

THE HOMELESSNESS PHENOMENON IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Abstract: *This study addresses the specific issues of homeless people. First, I aimed to identify the needs and problems of this vulnerable group. I believe that identifying the specific needs of homeless people, of these poor and vulnerable groups is a key element in implementing effective social inclusion policies. Secondly, the determinants of the homeless phenomenon/homeless people, as well as the risks to which homeless people are exposed, ending up living on the street. After 1989 in Romania, the phenomenon of "homeless children/people" had an ascending evolution both in terms of amplitude and visibility, and the effects of social marginalization / exclusion are dramatic.*

It is very important to study the phenomenon of homeless people, because in Romania, after 1990 this phenomenon has grown, and in the sphere of risk groups, they represent the category of vulnerable group most severely affected by: poverty, school dropout, family dropout, neglect, abuse, prostitution, drugs, serious illness, HIV / AIDS, addictions, social exclusion, discrimination and abuse of all kinds. I will also present social support services and formulate some proposals for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of homeless people.

Key words: *homeless people; vulnerable group, social exclusion; poverty, social reintegration.*

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of homelessness is a dynamic and complex process, which affects people at different stages of life, for longer or shorter periods and in various ways. There are different types and target groups of homeless people such as: children and adolescents living on the streets; young people leaving placement centers who cannot be reintegrated into the natural or extended family; single mothers living on the streets; people with health problems such as alcoholism, addiction; people with mental health problems; homeless elderly people; families living on the streets; homeless people from ethnic minorities such as the Roma or those with a nomadic lifestyle: homeless immigrants.

FEANTSA (European Federation of Homeless Organizations) has developed a typology of the phenomenon of homelessness and exclusion from housing, a typology called Ethos. Therefore, the categories identified by ETHOS try to cover all life situations and different forms of homelessness in Europe:

- without roof* (without a shelter, harsh sleeping conditions)
- homeless* (have a place to sleep in special institutions or shelters)
- unsafe housing* (threatened with exclusion due to unsafe rent, evictions, domestic violence)
- inappropriate housing* (caravans, unsuitable housing, overcrowding)

Lack of shelter and housing can lead to human degradation, physical, emotional and mental insecurity, illness (sometimes contagious or incurable disease), occupational or social exclusion, discrimination based on social belonging (to a disadvantaged group) and sometimes even death (especially in very cold or hot seasons).

Homeless people are those who live on the streets, they children, young people, adults and the elderly who have been left homeless due to natural disasters, who have been evacuated due to non-payment of housing maintenance or non-payment of loans left without work. , out-of-school, people whose home is in an advanced state of degradation, deinstitutionalized young people whose family reintegration could not be achieved, people who have lost their home to moneylenders, people with and without mental problems. Homeless people living on the streets are the most visible and extreme form of poverty and exclusion. Thus, according to the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction (2015-2020), carried out by the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, the last census of Population and Housing (2011) registered 1542 homeless people, at national level, while the estimates made by the Ministry of Regional Development in 2008 were three times higher.

2. The specific issue of homeless people

Street people is the usual name for "Homeless Adults" (PAFA) or homeless who make up a category of disadvantaged people, excluded from public social and medical services (social assistance, social canteen, health insurance system, etc.). Also in this sense, Badea V (2008) defines homeless people as a category of disadvantaged people.

In Romania, the legal definition of a homeless person is provided by law 292/2011 on the National Social Assistance System, namely: *homeless persons represent a social category consisting of single persons or families who, for single or cumulative reasons, social, medical, financial, economic, legal or major, live on the street, live temporarily with friends or acquaintances, are unable to support a rental property or are at risk of eviction or are in institutions or penitentiaries from where that, within 2 months, they be discharged, respectively released and have no domicile or residence.*

Homeless people usually go through an experience that can be called trauma, marginalization and social exclusion generated by homelessness, lack of economic resources, loss of social support (especially family ties), poor health (often aggravated by a form of disability), addiction (alcoholism, drug addiction), prostitution, begging, theft, sexually transmitted diseases.

