

LOSING HOME AS A DIFFICULT LIFE SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the issue of homelessness as a new social risk from the aspect of social work. The empirical part of the paper presents the methodology and partial results of qualitative research conducted with homeless people in a selected social services facility in the city of Prešov. The aim of the research was to identify ways of managing homelessness by clients of social work. The conclusion is devoted to the discussion and implications for social work.

Key words: Loss of home. Homelessness. Social work.

INTRODUCTION

In most cases, a person does not become homeless from day to day. The loss of housing is usually preceded by a number of other social events, which accumulate if any professional intervention is absent. Domestic violence, addictions, broken family relationships and friendships, financial problems, unemployment (Hovanová and Šlosár 2020), poverty, illness and other social events usually disrupt a person's social functioning prior to their loss of housing. It is therefore important to remember that other social events go hand in hand with homelessness. A person without a roof over their head cannot satisfy their essential needs. Sleeping on the street poses serious threats not only to their health but also to their life. Despite the defined circumstances, the Slovak legislation does not recognize the term homeless, which severely curtails the possibilities of intervention and social work. Thus, Rochovská and Miláčková (2011) claim that homelessness is the plight of Slovak cities. In their view, the state administration and self-government ought to solve this problem; however it is the members and volunteers of non-profit organizations, charities and communities that tend to address this issue.

The paper presents partial results of qualitative research, the priority of which was to analyze the consequences of homelessness on the social functioning of social work clients and subsequently identify ways of managing homelessness by social work clients. We are convinced that the imple-

mentation of partial research will contribute to the streamlining of social services for the homeless and to the overall improvement of the performance of social work.

1 Theoretical background

Exploring the phenomenon of homelessness, as well as setting policies for preventing and tackling homelessness, is difficult to carry out without a clear definition of the term. At the same time, however, it is not expedient and currently even common to squeeze the definition of homelessness into just a few words. At European level in particular, a relatively comprehensive "definition" of homelessness, known as the ETHOS typology, was developed, especially in the period 2002-2009, which captures more than 20 different life situations, such as homelessness or exclusion from housing. This typology has become the basis of national definitions of homelessness for the needs of public policies and research in most EU countries (Ondrušová, Gerbery, Fico et al. 2016; Concept of state housing policy until 2020; Operational Program Human Resources for the programming period 2014-2020). In revealing the consequences of homelessness from the point of view of social work, the key concept for us is social functioning, which is based on the assumption that people and their environment are in constant interaction. We work on the concept of social functioning (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Navrátil and Musil 2000; Navrátil 2007) which shows that the goal of a social worker is to support the social functioning

of the individual by helping him to restore or maintain a balance between sufficient task capacity and appropriate environmental requirements.

2 Methodology

The next part of the paper is devoted to the research methodology, in which we describe the research organization, the criteria for selecting a research sample and the research tool. One of the partial goals of the author's study focused on the consequences of homelessness on the social functioning of a social work client was to identify ways of coping with a difficult life situation (homelessness) by the respondent. In line with this goal, we set the following research question: What are the ways of coping homelessness as a challenging life situation on the part of the respondent?

A qualitative research strategy was chosen to achieve the goal. The research was conducted in 2019. Episodic interviews with homeless people (recipients of social services of the Greek Catholic Diocesan Charity in Prešov) were used as a research tool. Interview with instructions. It is based on a repeated call to tell an episode in a certain area of an individual's experience. For orientation, it is necessary to prepare a guide with a list of topics. The authors (Flick, Kardorff and Steinke 2004; Webster and Mertova 2007; Alleyne 2014) describing the narrative interview point out that in the first phase it is not appropriate for the researcher to enter into the client's story, the researcher should not interrupt the respondent and no longer supplement. It is recommended to ask the ambiguity and ask additional questions only after the respondent has finished talking. Clients participated in the research voluntarily, without the right to financial reward. In addition to interviews with homeless people, we also conducted three expert interviews (at the beginning, during, after the end of data collection) with a social worker working in the facility as part of triangulation. Participating observations in the facilities of the Greek Catholic Diocesan Charity in Prešov providing social services to homeless people (dormitory, shelter, halfway house) served to gain a more comprehensive view of the issue of homelessness. Interviews were recorded and anonymized

in writing with the consent of the respondents. Based on Punch (2014), we focused the ethical requirements in research planning and implementation on the participant's approach, consent and protection. The focal points included: informed consent, discretion and anonymity, ownership of data and results, use and misuse of results, honesty and trust and reciprocity. Our ethical responsibility included the general principles of academic integrity, honesty and respect for the other people involved in the research. We also followed the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and the Code of Conduct, as specified by the American Psychological Association (2010), in conducting our research.

