

Homeless Young People – Relationships and Risks of living on the Street

J. Pavelkova (Jaroslava Pavelkova)¹, M. Skodova (Monika Skodova)², M. Schavel (Milan Schavel)³, B. Kuzysin (Bohumil Kuzysin)⁴

Original Article

¹ Tomas Bata University in Zlin, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Health Care Sciences, Zlin, Czech Republic.

² University of Ostrava, Faculty of Social Studies, Department of Social Work, Ostrava, Czech Republic.

³ University in Presov, Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Presov, Department of Christian Anthropology and Social Work, Presov, Slovakia.

⁴ University in Presov, Faculty of Orthodox Theology of Presov, Department of Christian Anthropology and Social Work, Presov, Slovakia.

E-mail address:

jpavelkova@utb.cz

Reprint address:

Jaroslava Pavelkova

Tomas Bata University in Zlin, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Health Care Sciences,

Stefanikova 5670

760 01 Zlin

Czech Republic

Source: *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*
Pages: 33 – 37

Volume: 13
Cited references: 9

Issue: 4

Reviewers:

Michael Costello

University of Scranton School of education, USA

Gabriela Lezcano

University of California, San Francisco, USA

Keywords:

Homelessness. Young People. Relationships. Risks of Street Life. Social Work. Reintegration

Publisher:

International Society of Applied Preventive Medicine i-gap

CSWHI 2022; 13(4): 33 – 37; DOI: 10.22359/cswghi_13_4_9 © Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention

Abstract:

This article brings information about homeless young people as an alternative way of life from the point of view of their daily survival on the street. The aim of the paper is to present the results of qualitative research associated with the phenomenon of homeless young people and to understand their life on the streets in terms of creating some relationships, namely solidarity, a functioning group as a family and its mutual help or variability, and obstacles to changing this lifestyle. It also in-

forms about the risks posed by the majority society, city police, robbery, including the search for the meaning of the day. It is important, but also in the interest of society as a whole, to provide qualified social help to this target social group and reduce the number of young people on the streets and successfully reintegrate them back into the majority society.

Introduction

This article is devoted to the issue of homeless young people whose number has been constantly increasing recently. It is possible to look at this phenomenon from many points of view, but the real loss of home and the need to sleep in uncertain and unsuitable conditions is dangerous, degrading and undignified for the human-minded individual, whether they are the elderly, women with children, members of minorities or just young people. These people are typical of their way of life. It is often a complex social failure, inability to participate in the quality of life, disrespectful of the requirements of society which sets them aside to the very edge of the majority society (Pavelkova 2014).

Homeless young people represent a specific target group that requires a different approach (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2013). It is found that younger homeless people spend less time on the streets, but on the other hand they have a higher level of stress which is based on a number of challenges: gaining independence; studying; getting employed; creating partnerships (Tomset, Fowler, Torro 2009). The reason may also be leaving home due to disagreements with the family or it may be children with impaired mental health (Skodova 2021). They can also be young people belonging to different subcultures who have chosen being on the street as their own alternative path of life. There are many real reasons, but returning to 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 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 obtained data 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 this research, we aimed to 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). It was about the lives of young people on the streets, namely: relationships (solidarity, group as a family, mutual help, changes and barriers to lifestyle changes, etc.) risks of life on the street (Municipal police, robbery, etc.); the course of the day on the street (trying to forget about the current social situation, finding the meaning of the day). These questions provided answers to the identified research questions:

1. Where are you usually used to sleeping?
2. How do you evaluate relationships with other people on the street?
3. How does your day usually go?
4. What do you consider to be the biggest risks of living on the streets?

Data processing

Life on the street

From life on the street, we were interested in research questions about relationships, risks associated with life on the street and the usual course of the day (adjusted according to Skodova 2021).

Relationships

M. has both positive and negative experiences with people on the street: "*There are people and people. There are people who will cough*

on you, and there are people who will help you. They give you bad food."

L. perceives others on the street as her "children". She needs to take care of them for example, she goes to the day center to cook for others who are currently sleeping together in a squat. She is trying to make solidarity between them and to share things: *"Mostly I try to teach them one thing, that what I give to everyone, when someone has wine, let them give it to everyone, and it's not even about the wine or the cigarettes, but we have to have always shared."* Lucia holds a certain role as a mother. At the squat, she always tries to ensure that there is enough food and water. According to her, relationships on the street can sometimes be selfish, but otherwise they evaluate them as idyllic: *"As it happens that we're mean to each other or something, each of them has a fly, and I don't say that no and sometimes they fight but they go again, they shake hands, they hug and like this. I would not even she did not solve; rather we have a terribly beautiful relationship with each other on the street. Everyone."*

