the youth stories, all of them may not be infected with HIV but all are affected in one way or other.

2.4 IDENTIFYING THE DISCOURSES

2.4.1 Identification criteria

In a social constructionist and post modern paradigm, it rejects the deliberate effort of individual to create meaning. Rather it believes that the meanings are emerging out of discursive relations. The discourses may be outer or inner. “We each carry a social discourse in our heads and, therefore, we have an internal controller and we risk being diagnosed as mad or bad if what we say is not part of the dominant narrative” (Milner & O’ Byrne 2002: 22). In the discursive interactions the discourses involved are that which heard and that which unheard. The facilitator is not guessing the inner discourses of the story teller, but listening to the story told with a discursive approach. The themes, from which the story teller wishes to tell a story, are becoming the pointers to the inner discourses. Of course there is a role for the facilitator in listening to the themes shared. He has another role of listening to the stories untold and searching the themes unheard. The criteria for identifying the discourses are not that of listening to the stories shared but also listening to the stories unshared.

2.4.2 Identification methods

In the narrative approach of counselling work, the externalizing questions will help to identify and expose the dominant discourses. “We can expose dominant discourses by asking externalising questions about contextual influences on the problem. What ‘feeds’ the problem? What ‘starves’ it? Who benefits from it? In

what settings might the problematic attitude be useful? Which people would proudly advocate for the problem? What groups of people would definitely be opposes to it and its intentions?” (Freedman & Combs 2002:28). By asking such questions and listening to those questions we could identify the dominant discourses involved in his conversations. This approach will help the storyteller to view his perceptions and the discourses separately from his personality. This will help him to relive in the situation and move forward for alternate discourses and alternate stories. Along with the externalizing, the tracing of the history of the problem and exploring the effects of the problem could identify the discourses inherent in the interpretations. By certain therapeutic questions in the narrative relationship the facilitator could identify and deconstruct the discourses. It will lead to the discovery of unique outcomes and further lead to alternate stories. A set of questions are given by Alice Morgan for the deconstruction process.

- What are some of your beliefs about people’s roles in sexual/intimate relationships?
- What ideas do you have about what makes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sexual experiences?
- How did these ideas develop?
- Are you comfortable with these ideas?
- Which ideas are helpful in your relationship? Which ones get in the way? How do they work against your relationship?

(Morgan 2000:46, 47).

This is a pattern of question for deconstructing conversation. That does not necessarily demand questions in relation with sexuality. It is to help the story

teller to come out of the set meanings and move forward to alternate meanings.

2.4.3 Discourses

There are different discourses involved in the experiences of homeless people. The discourse about homelessness is directly related to the discourses of poverty, unemployment, crime, governmental policies, youth empowerment and so on. There are different categories in the discourses. The anger of some people towards the system and towards themselves expresses the psychological discourses. The response towards crime, violence and unemployment involves social discourses. To demarcate the boundaries of the discourses in different categories is a difficult task. Discourse constructions define the identity of the youth. The discourses involved in the conversations of the homeless youth will be the deciding factors of the construction and deconstruction of their stories. The hope and hopelessness of each individual is based on his or her discourses. Identifying the discourses will help them to deconstruct and reconstruct their identities for a hopeful future. There are discourses about homelessness having economic impacts such as poverty, globalization, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, personal irresponsibility and joblessness. All these discourses have economic overturns which will tamper their future stories of hope. Listening to the unique outcomes and moving to the alternate stories of hope will help them in the process of narrative therapy.

2.4.4 Apparently dominant discourses

Of course when I listened to different stories of Youth, there were some discourses that came dominant which have some sort of negative effects on their personalities and experiences. “Discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways” (Parker 1992:1). There is no analytical method in understanding discourse. It is so difficult to identify the

discourses, which are dominant. Some of the discourses identified are the discourse about homelessness, discourse about modernity, discourse about habits, discourse about family, and discourse about the government or system. For the homeless youth, discourse about homelessness itself has much negative impact on their identities. Even though they are acquiring a futuristic vision, they are chained in the experiences of being homeless. Some people think that it is so difficult to be good in streets. Because all the people around are wicked. Some people confess their sins, but no way to go back. Some others prefer to share the good news of not being homeless. Some have the perspective that it is enough that God can understand our homeless situation. Homelessness, for all of them, is not an encouraging experience, but coping.