Homeless people are those who do not have a home, live on the streets, in canals, night shelters (such as "Casa Ioana" in Bucharest), under bridges, etc., and do not refer to those who live temporarily with friends/relatives, until they either find a definitive positive solution or become homeless. Not having access to adequate housing is a serious manifestation of social exclusion. We could add that not having a home and living under the open sky is - in our opinion, the harshest form of social exclusion, along with probably the lack of identity documents.

In the quantitative social research "*Assessing the phenomenon of street children and young people.*" (2014), *Save the Children* defines homeless people as people who stay permanently or only at a certain time of day on the street (in the broadest sense of the term, including makeshift shelters, sewerage system, abandoned vehicles or buildings, etc.), procuring their means of subsistence alone or in groups, through legal or illegal activities. From a housing perspective, the sample included both people who spend the night on the street or in makeshift housing (sewerage system, abandoned cars, abandoned buildings, tents, etc.) - defined as permanently on the street, and those who have a home, but uses the activities listed above to make money - defined as temporarily on the street

The study *Child abuse and neglect* highlighted, in 2013, at national level, the main characteristics of child abuse. Its conclusions showed that ways of disciplining abuse

are still widespread, even if we are talking about the general population. In the case of street children and young people, the risk of abuse, in all its forms, proves to be significantly higher, especially since we are talking about severe forms of abuse, physical, sexual or exploitative abuse.

UN - The United Nations has divided the category of homeless into two major groups: *primary phenomenon* (or rooflessness), this category includes people living on the streets without a shelter; *secondary phenomenon*, this category may include people without a place of usual residence who frequently move between different types of accommodation (including shelters, institutions for such persons). This category includes people who live in private homes but do not have a permanent residence in the form of a census.

Homelessness and domestic violence have a serious impact on their health, education and well-being. These effects include higher rates of anxiety, emotional problems, behavioral problems and mental illness.

Impact on children's health

Children who grow up outside a home get sick more often and have higher rates of acute and chronic illness. In addition, many suffer from emotional or behavioral problems that will hinder the development and learning process. These children tend to have anxiety, depression, or isolation.

Impact on education

Although most children and young people without a home attend school, not all of them go to school regularly. Among those who are enrolled and attend school, some have problems accommodating and learning. Compared to other children, they are more likely to experience developmental delays and learning difficulties.

3. The determining factors of the homeless people phenomenon

The causes of children's presence on the street are multiple and there is a perception that they are relatively deductible: conflicting relationships with both parents or with one of them (usually the father), neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, acute poverty, deinstitutionalization, improper conditions and insecurity in the centers placement etc.

Here are some of the causes that generate the appearance of homeless people and their specific problems:

- *Social exclusion* refers to the multiple factors that have the effect of excluding homeless people from housing, education, health and access to services, forms of discrimination, marginalization and segregation (Commission of the European Communities, 1993: 1).

- *Poverty*, lack of income, loss of housing, loss of employment, divorce, as a result of which one of the spouses was forced to leave the marital home; gambling, quarrels and misunderstandings with family and relatives, who severed all ties with them, drove them away from home or they left on their own initiative; victims of real estate scams; excessive alcohol and drug use that led to the loss of housing and identity documents, the family environment of origin, the rupture of relationships with relatives and family; school dropout, domestic violence, abuse, prostitution, deinstitutionalization, release from detention and loss of property held as a result; accumulated and unpaid debts for communal services; emigration, without success, to work abroad; following long-term cohabitation and their breakup.

- Extreme Poverty - In Romania extreme poverty is associated with long-term unemployment, work in the informal sector, lack of skills, single-parent family or other atypical forms of family, social marginalization, social disintegration phenomena. The

social and psychological characteristics of the culture of poverty are: overcrowding of the area and housing, lack of privacy, high incidence of alcoholism, domestic violence and low crime, unofficial marriages and a special emphasis on family solidarity. *The European Platform for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* was launched in 2010, which is also active in 2020. This is one of the major initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy for sustainable and inclusive growth.

- *The family environment, the family climate, the family of origin*, is a major cause for which the child end up on the street. Most of the families they come from are poor, they do not meet their needs, but poverty is not the only cause. Poverty, misunderstandings, domestic violence, abuse, lack of communication between family members, unfavorable living conditions, lack of affection, attention, indifference and lack of supervision and control from parents, cause them to run away from home, children to reach the streets. Arriving in the street, the child becomes attached to the group in the street, begins to feel accepted and valued. It makes friends with older children, out of the need to seek protection, to be protected. In the group, the street child feels secure, finds a common place to sleep, shares food, money, cigarettes. In most cases, street children are integrated into groups. Within the group, there is a leader, rules, norms, values, different from those within the family. Therefore, a child who has lived in such a group will find it difficult to reintegrate into society and the biological family.

