



Homelessness research: Definitional issues and first mapping of methodologies

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Part II. Various methodologies used in research about homelessness

The purpose of this paper is to draw a provisional map of the various methodologies in use in the study of homelessness. Each methodology is described briefly, as it will be detailed in the following workshops (more detailed reports in French are also available).

Only a few examples of each method will be listed. For other European countries, a list of possible sources (which should now be updated) may be found in Avramov, 1999, pp.140-150.

A. Quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative data (statistical surveys, register-based or administrative data) and qualitative data are complementary in homelessness research (this issue will be developed in workshop 4, see technical annex). Some of the difficulties involved are similar (how to contact a homeless person, how to recontact previously interviewed persons), some are different (the generalization is not based on the same principles). The following mapping of methodologies seeks to include both qualitative and quantitative methods, but we rely on those participants who have extensive experience of qualitative data to develop their specificities in the discussion and in workshop 4. An attempt to describe the complementarity between qualitative and quantitative data can be found in (Marpsat, 1999; 2001). The research carried out by several of the network participants is an example of such complementarity (for a more sceptical view see: Stax, 2000).

B. Contextual data

The necessity of analysing each national context will not be developed here but must be kept in mind. The danger with surveys or other data relating to individuals is that they induce us to interpret the causality of homelessness in individual terms only, such as state of health, especially mental health, unemployment, lack of social networks... But these contributing factors must be put in perspective, and considered in the wider context of employment levels, social policy on mental health (deinstitutionalization), one-parent families, immigration policies, migration flows, etc.

C. Point-in-time data on literal homelessness

Table 1, included in this paper is a first attempt to classify the main sources of data used in research about the homeless according to the method employed. Quantitative data must be understood as either statistical surveys

or register-based (or administrative) data. Qualitative data are obtained mostly from in-depth interviews, but other sources include participant or non-participant observation, analysis of texts written by homeless persons.

In the table, the columns separate the sources of data according to the interviewees/source:

- 1) interviews of service managers about their clients or services, or administrative or register-based data;
- 2) interviews of the homeless themselves (a variant being texts written by the homeless));
- 3) interviews of the general population.

The rows distinguish the various sources according to the time span envisioned:

- 1) point-in-time data (the data is collected at a given time or over a short period, and gives results that are valid at a given time, or on an average day or an average week of the data collection period);
- 2) longitudinal data (participants must be interviewed several times over a given—and lengthy—period, such as a few months or a few years).

Though not completely unrelated, this must be distinguished from the time factor in the definition of the field of study: does the study deal with people who are homeless at a given point in time (even if it produces longitudinal data on them, but there are no “new entries” in the sample), or with people who have been homeless (by whatever definition) at least once in a given period (one year, five years, or other). The number and the characteristics of the persons involved are different according to the chosen point of view (see Table 2 in the appendix).

C1. Point-in-time data using statistical surveys (workshop 2)

Definition

Historically, when the first studies of homelessness began in the US, three forms of data collection were attempted, each replacing its predecessor:

- interviews of experts, asking them to estimate the number of homeless people in a given area. Example: the report by Mary Hombs and Mitch Snyder in 1983 (*Homelessness in America: A forced March to Nowhere*, CCNV – Community for creative non-violence);
- interviews of homeless people in shelters and in a sample of outside areas (the “street and shelter” method). Example: the Nashville survey (Lee B. A., 1991, “The Nashville Method”, in : Conference Proceedings for Enumerating Homeless persons : Methods and Data Needs (Taeuber, ed.), Washington D.C., U.S. Bureau of the Census (Conference Proceedings), 139-146; the Rossi survey in Chicago (Rossi P.H., Wright J.D., Fischer G.A., Willis G., 1987, “The urban homeless: estimating composition and size”, *Science*, 235, 1336-1341); the S-night of the 1990 US Census (Taeuber C.M., Siegel P.M., 1991, « Counting the Nation's Homeless Population in the 1990 Census », in : Conference Proceedings for Enumerating Homeless persons : Methods and Data Needs (Taeuber, ed.), Washington D.C., U.S. Bureau of the Census (Conference Proceedings), 92-122;
- interviews of homeless people in various services for the homeless: shelters, but also soup kitchens, outreach services etc., to reach people not using shelters.

The last type of survey (based on interviews of homeless people who are service users) is now something of a standard in surveys of homeless people. Coverage issues and weightings to correct overrepresentation of multi-users have to be dealt with.

Some examples

*** USA**

- 1984, the Rand Corporation survey called the *Los Angeles Skid Row Study* (Koegel *et al.*, 1996);
- 1987, the Urban Institute survey of cities over 100,000 inhabitants (Burt, Cohen, 1988);
- 1991, the RTI survey in Washington DC metropolitan area (*Homeless and transient population study*) (Dennis *et al.*, 1993; Dennis and Iachan, 1993);
- 1996, the US national survey conducted by the Census Bureau (Burt *et al.*, 1999 and 2001) ;

*** European countries**

For a survey of research in the countries participating in the network, see the other members' papers. For all countries belonging to the European Community, see the site of the FEANTSA. A more detailed bibliography will soon be on this website.