As they are away from homes they have role confusions in their identity. They are son, brother, father, and husband. But they are not doing any roles at this stage. So during conversation they swing from one role to the other and vice versa. But when we could see the possibilities in this shifting of roles, it is so easy to move with them for more vivid understanding of the present. “Inherent in our approach is the assumption that social identities are discursively constructed, dynamic and multiple: potentially our young informants present themselves in several roles or identities throughout the conversation” (Norrby & Wirdenäs 2003:249). These multiple roles are in a way possibilities for better options in the future. It can also end up in role confusions and utter desperateness.

2.4.5 Impact of economic factors

The adverse experiences of the homeless youth gives them negative evaluations and affirmations about the factors that lead them to homelessness. The starvation in the family, the increased number of family members, the broken family ties, repeated disappointments to get a job, lack of good friends, lack of dignity and helplessness are some of the discourses of the homeless having

economic impact. The economic impact on these discourses is so adverse and powerful. The economic policies are formulated by political and economic authorities. They have no real, concern to uphold the development goals of the homeless people. Thus the policies will again become oppressive. “The present trends in the economic sphere are none the less a sure sign that the time has come to take account of our attitude to work. To appreciate this, it is necessary to know what the essence or deeper significance of labour is” (Venter 1959:30). Some of the homeless have even a negative attitude to work. They got fed up in searching jobs. Now they are enjoying food from different charitable organizations and non-governmental organizations. It made them lazy and lethargic. In deconstructing the discourses, having economic impacts, making the value of work in them and help them to raise the dignity of their lives are important tasks in the narrative conversation.

2.5 HOMELESSNESS AS A DISCOURSE

2.5.1 Discourse analysis

In the strict scientific sense, the process of discourse analysis within the social psychology is problematic with the qualitative inquiry. It is not just analysing the discourse and finding meaning involved in it. It has a preconception that there is a set of meanings for a particular discourse. When approaching a discourse in search of a particular meaning or a set of meanings there is the opportunity of neglecting or missing the new meanings evolved. The danger involved in the discourse analysis is that which is the searching and finding of the meaning intended by the author of the discourse. It will not view the meaning evolved, in relation to the context or in relation to the audience. “Discourse analysis is an approach or a stance rather than a method. In terms of specifying or recommending procedures for conducting research studies, discourse analysts place most weight on the capacity of the researcher to understand the idea of discourse analysis, rather than on his or her willingness to master particular

research techniques” (McLeod 2001:100). There is a stream of various approaches for analysing discourse. There are approaches within discourse analysis which are against the approach of social constructionism. Thus I am not adopting the methodology of the scientific pattern of discourse analysis, but using it to understand the positive and negative discourses of the homeless youth. Also in a social constructionist narrative approach, it is not the duty of the co-researcher to analyse the meaning of the discourses. All I can do as the co-researcher is to understand their discourses within their specific context and help them to interpret as they wish to interpret. Through interpretation and retelling they will move to new meanings of their stories. By scripting and explaining their stories and its interpretations I am engaging in a process of discourse analysis.

