

# The Issue of Homeless Young People as an Alternative of Life – Subjective Evaluation of Life on the Street

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## Abstract:

This article is devoted to the issue of homeless young people as an alternative way of life on the street. Homelessness can understand as a complex generalized social failure of an individual characterized by their specific way of life, which puts them on the margins of society because of their inability to participate in their quality of life and disrespecting the requirements of the majority society. The aim of this article is to present the results

of qualitative research related to the phenomenon of homeless young people and to understand the causes of their social decline in two areas of their life on the street, namely in the causes of home loss and subjective evaluation of the situation. Only professionally, provided social work can stop or reduce the number of young people living on the street and help them successfully reintegrate into mainstream society.

## Introduction

It is possible to understand a homeless person from many perspectives. He may act in a derogatory way; the usual idea is a dirty man of older age, wandering the city and spending time at the train station or sleeping on a bench in a deplorable state. However, the truth is that anyone can lose their home or sleep in uncertain and unsuitable conditions, older men, women with children, members of minorities or young people (Skodova, 2021). It may be the young people who may have experienced the home only briefly and lost it as a child and went into institutional care, when, after leaving it, they had nowhere to go. These may be young people who have left home due to disagreements with their families or people with impaired mental health. These may be young people from different subcultures, who have chosen to be on the streets as their own alternative way in life. There are many reasons, but returning to majority society for these people may not always be easy (Pavelkova, Schavel, Skodova, 2022).

## Research methodology

The research aims to find out the key moments in the lives of homeless young people and why they got on the streets and what preceded it. The method of qualitative research was choosing which is best to enable a deeper insight into the issues addressed. The collection information technique was semi-structured interviews with five homeless young people who use social services and were clients of the Elim Day Center in Vsetin (Elim 2020). The data obtained were analyzed by coding (the interview was recorded with the consent of the participants, then a literal transcription was created, which was processed by coding, age category up to 30 years). The codes below we generated based on the encoding of the interview transcripts.

## Research questions and objectives

In the research, we aimed thoroughly get to know and bring closer the lives of homeless young people, which can contribute to a new perspective on working with a given target social group and gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon (Skodova 2021). We followed 2 areas in the lives of these young people, namely:

*the cause of home loss* (substance abuse, family disagreements, relationships with friends, different ideas about the future, job loss, finances, etc.) and *subjective assessment of the situation* (homelessness and life before it, feelings of guilt, escape to the past, lifestyle and past, contact with family, etc.).

### These questions provided answers to the identified research problems:

1. How did you find yourself in your current situation and what preceded it? (Cause)
2. How do you evaluate this situation and how do you perceive it? (Subjective assessment of the situation)

## Data processing

### Causea

There are several reasons that have led participants to lose their homes. It was often the accumulation of different factors at the same time.

Participant M. considers alcohol to be the main cause of his downfall on the street. Alcoholism developed gradually in him and interfered in personal relationships. Absence from employment subsequently led to termination of employment. The relationship to finances and their reckless spending on alcohol or tobacco also played a role. He attributes his situation to subjective fault, caused by his own fault.

At the age of 18, participant L. left her grandmother, who raised her and had her own flat. Disagreements in the family contributed to the lea-

ving, where the conflict was a different idea of the future. She did not feel accepted by the family and claimed that her family had given up on her. As a child, she experienced sexual abuse, which they did not want specifically addressed in the family, which hurt her. After moving out, she had her apartment for a period, but then lost her job, was unable to pay for it, she subsequently moved to a hostel. She found herself on the street repeatedly, constantly using accommodation in asylum houses. Her choice of partners and the use of psychotropic substances were also problematic.

Participant P. evaluates the cause of his situation as the accumulation of several factors, associated with the loss of employment. His parents moved out and he moved to his brother. After moving his brother to his parents, he arrived on the street.

Participant A. found herself on the streets at the age of 15. The reason why was a conflict with the mother and disagreements with the family. After leaving home, she spent time mainly with her boyfriend who also lived on the streets. Later, they lived together with his parents, but there were conflicts again. However, she also attributes the situation to subjective fault. She sees the main cause of her decline in her relationship with her parents and in her positive attitude towards alcohol.

Participant T. resists the usual stereotype that homeless people have alcohol problems. He also expressed his relationship with homelessness and alcohol in the help provided by his girlfriend. He lost his home after disagreements with his girlfriend and subsequently with his mother. He found himself on the street from day to day. The exact reason why his girlfriend threw him out of the flat is unknown to him to this day. He himself admits that he was in a bad mental state at the time. He overlooked many things in the relationship.