In the opinion of Adrian Dan, (2003) the determining factors of housing exclusion in Romania are four in number: socio-demographic, socio-economic changes, deficits in the provision and distribution of welfare and traditionally vulnerable groups. The author also states that *housing poverty is a cause that causes constant effects on housing, meaning sleep deprivation, poor hygiene, lack of privacy (with an effect on health and favoring conditions for sexual abuse), severe disruption or lack of information processes, diminished capacity to accumulate resources to ensure survival and development (food, clothing, etc.)* I end up in this unfavorable situation due to family conflicts, divorces, real estate scams or job loss. There are **different types of vulnerability factors**:

- **structural**: economic process, immigration, citizenship, lack of adequate and affordable housing, high credit and unemployment rates, the social impact of homelessness in Europe, the economic crisis.

- **institutional**: main social services, allowance mechanism, institutional procedures (lack of adequate assistance services, for example when leaving prison or a mental hospital).

- **personal**: disability, education, dependency, age, the situation of immigrants (divorce, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, death of a partner, loss of a job, drug use, human trafficking).

Physical abuse and consequences on the child

"Physical abuse involves the use of physical force by the caregiver (parent, guardian, foster parent, babysitter) resulting in child injury." (Constantinescu, 2008: 119). Also, the author mentioned above presents some manifestations of physical abuse, such as: beatings, suppression of meals, physical isolation, exploitation through work, and various punishments, in order to discipline the child. Physical abuse can have physical, neurological consequences and can lead to illness, injury, disability and even death. It also frequently leads to the installation of aggressive behaviors, emotional and behavioral problems and to learning difficulties and decreased school performance. The context in which physical abuse occurs can be in the family, various institutions (eg school, re-education center, placement center), in the community (eg on the street).

The consequences of emotional abuse

Regarding emotional abuse, Constantinescu, M. and others (2017) stated that it is the most common and is found in all forms of abuse. It can manifest itself through: insults, threats, intimidation, humiliation, isolation, killing your favorite animals, deprivation of food, sleep and other needs. Repeated emotional abuse has especially long-term consequences on a child's development, mental health, behavior, and self-esteem. The contexts of this type of abuse are mainly those related to domestic / family violence, adults with mental health problems and parents with low parental abilities.

Sexual abuse and its consequences for the child:

The phrase child sexual abuse is a term that covers several types of abusive behavior, sexually abusive abuse, such as: nudity, exhibitionism, kissing, palpation, masturbation, oral sex, imitation sexual intercourse... (Barker , 1995, *apud* Irimescu, 2003). Sexual abuse can often be recognized through self-aggressive behaviors, depression, loss of self-esteem, and sexual behavior that is inappropriate for the child's age. Sexual abuse is a special category "attracting, persuading, using, corrupting, forcing and forcing the minor to participate in activities of a sexual nature" (Constantinescu, 2008: 200)

The consequences of neglect

Neglect consists of forms of abuse that endanger physical, emotional, cognitive and social development, thus depriving children of biological, emotional and educational needs. Constantinescu Maria (2008) shows that neglect manifests itself in several forms:

-*growth and developmental deficiencies*: errors in the preparation of food for infants and young children are the causes of weight loss and dystrophy.

-*educational neglect*: allowing absenteeism

-*physical neglect* consists in the failure of the parent to ensure decent living conditions, physical assistance, especially when the child is dependent on the parent, failure to provide supervision, neglect of clothing;

-*medical negligence* consists in the parent's lack of interest in the child's health,

-*emotional neglect*: inadequate care and affection consists in neglecting the child's need for affection, attention, emotional support

-*inappropriate abandonment and supervision* is characterized by the abandonment of children by parents, by their exclusion from the family, by the disinterest of parents in raising and caring for children.