2.5.2 Discourses, negative and positive

There are enough books, which go into the problem of homelessness. Many of them analyse the reasons for homelessness as personal irresponsibility, shortage of low income housing, the impact of changing technology on work, globalization, alcoholism, extreme poverty and so on. “The current and expanding crisis of urban homelessness results from the convergence of two contradictory and proximate forces; the rapidly dwindling supply of low-income housing and the increased economic marginality among the poor and the near poor, caused by the changing economy, changes in family structure, and shifts in government policies” (Timmer, Eitzen & Talley 1994: 17). It purely put the responsibility for the problem of homelessness to the shoulders of government. The factors leading to the economic deprivation and the factors leading to homelessness should come to the fore for a better understanding of the discourses of homelessness. Understanding homelessness involves a matter of various ingredients. Here, cultural, social and political factors cannot be minimized. The poor governance results in the displacement of people geographically, socially and politically. “Long-standing cultural currents figure in such displacements: a deep-seated ambivalence toward dependency, anxiety

about the shaky purchase of the work ethic among unsettled men, fears of mobility itself (people without ties were thought to be without norms as well), resentment by ordinary working people of their own ordinary working lot, the deep distrust shown by organized charity toward those of its charges who prove uncooperative or indifferent” (Hopper 2003: 26). According to Dear & Wolch, “Homelessness, at its most elementary level, is caused by a series of adverse events. These include eviction, loss of job, discharges from an institution, personal crises (such as divorce or domestic violence) and withdrawal of financial support” (Dear & Wolch 1987:197). These researchers analyse the sociological factors of homelessness. The discourses of homelessness are closely related to the discourses of unemployment and poverty. The discourse on the problem of the unemployed is an extension of liberal discourses and practices regarding poverty.

2.5.3 Homelessness as a dominant discourse

Homelessness has very hard experiences that lead the people to hopelessness. These retain the uncured scars in their minds. This will create some beliefs and affirmations about some social realities and phenomenon. This will be always negative. Those negative affirmations can be defined as negative discourses or in other words dominant discourses. It may be related to the stories about gender, race, class, age or so on. “There are subjugating stories of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, and religion (to name a few) which are so prevalent and entrenched in our culture that we can get caught up in them without realizing it” (Freedman & Combs 2002:27). The subjugating nature of such stories declares that those are dominant discourses. The dominant discourses are called dominant because they have a negative influence on the person and his identity. It is in a way invisible and not consciously known about. It may have direct or indirect relation with the discourses in the society. The responsibility of the counsellor is through deconstructive questioning help the person to examine problems in detail and expose discourses that support them.

When seeing the problem of homelessness as a dominant discourse, the picture adds more and reads more. When this sociological information became part of the discourses of the homeless, it may have negative and positive impacts. They may have a tendency to excuse for their homelessness and blame the social, economic and political system for the dysfunction. In the positive way some people will think about empowering the government and non-governmental organization to help the poor by supporting them. When we listen to the youth stories, the negative discourses are prominent. For the homeless youth, discourses about homelessness itself have a very negative impact on their identities. The understanding of the homeless youth about their condition of homelessness is very negative and it is taken for granted. In the real sense they don't know what they believe, but they live according to their belief. This will make their life worse and their experiences negative.

2.5.4 Economic conditions as discourse

'Homelessness is the result of poor economic conditions' is a major discourse. "Discourse analysis of economic theory, at least in post modern thought, is not a question of ascertaining the scientific core of concepts and methods; rather it is a question of seeing how language and other discursive forms can produce the meanings that determine partly our cognitive experiences of economic reality" (Samuels 1990:16). This is vivid in the conversation with Joseph (name fictitious) aged 23.

Renjan: When did you come from your home?

Joseph: Last year

Renjan: What circumstances made you to leave your home?

Joseph: My family is in poverty. My four sisters have nothing to eat. If I also was there it would be a great burden.

Renjan: How do you feel about coming out?

Joseph: It is so sad, but no other way.

Renjan: How do you experience now as a homeless person?

Joseph: It is not a pleasant experience. I miss my family very much.

Renjan: Do you think you can join them again?

Joseph: Sure, I hope that I will get a job and can help my family.

This researcher and his experiences shed light on the fact of the economic aspects of the homelessness. He has dominant discourses of homelessness and poverty, as surely unpleasant. But he has a hope of redemption and moves to a better experience in the future. The dominant discourses are in a way the discourses happening in his mind about his experiences and its stories.