For L. and A. the group is like their family. *"I actually have a family here, the boys on the street. Because they held me when I just ended up on the street and this, they always held me and helped me. Even though they helped me down, they also helped me up (laughs). How, one just knows that he is not alone, it is fine that he will find friends and it is great."* What is important for her is that as a party they stick together and provide mutual help: *"I didn't see it, for example, that somewhere else in the republic it happened that when someone was sick, that the group just agreed and took turns and went to look at the man and help him. In fact, I didn't experience it anywhere else but here at Vsetin."* Even though she currently lives with a friend, the group is still important to her, she is in contact with the people from the party, and if she does not have a relationship with a friend, she plans to return to it. *"Actually, we still stick together like this, and I believe that if it happened now that I would break up with a friend and end up on the street again, I know I always have a place to go, so at least."*

P. perceives the variability in relations on the street are mainly caused by the abuse of alcohol: *"So sometimes they are friendly and sometimes even, simply insane. It is just, depending on how*

well they have drunk."

T. has many negative experiences. He has been robbed on the street several times, losing his documents and feeling that other people from the street are "knocking" him down, preventing him from changing as he tries to resolve his situation.

The risks

The Municipal Police are identified as one of the risks associated with life on the streets. L. has several negative experiences with the Municipal Police. *"The police came, they kicked me out of the waiting room, I didn't even have a drink, nothing that I, as a homeless person, have no right to wait there at all, or to smoke or not at all ... And you don't explain like what like ... I don't know, you won't explain. That you do nothing, that nothing is so bad."* She has experienced several more incidents with the Municipal Police; according to her, she describes unnecessary fines as well as aggression by the police. Several times, they were allegedly physically assaulted by members of the Municipal Police and claim that the police have taken away their documents: *"I'm not the only one who's an ID card taken like this. When my ex-boyfriend was still out, they took his ID again and didn't return it to him, so he got fines of three hundred Czech crowns in the office."*

A. also describes the strained relations with the Municipal Police: *"So you are afraid of something every day. Therefore, the biggest risk ... I do not know. So here in Vsetin, especially the cops. Because when you slept somewhere or it smelled like that, they were able to throw us tear gas in a squat or something."* According to her, unjustified fines also hinder the approach of the Municipal Police: *"We have been fined so many times, unnecessarily, for no reason. We did not even drink alcohol or anything, but they just kicked us out ... and the boys certainly have problems to this day. There are a few people who are something and we were actually nothing for them."* According to her, the members of the Municipal Police are exalted above them which in turn has an impact on its self-assessment: *"For example, the police, the Municipal Police and the fact that they make you the biggest dirt and this hell."*

T. considers the biggest risk to be a possible robbery: *"That you rob people when they can."* At the same time, however, as he has several years of martial arts, he claims that this is the

only thing that can happen to him: "Yeah, yeah, I've been playing sports since I was a kid. Well, I just had the confidence that no one would hurt me like that. Even if they robbed me, that's probably all they could do."

The course of the day

In the case of A., when spending the day is also an attempt to forget: "So, I got up in the morning and went for wine, for example, to spend another day. There was always something to find to spend the day. And you don't think about it." Alcohol often helped to fill the day, thanks to which time passed faster. It was also important to try to find the meaning of the day: "And actually, if you drank for a while like ... as if you were running faster. Just really, kill that time somehow. That was the worst. It did not work out a few times or anything ... just. When you go from nothing to nothing ... that, you are just looking for the meaning of the day. It's just not possible to sit in one place and so, you can't solve that."

P. says: "I get up in the morning, wake up in the morning, light a cigarette, jump to the toilet, and ... go to the street or here to town. Otherwise, just like that. Various ways every day." It is similar with the daily routine with T. He fills the day by dealing with personal matters, such as processing documents, or trying to help others: "When I went to a brigade, it was a brigade, but otherwise my day is now not really ... I just deal with my personal things and help my friends around me as much as possible. Somebody lives worse than me."

The content of the day in young homeless people usually does not have a specific structure. This can lead to the loss of any daily routine which can later prove to be a problem, for example, when attending work. P. himself considers the loss of the daily routine to be one of the problems of his further reintegration to society. In some cases, the content of the day can also form by the social services themselves (Skodova 2021).

Discussion

This paper dealt with the issue of homeless young people in the town of Vsetin. The aim of the work was to find out more about the key moments that led to the social decline of young people and about the obstacles that can prevent rein-

tegration into society. We compare the results of the research with several other authors who deal with this issue both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

Solidarity, mutual help but also instability is sometimes an obstacle to changing the situation to characterize the relationships that young people have on the street with each other. In some cases, the group is a substitute for the family. Snow and Anderson (1993) also write about the variability of relationships with which we identify describe them as superficial and unstable, albeit easily follow-up.

