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**Eventually Everything Runs Out: Becoming Homeless in  
Singapore**

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Homelessness is an idea that seems far removed from the image of Singapore as an efficient provider of cheap affordable public housing for its citizens. In 2017, a point-in-time street survey of homeless people conducted by two local volunteer groups counted 180 people sleeping rough on a single night in Singapore. The majority they found were men, aged 50 years and above. While the survey showed that most had low-income work and experienced chronic homelessness, less was known about why older people in Singapore were becoming homeless.

Drawing on a three-year ethnographic study of how older people (aged 50 years and above) become homeless, and experience and exit homelessness in Singapore, this paper presents key findings that focus on the becoming homeless dimension. First, the paper argues that three key social institutions provided the necessary structural resources needed to avoid a housing crisis for older people in Singapore. These were the institutions of work, family and friends, and government (housing) assistance. The significance of these institutions is a direct reflection of an anti-welfare “social safety net” that prioritizes self-reliance and work, support from family and friends and views the government as the last resort. Second, older people in the study generally struggled with getting regular income from work, maintaining healthy relations with family and friends and gaining access to government assistance due to a combination of individual and structural factors. Finally, the paper shows that older people in the study began to sleep rough in public spaces when they “ran out” of resources from all three of the key social institutions of work, family and friends and government assistance. Succinctly summing up the situation for this group of older people in Singapore, an older person in the study commented, “Eventually, everything runs out.”