2.6 ECONOMIC FACTORS

Existing literature works on the social, anthropological, economic reasons of homelessness. According to Passaro it is the culmination of crises and missed opportunities in life. “For some people, homelessness comes relatively suddenly, with job loss and a subsequent eviction. For others, ‘homelessness is often the final stage in a life long series of crises and missed opportunities, the culmination of a gradual disengagement from supportive relationships and institutions’ ” (Passaro 1996:29). Such scholars were engaged in the discussion of homelessness as a social, political or economic problem. That doesn’t give

answers for the inner struggles of the homeless youth. Knowing about the social or economic reality will give a clearer picture of his/her economic situation. But it helps little in disengaging the dominant discourses of the homeless youth and the economic impacts involved in their life experiences. Filling the gap within the researches about homelessness and economic reality is a great task. That is the effort going to be done in this research.

Generalising the factors involved in the reality of homelessness is making the issue vague. When searching for the specific factors involved, light will be shed on various issues of poverty, disempowerment, globalization and mismanagement of resources, etc. When some people think their life as a curse in the streets, we cannot be judgemental to the real life experiences of the street people. Sometimes it may be a generalisation about the people around and sometimes we may think that as an exaggeration. We are not able to analyze completely the interpretations given by the homeless youth for their stories. Some people confess their sins, but no way to go back. The pricking feelings of their past experiences are haunting them again and again in their present street experiences. Even if they have people with them having the similar experiences they are not relieved from their own personal feelings and evaluations. Some of them have pleasant past memories, at the same time some others have highly irritating and painful past experiences. Some people prefer to share the good news of not being homeless, with others. All of them have some economic reasons or other factors that threw them to this status and that still haunt them. We cannot overlook other factors leading or contributing to the homelessness and joblessness. "Many of today's problems in the inner-city ghetto neighbourhoods-crime, family dissolution, welfare, low levels of social organisation, and so on-are fundamentally a consequence of the disappearance of work" (Wilson 1997:xiii). When work disappears, the joblessness and homelessness result. Homelessness, for all of them is an experience of confusion and trials of life.

2.6.1 Poverty

It is a Herculean task to define poverty. Poverty can be defined as a deficit of some essentials. Those essentials can be the physical necessities as well as the spiritual and mental necessities. The lack of food, clothing and housing can be defined as poverty. The lack of knowledge about God and good news of Jesus Christ can be defined as the spiritual poverty. When Robert Chambers [England] defines poverty as entanglement, John Friedman [California] is of the opinion that poverty is lack of access to social power and Jayakumar Christian [India] describes poverty as disempowerment (Myers 1999:66-79). These definitions are not self explanatory. Each one has its own particular social contexts to explain. But the important thing to notice is these definitions are not contradictory, rather they are complimentary. Poverty is directly related to homelessness and its economic conditions. We cannot place poverty in the prominent place in identifying the economic factors of the homelessness. We also cannot fall into pitfall of belittling poverty as one of the factors. “Inner city joblessness and homelessness are severe problems that are often overlooked or obscured when the focus is placed mainly on poverty and its consequences” (Wilson 1997: xiii). Joblessness and homelessness are in a way called as the extreme forms of economic marginality.

The biblical picture of poverty is varied and gives different dimensions of poverty. Basically Bible tries to define poverty as material poverty and spiritual poverty. The gospels give picture of disciples who choose poverty in response to Jesus’ call for discipleship. “When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him” (Lk. 5:11). They left everything including their possessions and relations. The result is that they volunteer themselves to be jobless and homeless. Jesus said to the multitude, “Sell your possession and give alms” (Lk. 12:33). There are blessings pronounced on the poor. “Then he looked up at his disciples and said: blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk. 6:20). It gives us the picture that poverty is a blessed