Severe neglect, especially of young children, greatly affects the growth and physical and intellectual development of the child, and in extreme cases can lead to hospitalization, disability and / or death of the child, inappropriate social behaviors (aggression, anxiety).

4. The risks of this vulnerable group

The risks of life on the streets are multiple, taking various forms, such as: chronic diseases, begging, school dropout, exploitation at work, sexual exploitation, prostitution, drug trafficking, dependence on illegal or legal drugs (tobacco and alcohol). Traumas, negative emotions, repeated family shocks, determine the appearance of feelings of fear and insecurity, social maladaptation, school dropout and serious attachment problems, lack of confidence in adults and in themselves. Therefore, children who have been traumatized by abusive parents experience a feeling of insecurity and inferiority, prone to anti-social acts, to acts of delinquency, to crime.

School dropout and illiteracy are other specific problems of homeless people. It is known that most "street children" come from poor families with low socio-

professional status, which leads to school dropout. When the child reaches the street, he rarely keeps in touch with the school. Some children never went to school, due to the negligence of their parents, others end up on the street from families or Placement Centers, most of the children end up on the street from an early age and, due to this, I do not attend school early. , failing to make purchases, or have not acquired a minimum knowledge of writing and reading.

In the research *Street, between Fascination and Easement*, coordinated by Sorin Cace and Dana Costin Sima. (2003), Flavia Marin considers that, in this case, there is functional illiteracy due to the disinterest of the family, on the one hand, and on the other , the education system, the children going, first through a period of absenteeism, before leaving school for good. Poverty, with its many implications, has been found to be a cause of early school leaving. Instead of being included in the education system, they are sent to work, to beg, to bring an income to their families. Other causes of dropping out of school are the lack of support and involvement that parents have for their children, as well as repentance, leading them to drop out of school permanently. Reaching the street is also due to school dropout, which, together with family and / or institutional dropout (placement centers, protection institutions), are the main causes of this phenomenon.

The family and the school are two of the most important factors of the individual's socialization, and when the child arrives on the street, breaks the connection with the family and the school, his integration will be very difficult, not knowing the basic rules according to society.

Begging - is another specific problem of street life, is the most extensive form of work from which they get most of their income, being considered the main source of income. To this are added thefts, prostitution, loading and unloading of goods and washing windshields and cars, work on terraces, kiosks, shops, work in markets, work in construction and other occasional work. Begging is practiced by both girls and boys. It is the easiest way to get money or different products. Begging takes different forms. Most often, begging is found at traffic lights and intersections, taking advantage of the mercy of citizens. Begging on the subway is specific to Bucharest, there are different ways in which street children try to convince and sensitize travelers in different ways to give them money. Other specific places for begging are churches, cathedrals and begging on the train, raising awareness on train journeys. Also, in many situations, he steals.

Thefts are also specific to the lives of homeless people, the vast majority of street children steal. Thefts are small, in some cases, but there are situations in which the consequences can be serious, some of them being convicted of various thefts. Therefore, the work of street children is present in various forms, they most often using what is offered to them.

Drugs - Drug use inevitably occurs in the lives of children / young people / people on the street. The drug is, in the classical sense, the substance that being absorbed by a living organism, modifies one or more functions: in the pharmacological sense, the drug is the substance whose abusive use can create physical and mental dependence or serious disorders of mental activity, perception and behavior. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines drug abuse as *any excessive, continuous or sporadic use, incompatible or related to medical practice, of a drug.*

Consumption can be: *exceptional*, in order to try a drug once or several times, without continuing; *occasionally*, without becoming addicted; *episodic*, in a given circumstantial and systematic situation, characterized by addiction. In drug addiction, the propensity to use drugs leads the individual to a condition that changes his

behavior, family and social relationships (Brez, 2019: 182). Drug use is one of the most serious social problems facing contemporary societies. From a medical-psychological point of view, drug use determines the individual's dependence on substances used to produce the disinhibition effects of the central nervous system or to avoid the pain caused by withdrawal syndrome (stopping drug use). From a social point of view, drug use has negative consequences on health resources, determines the increase of illegal drug trafficking, as a component of organized crime.