According to research by Vagnerova, Csemy and Marek (2013), despite the fact, that group cohesion and friendship are very important for young people although in some cases it may be more a matter of making life easier on the streets, relationships with other homeless people are rather negatively assessed especially by women. In our research, on the other hand, female participants attach great importance and a significantly positive aspect to their relationships on the street. The difference may be caused by the town itself when there is a higher incidence of homeless people in Prague in the large capital, and it is easier to make new contacts, but also a greater risk of dirty tricks, etc. In a smaller town, homeless people forced to live more in the community, before their actions, they would not be anonymously lost in the hustle and bustle of the city.

The biggest risk associated with street life for young people was robbery; fear of not having to wake up in the morning; inter-relations with the Municipal police. Vagnerova, Csemy and Marek (2013) also confirm robbery, as a negative aspect of life on the street, when young homeless people often fall victim to various crimes. According to Stechova, Luptakova and Kopoldova (2009), the police's relations with the homeless are probably tense and often sharpened, based on experience from abroad. Our research confirmed this view when the Municipal Police posed one of the risks of street life for homeless young people. The authors of a foreign study conducted on this topic in Regensburg summarize (Jacobi *et al.*, 2003 in Stechova, Luptakova, Kopoldova 2009) that one of the problems in the relationship was the mutual ignorance of individual groups about the work and duties of the Municipal Police by the homeless and conversely, ignorance of the causes

and other aspects of homelessness from the point of view of the police. In the case 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 out this social group within field social services.

Conclusion

This article deals with the issue of young homeless people. Having a home, a place to rest, a functioning family, peaceful relationships and friends is one of the basic things one needs for one's life. One needs to fill aspects of life which fulfill the personal area, both work, economic, but also health. The Czech Republic does not pay due attention to this issue of homeless young people. With the help of qualitative research we tried to bring closer the knowledge about this phenomenon which has a growing tendency and represents a serious social problem. The aim of the work was to analyze the issue of young homeless people in the Vsetin (clients of the day center for homeless people Elim, aged 18-30 years) and find out how their daily life on the street actually takes place from the point of view of relationships (solidarity, group as a family, mutual help, changes and barriers to lifestyle changes, etc.), the risks of life on the street (the Municipal Police, robbery, etc.) and the course of the day on the street (trying to forget about the current social situation, finding the meaning of the day). Attention was paid to the relationship issues of homeless young people, including the risks associated with the lifestyle of this subculture on the street. It is necessary to realize how important the motivation for change and vision for the future for this social group is, change in their philosophy of thinking and if there could be any possible return to the family environment. According to Skodova (2021) to focus on caring for the mental health of young people and the involvement of a psychologist or psychiatrist in the process of reintegrating a homeless young person back into the majority society, including quality screening activities within the field of social services and active resolution of the current situation

References

1. ELIM (2020) [online] *Annual Report 2019*. Vsetin: Elim. [cit. 2022-06-29] Available from: <http://www.elimvsetin.cz/vyrocnizpravy>. (Czech).
2. JAKOBI C et al (2003) in STECHOVA M, LUPTAKOVA M, KOPOLDOVA B (2009) *Homelessness and the Homeless from the Perspective of Criminology*. Prague: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci [cit. 2022-06-29]. Available from: www.ok.cz/iksp/docs/344.pdf. (Czech).
3. PAVELKOVA J (2014) *Homeless and Beggars: Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Individuals*. Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave. (Czech).
4. PAVELKOVA J, SCHAVEL M, SKODOVA, M (2022) The issue of Homeless Young People. *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*, 13/1: 45-54. (Austria).
5. SNOW D A, ANDERSON L (1993) *Down on Their Luck: A Study of Homeless Street People*. California: *University of California Press*. (USA).
6. SKODOVA M (2021) *An alternative of the lives of homeless young people in Vsetin*. Zlin: UTB. (Czech).
7. STECHOVA M, LUPTAKOVA M, KOPOLDOVA B (2009) *Homelessness and the Homeless from the Perspective of Criminology*. Praha: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci [cit. 2022-06-29]. Available from: www.ok.cz/iksp/docs/344.pdf. (Czech).
8. TOMPSETT C J, FOWLER P J, TORO P A, (2009) Age Differences Among Homeless Individuals: Adolescence Through Adulthood. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 37/2: 86-99. [cit. 2022-06-29]. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2774834/>. (USA).
9. VAGNEROVA M, CSEMY L, MAREK J (2014) *Homelessness as an alternative existence for young people*. Praha: Karolinum. (Czech).