status. In Mathew we read the parable of people who give up everything in order to acquire the buried treasure or a priceless pearl which is the Kingdom of God. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which some one found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Mt. 13:44). This teaches that the treasure on earth is not important when compared to the treasure of God’s kingdom. Even the gospel pictures rich man as a fool (Lk. 12:20) or as a villain (Lk. 6:24-25). Bible gives another picture of sharing at the context of famine and poverty. “The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea, this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul” (Ac. 11:29-30). When Paul exhorts the Corinthian people to share the resources with the poor people, he supports his request by the argument of God’s richness and God’s volunturiness to be the poor. “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). All the biblical stories lead to the particular context where they experienced economic adversaries. “The hypothesis is that there is some correlation between the economic circumstances we see in Bible and the different strata of teaching in poverty and wealth in the gospels” (Mealand 1980:11). This understanding will help us to be non-judgemental towards the biblical passages. As the economic circumstances create the biblical stories, the stories of the homeless people have their own specific economic circumstances. Listening and describing in the helping sessions will reveal more about these contexts.

2.6.2 Globalization

Globalization is an array of processes in the global, economic and social scenario which shrinks the world into a village. “The effects of globalisation on the youth has been the same as with nation states....Among disadvantaged young people it has resulted in increased unemployment, a growth in unfulfilled expectations and the growth in migrant labour...” (Johnson 2005:11). The

financial markets and global economy is ultimately not aiming to include the poor but only escalates the existing gap between the rich and the poor by avoiding the poor from the common areas of economic transactions and its global decision makings. The availability of consumer products from different countries in the market tries to make the common people understand the globalization as a blessing. Cheaper products from China, Hong Kong or Japan became common and are affordable for the middle class and also for the poor. But ultimately the national economies will be disempowered and it will weaken their market power. That will enable the multinational and some other financial agencies to decide on the market policies. Then the national governments may not have a say in the economic matters of the nation. That will be completely determined and dictated by the external forces ruled by the multinationals and the developed countries.

Through globalization the problems of a nation or a culture is not at all an internal or household problem. It turned to a global problem. As well, the possibilities of the local cannot be fenced in a globalized context. It turns to be the possibilities of the world at large. “Also life in the global village focused attention on pluralities of all kinds-cultural, political, religious etc.” (Rossouw 1995:88). Accepting the pluralities open up the way for the different possibilities of the community. This is in line with the approach of postmodernity. As well as the globalization opens the plurality of cultures and economic opportunities, it marginalises the powerless, economically poor majority.

The possibilities of globalization minimises the use of human work force and extensive use of technological innovations. This results in massive discount of employment rate. “The absence of employment for youth and adults in inner cities not only makes the young deeply pessimistic about their future and the value of school but also means the young have no opportunity to learn how to work, or to learn the skills and habits of the workplace either through their own involvement or through the models provided by adults in their lives” (McLaughlin

1993:40). It shows that the globalization negatively affects the future of the urban youth. It curtails the opportunities to familiarise with the work situation.

When all the international assemblies held in connection with economic development and market strategies declare 'There Is No Alternative [TINA]', we have to listen to the practical proposals of deglobalisation. "Deglobalisation is not about withdrawing from the international economy. It is about reorienting economies from the emphasis on production for export to production for the local market" (Bello 2004:113). Seeking the alternatives through non-judgemental interaction with the local community is important in this context. In the context of homeless youth, there is the influence of a global culture which leads them only to unsatisfactory life experiences. When they wish for the imported fanciful products of other countries, more than their necessities, unaccomplishment of those wishes turns them to despair and disillusionment.

2.6.3 Substance abuse

Use of alcohol, stimulants, tranquilizers, heroine and ganjah are significantly higher in the youth compared to other age groups. The particular homeless situation adds the circumstances for becoming a drug addict or/and a drug seller. It is another easy way of getting money. The individual street fights, robbery and rape happen because of the extensive use of the drugs. Lack of relationships, loneliness, and deprivation of opportunities cause these types of social deviance. "Leisure activities among South African youth were linked to risks associated with HIV/AIDS, delinquency, violence and substance abuse" (Johnson 2005:11). Although much research has not been done in this particular area the stated discourses are clear from my experiences with the street people. I saw drug users and drug sellers, some selling pen and small items in the streets as a cover to drug selling. I met some males been raped by other homosexual males who are HIV positive. Lack of social taboos, social control and the ambiguity of the streets contribute to such activities of personal spoiling.