According to the results of a research coordinated by Diana Serban, (2003), a qualitative survey aimed at capturing the effects of solvent consumption, by using the method of direct observation on different groups of street children / youth, as well as by qualitative analysis for non-directive interviews. , the following results: like alcohol, more solvents used by street children affect health, cause a depression of the central nervous system, with the appearance of euphoria, increase the risk of social deviance, occur socially dangerous behaviors, occur confusion, speech disorders, weakening of discernment.

"- Benzinolac is the best... but this one is good, a little, with that kind of gas that makes you dizzy... like you're drunk. It's not like benzinolac that is attacking you all of a sudden! You took two shots, you ate, you recovered!"

Other symptoms include: nausea, dizziness, vomiting, repeated sneezing, diarrhea, cough. Also, repeated inhalation is a common practice among street children / young people, it can cause serious consequences, through disorientation, unconsciousness, decreased cardio-respiratory rhythm, suffocation with the plastic bag, unconsciousness, even death. The research highlights a number of chronic effects of drug use: liver dysfunction: "After pulling the bag for so long, I kind of miss them all... The head, gives more liver. I feel it big and hard "; respiratory and lung dysfunctions: *"I have a wound here. A wound, but it passed like that, oleacă, but it hurts. My lungs hurt here, especially in the evening. I know why: because of the bag, the auroch. He ate us on time, he laid us down on time..."*

So, in terms of the evolution of street children, substance use is addictive and sometimes has negative, dramatic repercussions. In terms of the risk of becoming drug users, children and young people on the street are in the most vulnerable situation.

Prostitution - *The Dictionary of Sociology (C. Zamfir and L. Vlăsceanu, 2003)* defines prostitution, "the oldest profession in the world, is the acquisition by a woman of means of subsistence by having sex." *Prostitution means the receipt of money or goods in exchange for sexual services, on a regular or occasional basis, by women, men or transsexuals, regardless of whether or not the person in question consciously defines this activity as income-generating.* According to the study *Sexuality of those who live on the street* by Costin Sima, (2003), girls do not prostitute themselves permanently, but only in cases where they have no income or nothing to eat. Usually, another older person initiates them, sometimes even the parents are the ones who exploit them, forcing them. This behavior, once learned, will be practiced whenever the need for money reappears. Unfortunately, street children are also exploited by other members of the street children's group. They deal with the contamination of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV-AIDS, hepatitis, physical, emotional abuse, abuse, and sometimes the risk of being killed. Ursan (2017) mentions that *the main risks of HIV transmission to girls who sell sexual services are due to unprotected sex with clients.* Drug use and prostitution pose major challenges, from individual medical and public health issues to marginalization, social exclusion, stigma and discrimination.

5. Conclusions

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union on social security and social assistance states: *In order to combat social marginalization and poverty, everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including adequate food and nutrition, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services.* For the rehabilitation and socio-professional reintegration it is necessary to create as many social protection and support services for this socially vulnerable category of welfare beneficiaries, to create mobile teams to work directly in the street, to regularly monitor each case and to intervene. Early are more than important. As a solution to this problem, the objectives of emergency social centers for homeless people are:

- preventing social exclusion and ensuring the social protection of homeless people;
- monitoring the number of homeless people, as well as the percentage of solving existing cases;
- ensuring normal living conditions, respectively accommodation;
- counseling, support for social integration, for combating the social marginalization of this category of people.
- solving the problems related to the lack of identity documents:
- facilitating access to medical services
- identifying a job
- identifying an alternative to living
- professional training by enrolling the beneficiaries according to their studies and potential in qualification courses;

According to the provisions of the Social Assistance Law no. 292/2011, social services addressed to homeless persons aim at providing accommodation for a determined period, associated with the provision of counseling services and social reintegration or reintegration, in accordance with the identified individual needs. The local public administration authorities are responsible for setting up, organizing and administering social services for the homeless.

Once in the critical situation of living on the street, people have low self-esteem, go into mental regression. Through psychological, medical and socio-professional counseling in a specialized center, obtaining a job and a living space, through *integrated and proactive programs, actions with a positive impact in restoring the potential for integration of vulnerable groups or individuals in the community, in order to gain their autonomy and independence* (Constantinescu, 2018: 15) there is the reverse process of regaining self-esteem and self-identity, while returning to society. All this contributes, together to prevent what we call the *risks of life on the streets*.

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