

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/kontakt>

## Original research article

# Mental health problems as one of the factors in the development and persistence of homelessness

Q2 Tomáš Habánik\*

University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Social Sciences, Trnava, Slovak Republic

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 8 November 2017

Received in revised form

15 January 2018

Accepted 22 March 2018

Available online xxx

## Keywords:

Homelessness

Mental health

Addiction

Homeless people

## ABSTRACT

The study aims to identify the presence of psychiatric disorders (and the different types) among the homeless, while also seeking a correlation between homelessness and mental health problems. The study was conducted as qualitative research at a low-threshold day treatment center in Trenčín between January 1 and October 1, 2017. The research sample consisted of twelve users of low-threshold social services, and through these participants we examined and identified not only the extent of psychiatric disorders present in them, but also the current state of treatment and the interest of the participants in addressing existing mental health problems alongside their relationship to their social environment. The results of the study demonstrated the connection between homelessness and mental health problems, as well as the consequences of the failure to treat psychological problems due to how the homeless act and their behavior toward their social environment, limiting the ability to reintegrate them into society.

© 2018 Published by Elsevier Sp. z o.o. on behalf of Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice.

## Introduction

Society is currently able to tackle social insecurity in many areas of everyday life, whose consequences gives rise to various social risks inherent in conjunction with an adverse social/life situation [1]. In this context, an equally large number of people have no opportunity for adequate housing or have been prevented from receiving access to such housing [2]. As a result, they are forced to use various forms of non-compliant or insecure housing. In extreme cases this leads to

living on the street, as they have been unable either to overcome their plight or to cope with it. Housing loss and the homelessness resulting from this has become extreme [3].

There is a correlation between homelessness as an extreme expression of social exclusion and lack of access to basic human rights [4]. In light of these circumstances, it can be stated that, on a daily basis, homeless people experience exclusion and infringement by society of their basic human rights [5].

Although homelessness is connected primarily with housing loss, it is important to think about the deeper

\* Correspondence to: University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bučianska 4/A, 917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic.

E-mail address: [tomas.habanik@ucm.sk](mailto:tomas.habanik@ucm.sk)

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kontakt.2018.03.004>

1212-4117/© 2018 Published by Elsevier Sp. z o.o. on behalf of Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice.

definition of the term *home*. Home has a deeper context, providing a space not only to live in, but also a place that guarantees feelings of safety, security and expressions of identity or the development of social interactions with family, friends and acquaintances, thus contributing to an individual's emotional well-being [6]. Housing loss is often accompanied by a lack of social support, substance abuse, an inappropriate and dysfunctional family environment or experience with selected types of institutional care [7]. Homelessness is also usually accompanied by the widespread incidence of physical and mental health complications [8–10]. Here, health can be defined as one of the most important values in human life, from which all other aspects derive [11].

The trigger mechanism of homelessness can thus shape the consequences of psychiatric disorders and diseases in conjunction with the presence of socioeconomic problems. For these reasons specific to homeless people, they lack social support and have no safe haven, namely a *home*, and this is an indisputable factor affecting their mental health [12].

It is important to pay attention to a number of studies documenting significant cases of psychiatric disorders and mental illness among the homeless, touching upon depression and anxiety, suicide attempts and emotional problems [13]. However, a very substantial percentage of the homeless with mental illnesses are also dependent on alcohol or drugs [14]. A mental illness primarily affects their thinking as well as their moods and emotions, and also significantly affects their ability to establish and maintain relationships [15].

It is extremely difficult to tackle mental illnesses when homeless people have both no opportunity to receive adequate treatment and no space to recover. Homelessness is accompanied by minimal contact with a physician or missing medical files [16]. Two of the reasons many homeless people do not seek medical and specialized assistance can be the fear of getting help or bad experiences from having been rejected by so many doctors. Living rough on the street or in an open area leads to constant stress and danger, with the combination of homelessness and other psychiatric disorders only worsening overall health. Homeless people suffering from psychiatric disorders who are not getting treatment have only a minimal chance to break out of the street environment. In turn, the interconnection between these factors creates a space for other sociopathological phenomena (like prostitution and crime) to appear and expand [17].

Homeless Link, a charity dedicated to providing physical examinations to the homeless, has presented the results of its research involving 2590 homeless people in 19 counties in England. It shows a high percentage of health problems among the target group of its social work, where 73% of people responding to the survey admitted physical health problems, and 80% were suffering from some form of mental illness or disorder. In terms of substance abuse, 39% of respondents said that they were abusing drugs other than alcohol (or were recovering from drug addiction), while only 27% of them were using alcohol or recovering from alcohol dependence [18].

It can be further stated that substance abuse may be both a cause and the result of homelessness [19]. The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that approximately 38% of homeless people suffer from alcohol dependence and 26% of homeless people are drug addicts. While older

homeless people tend to be alcohol dependent, substance abuse is more prevalent among the younger people [15].

In this context, homeless young people can be characterized as those between 12 and 24 years of age with no possibility of finding stable housing and who are identified with the *street culture* value model. Alcohol and/or drug abuse is an indispensable part of the lifestyle for many young homeless people to mitigate everyday worries and stress, while also replacing other physiological needs (such as the need for sleep and food). Although drug use can be seen as an attempt to escape from reality, drugs ultimately only contribute to a worsening of existing problems [20]. In their selected research, the authors identified *marijuana* to be the dominant drug of choice among the young homeless, followed by *opiates* [21].

Research in the United Kingdom has also shown people in homeless shelters to be eight times more often affected by psychiatric disorders, and those sleeping on the street eleven times more often affected than the resident population. In contrast, research findings in Prague (examining the presence of mental illness and behavioral disorders among homeless people seeing general practitioners between January 1, 2005 and May 31, 2006) showed addiction to be the most significant issue among them (23%), followed by depression (19%), sleep disorders (17%), stress responses and adjustment disorders (16%), schizophrenia (8%), personality disorders (4%), anxiety disorders (2%) and other unspecified diseases and disorders (11%) [12].

A significant problem in addressing health problems is the reluctance of physicians to care for and treat the homeless. Another questionnaire survey conducted in Prague (between August and December 2005) concentrated on the homeless in low-threshold social services facilities. 900 men and women participated in the research, which produced the following findings concerning mental health:

- 57% of the men (420) and 45% of the women (72) responded that they were not suffering from any anxiety or depression.
- 37% of the men (275) and 49% of the women (77) responded that they suffered from a moderate level of anxiety or depression.
- 6% of the men (41) and 6% of the women (10) responded that they suffered from an extreme level of anxiety or depression.
- 12% of the men answered that they drank daily, while 20% were abstinent.
- 4% of the women answered that they drank daily, while 50% were abstinent. However, these figures should not be considered a relevant factor, due to the fear of no longer being provided social services in charitable facilities because of repeated consumption of alcohol.
- Nearly 20% of men and women said that they were abusing addictive substances other than alcohol and tobacco (predominately marijuana, followed by stimulants and opiates). The use of volatile substances such as toluene, considered low-cost and a drug for the poor, was likewise confirmed among a small number of people [22].

## Materials and methods

This study focuses on mental illnesses as a factor in the development and persistence of homelessness in today's

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7521321>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7521321>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)