### **Subjective assessment of the situation**

Homelessness and the situations associated with it in the respondent M. evoked feelings of guilt or remorse. In some moments, these feelings can turn into suicidal thoughts in him. He feels the worst when he is alone. Relaxation for him is, if he has the opportunity to talk to someone, or turn on the radio to forget these self-destructive thoughts. He evaluates his situation very

negatively: *"I am not reconciled. I want to be better."*

The situation, in which the participant L. finds herself together with the use of addictive substances allegedly, assessed, by psychologists as an escape from the past but she does not agree with it. *"I went to see psychologist a lot. hey told me I had a lot of problems because I was raped from two to fourteen; my mother died; I was abused; my fingers are cut off; they just told me that this is how I deal with it; that I am running away from my past. I personally do not think that is true, but psychologists do."* She states that, unlike life before the team, she most misses contact with her own children.

Respondent A. describes life on the streets as a lifestyle. *"So there are, for example, people who have the opportunity to live; they also have their own house or something like that. But we don't want it that way; we like life on the streets more."* However, she herself considers this life as inadequate for her age. *"So I should start doing something for myself, I'm very old living on the street like that and so on."* During life on the streets, she most misses family contact and home comforts and sitting in front of the TV.

For the respondent T. homelessness is a certain life experience: *"But I'm glad I tried. I am a supporter of the fact that I would like to try as many things in life as I can; what I will enjoy; I have tried so many things on the street that I would not have experienced in a normal life."* On the street, however, he also lacks the absence of his own space: *"It is normal living; just going home after work; just being with a girlfriend; just being at ease, in my own place. I do not have my own place at all now which is really awful."* The absence of one's own space and the possibility of one's place is also an obstacle in the use of various residential social services, such as an asylum house or a shelter where one is constantly in a group without the possibility of privacy.

### **Discussion**

This contribution dealt with the issue of homeless young people in the town of Vsetin. The aim of the study was to find more about the key moments that led to the social decline of young people and about the obstacles that may hinder reintegration into society. We compare the results of our research with several other authors

who deal with this issue both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

The first factor examined was the cause of home loss. Marek, Strnad and Hotovcova (2012) describe that the breakdown or dysfunction of the family is often the cause of young people's homelessness. Different ideas about their future can also be an impulse to leave the family. This statement confirmed by our research, when in several participants the disagreements in the family and the sometimes-unsuitable family environment played roles in the collapse or leaving to the streets. Other identified causes were substance abuse; irresponsible attitudes towards finances; job loss; an unfavorable mental state. Vagnerova, Csemy and Marek (2014) divided the causes of leaving the street into several categories, namely: excessive use of addictive substances or alcohol inability and unwillingness to work systematically; a combination of behavioral disorders with reluctance to work; mental illness.

In our research, the cause was also the abuse of alcohol or other addictive substances which subsequently led to job loss and other problems associated with the use of substances. Hodgson, Shelton, Los (2013 in Kidd et al. 2018) describe a complex relationship between mental health; substance use; and homelessness. They estimate that 48.0 - 98.0% of homeless young people would meet the criteria for at least one mental health-related diagnosis, which we can agree with in the results obtained.

Homeless young people as such perceive homelessness in different ways. The resulting situation involves feelings of guilt. It can serve as an escape from the past, but it is also a life experience and a form of lifestyle. From the data analysis, we came to very similar results as Marek Strnad & Hotovcova (2012), when life on the streets symbolized a place of freedom where young adults do not have to follow rules or perform any duties.

### **Recommendations for practice**

Based on the results of qualitative research, it is possible to make a recommendation for providing of social work in clinical practice with the target group of homeless young people (Skodova 2021).

Homeless young people have often had various negative or traumatic experiences in their

past, such as: sexual abuse; loss of a loved one; a depressive episode. It would be appropriate for homeless young people to have easy access and the opportunity to address their problems or the consequences of these mental health events with a psychologist, psychotherapist, psychiatrist or other mental health professionals during the provision of social services.

Homelessness of young people is a phenomenon, which according to current statistics is on the rise. It is therefore important to think about the sufficiency of low-threshold day centers in particular for homeless people and their sufficient capacity.

In cases of homelessness, the longer a person is on the street, the more they integrate into a homeless lifestyle, and subsequent reintegration becomes more challenging. It is therefore important to motivate homeless people to change the situation as soon as possible and actively seek this social group within the field social services (Act no.108/2006 Coll., on social services).

### **Conclusion**

This paper is devoted to the issue of homeless young people. Having a home; background and a stable roof over your head is one of the basic things a person needs. Its absence is a problem that affects all aspects of an individual's life and affects the area, both personal and occupational, economic or health. In the environment of the Czech Republic, the issue of homeless young people have not given much attention. Through qualitative research, we have tried to expand knowledge about this phenomenon which has a growing tendency and is a serious social problem. The aim of the contribution was to analyze the problems of homeless young people in the city of Vsetin to find the extent and causes of the social decline of homeless young people, but also the subjective assessment of the solution to their unfavorable situation. Based on the obtained results, it is necessary to think about the recommendations for clinical practice for social and health social workers in the providing of social work with a disadvantaged social group of young homeless people. We consider it important to take care of the mental health of young people and to involve a psychologist or psychiatrist in the process of reintegrating a homeless young person back to majority of society. High-quality

screening activities within the field of social services and an active solution to the current situation are also essential.

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