2.6.4 Personal irresponsibility

For the well being of a community the personal responsibility of the individuals are necessary. There are cultural and social factors behind the reality of homelessness and its economic backthrows. Blaming those cultural and social factors will not help us to evade the personal responsibility of the individual. In some of the cases of homeless persons the personal irresponsibility is a major factor contributed for their status of homelessness. Some of them coming to the Street Centre are homeless and jobless for years. They have their own reasons for coming out of their homes. But they are still homeless because of their personal irresponsibility. They are satisfied with the food they get from the social and religious organizations working among the street people. They have the shelter for night stay. Thus some of them are too lazy to seek some job. They will find lame excuses for being homeless and for being jobless.

We cannot totally blame them for their personal irresponsibility. They are not at all coming from a well defined family or social setting. From their raw life situations they haven't achieved enough life skills for coping up with the changing society. "Many children from poor homes are not exposed to situations that would promote the development of the coping skills required to meet the demands of an increasingly complex society" (Prins & Van Niekerk 2001:14). Thus they fall in a mood or attitude of blaming the society for their failures. Otherwise they will be lazy to seek for a job and find the reason that there is no use in seeking and seeking.

There are psychological reasons for these kinds of responses. They have no goals of self actualising or social role. The lack of self esteem and the vague understanding of the realities lead them to unhealthy attitudes of life. The existing life situation of homelessness and economic problems contribute more to this situation.

2.6.5 Shortage of jobs

“Many young people in South Africa were highly positive in their outlook even though many felt that they would not be able to fulfil their potential. The main reason for this feeling was indicated as a lack of financial resources; there may of course be a range of other reasons such as the lack of facilities” (Steering Committee 1994:20). Lack of jobs is a major factor for in the negative financial condition of many homeless youth. The new government’s development approach, extensive growth in computer technology, and increasing rates of urbanisation are some of the reasons for the scarcity of work in South Africa. The result is that many young people live in a state of permanent unemployment, which has many psychological repercussions, including loss of confidence and a failure to seek for work, which only worsens the grip of unemployment. Thus a psychological response is also needed to the impact of economic factors in the life situation of homelessness and its discourses. Most of the people coming to the streets of Pretoria from rural settings in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape or Mpumalanga are relatively unskilled and lack working abilities. Some of them cannot even speak or understand English, which is necessary for survival in an urban setting, especially in South Africa. These less skilled, uneducated youth in streets struggle to find the jobs they need to meet their economic and physical needs. Even though they are positive in their attitudes scarce resources and minimum or absent job opportunities lead them to socially deviant activities such as crime, violence, substance abuse, drug trafficking and rape. Thus an important part of the ministry of the Street Centre is helping homeless youth to prepare their CV’s and to hunt for jobs. Along with these practical measures, counselling interventions and spiritual classes also help the young people to discover their resources and to be self-equipped. However, these interventions which develop job-hunting skills will only re-order the queue for jobs, if no more jobs are created. Thus the governmental has to complement these social, psychological and spiritual interventions with effective job-creation programmes if the problem of unemployment is to be solved in South Africa.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter was a journey through various definitions of youth and issues related to these. The sector of society made up by youth in the South African context was identified, and the discourses of homelessness explored. Identifying and deconstructing these discourses are the tasks of a counsellor as facilitator of new stories. The various economic factors involved in the discourses related to homelessness were identified, and gave insight into the unavoidable economic condition of homeless people. The economic factors identified in the discourses can help policy makers in further empirical studies and policies. They contribute to alternate visions through which homeless youth can identify the trends in their stories and find better alternate understandings.