3 Result of work

To evaluate narrative interviews, we chose a narrative analysis, in which we proceeded in three phases (Daiute and Ligtfoot 2004; Riessman Kohler 2007; Fina and Georgakopoulou 2015). As we were not allowed to record the interview by sound, we recorded the course of the interview. The interviews were conducted by two researchers - one conducted an interview and the other recorded the statements of the respondents. Based on the analysis of interviews through the identification of narratives in the following section, we offer an answer to a research question aimed at identifying the sources of homelessness management in our respondents. As shown in Scheme no. 1, based on narrative analysis, we have identified the following most common sources of homelessness management: faith in God, work/occupational therapy, efficient leisure time, facility rules.

Scheme no. 1: Identified homelessness coping strategies in respondents

Faith in God	•prayers, holy masses, confession, scripture reading
Effective leisure time	•doing crossword puzzles, caring of animals, cooking together, watching TV, reading, walking
Work / Occupational therapy	•magazine sale, distribution, occupational therapy, work based on contract
Rules of inclusion	•strict rules, regular/monthly savings, assistance during the abstinence, time organization, participation in life in the facility
Provision of social services	•organizing activities, providing social counseling (opportunity to air one's grievances, information, distribution ...)
People in the same situation	•new friendships from among the homeless community, new partnerships

Source: the authors' research

4 Discussion

The research question was about finding out how the respondent managed to manage homelessness. The analysis of the responses identified the following sources: faith in God, effective leisure time, work/occupational therapy, facility rules, provision of social services and people in the same situation. Respondents, along with the loss of housing, also lost their sense and zest for life - in this difficult life situation they found elements of their own mobilization, especially in faith in God, which helps them overcome difficult moments, accept their destiny and believe that there is a better future for them. Respondents are also helped by the organization's strict rules, which force them to abstain, make monthly savings and spend the day efficiently, and engage in meaningful activities. Interpersonal relationships in particular are an important source of help in managing homelessness. Nevertheless, that the respondents also lost their family by losing their home and their friends make new friendships and relationships at this stage of their lives. They emphasize that they are grateful that someone cares for them and that they have a roof over their heads, and also appreciate the help of social workers and animators who have patience with them, even if they lie or break the rules of the organization. The results of the research brought interesting findings concerning the identified sources of coping with this difficult life situation on the part of the client of social work. We are aware of several limits of research - especially the unreliability of respondents' answers, a certain degree of subjectivity of the researcher and the size of the research sample. As we worked in the research mainly with respondents suffering from mental health problems, we often encountered conflicting answers, confabulations, answers, which were not related to the question, etc. We therefore verified the clients' statements in interviews with the social worker and the client's record (triangulation). In addition to interviews with the expert, we also used participatory observation to increase the validity of the data obtained. We are aware that our research sample is not representative and we can only apply the presented research findings to a group of homeless people

in the organization in which the research was conducted. However, we are convinced that the implementation of such in-depth interviews brings a new dimension to homelessness research in Slovakia, as it offers some kind of qualitative probe into the individual life stories of respondents - homeless people. In addition to interviews with the expert, we also used participatory observation to increase the validity of the data obtained. We are aware that our research sample is not representative and we can only apply the presented research findings to a group of homeless people in the organization in which the research was conducted. However, we are convinced that the implementation of such in-depth interviews brings a new dimension to homelessness research in Slovakia, as it offers some kind of qualitative probe into the individual life stories of respondents - homeless people.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of partial research and the dissemination of their results in practice creates a platform for improving the performance of social work with homeless people in terms of providing better social services - especially counseling and sociotherapeutic activities. As the research focused on the identification of ways of coping with a difficult life situation (homelessness) by the respondent, we emphasize that a social worker working with homeless people should know the sources of coping with this difficult life situation for their individual clients and on this basis should to draw up an intervention plan. Building on your own resources to resolve the situation is the first step on the road to taking responsibility for

your life. As part of the implementation of sociotherapeutic activities, we recommend focusing on the following topics: related to adaptation to a new life situation, searching for the meaning of life and conflict resolution and assertive behavior (in the facility), implementation of joint leisure activities according to interest. As part of the therapy, our respondents appreciated the care of the animals very positively (despite the fact that the facility does not provide animotherapy - it was mostly stray cats and dogs that they cared for).

Affiliation

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