France

- 1995 and 1998, the INED surveys in Paris (Marpsat and Firdion, 2000; Marpsat and Firdion, 2001; etc.);
- 2001, the INSEE national survey (Brousse *et al.*, 2002a and 2002b);
- FNARS (a French federation of associations) survey in 2001 (CSA 1994; FNARS 1997);

Germany

- 1989-1990, the Munich University (psychiatric department) survey (Fichter *et al.*, 1996; Greifenhagen and Fichter, 1997; Fichter *et al.*, 1997);

Spain

- 1992-1993, the Complutense University survey in Madrid (Vázquez *et al.*, 1997 and 1998; Munoz *et al.*, 1998 and 1999);

Other European countries

- 1993, the ICCR (Interdisciplinary Centre for Comparative Research in Social Sciences) (Kofler, 1999) survey in Vienna (but the results were not weighted).

Plus most of the surveys used as baseline surveys in collecting panel data: the Rand Corporation "course of Homelessness" survey in 1990-1991 (Marshall *et al.*, 1996), the Complutense University survey in 1997 (Munoz and Vázquez, 1999), the Munich survey in 1995 (Fichter and Quadflieg, 1998), etc.

Difficulties

Two difficulties must be kept in mind when using this method:

- this method can be used to reach people who are homeless in a restricted or literal sense, that is persons sleeping in a place unfit for human habitation or in a shelter or other form of housing provided by NGOs and other organisms. The coverage of people who sleep in places unfit for habitation is good as long as they also use food distributions (or other services included in the survey) and these services are developed in the area surveyed. This is the case in Paris where a study of the coverage of the national INSEE survey has been conducted by INED (by following outreach services). INED has also conducted a small survey on non French-speaking homeless people who were not interviewed by INSEE (Marpsat *et al.*, 2002; Marpsat and Quaglia, 2002). In countries with many immigrants, a problem of coverage arises due to the difficulty of interviewing people who do not speak the national language.

Although there are some additional difficulties in collecting the data, these surveys can be adapted to interview people sleeping in gathering areas such as train stations (the station is considered as a "service" and sampled in the same way). The RTI survey in Washington is an example of such an adaptation.

Definitions of what is a shelter can also vary and their influence on results should not be underestimated. For example, the INED survey in Paris did not include the *centres maternels*, hostels for mothers with young children under the age of three, whereas the INSEE survey did (the question of whether to include these hostels is not simple, since although not primarily intended for homeless people they are increasingly used to house women in very difficult circumstances that often, but not always, include a housing problem). The consequence is clearly visible in the results: on an average week, women represent 13% of the homeless in the INED survey, and 36 % in the INSEE survey.

These surveys are not useful tools for interviewing homeless people in a broader sense. People who sleep in squats or in someone else's home are reached by these surveys if they make use of food distributions (or other services included in the survey), but this is true for only a small proportion. The study of people who use food distributions even though they are not homeless provides insights into a particular form of poverty. Such studies have been conducted in the USA, Spain and France.

- a set of weightings is needed to allow for differences in service utilisation, otherwise persons who use more than one service will be overrepresented. In France, these weightings have existed since the first Paris survey (INED,

1995) and their formula was improved by the INSEE team during the first French national survey of the homeless (INSEE, 2001).

Results obtainable

These surveys provide information about the living conditions of homeless people at a given time, and about their characteristics and background. They give estimates of the number of people that are homeless at a given time. They cannot tell us much (though with the help of hypotheses and models they can tell us something) about the duration of homelessness and how it varies according to various characteristics, or about the number of people who have had at least one homeless episode in a given period of time. More precisely (see Table 2), a point-in-time survey can provide information on how long people who are currently homeless have been in that situation. But it cannot answer the question of the length of the episode for people who, for example, entered homelessness in the past year. This is because at a given time, people who have had long episodes of homelessness are much more numerous (in overall proportion) than they are among the people who entered homelessness in a given period. To know the total length of an episode, we must either wait till people exit homelessness (that is, have longitudinal data) or model the data with hypotheses.

Another approach has been attempted with capture-recapture methods, but this presents some methodological difficulties (the hypotheses of the capture-recapture method are not satisfied in the case of homeless people) (Marpsat and Firdion, *La Rue et le foyer*, 2000).

C2. Point-in-time data using service records (workshops 2 and 3)

Record data from service providers, or surveys about their clients answered by service providers can also inform about the size and characteristics of the homeless population on a given night. With this kind of data one must be careful to correct for double-counting of homeless persons who use several services (see below, in the section about collecting data over time). In France, the ES survey conducted every second year by the Statistical Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs (DREES) in the shelters and hostels servicing persons in great difficulty can be considered an example of this type of survey. The use of record data will be briefly addressed in workshop 2 but examined more thoroughly in workshop 3 on longitudinal data. See part D2 below; the difficulties listed for record-based research in a longitudinal perspective are in part the same as those for point-in-time data.

D. Collecting data over time: panel data, record data (workshop 3)

Two main methods are used to collect data over time: panel surveys and the use of service records. Both have advantages and limitations. A third method is the inclusion of questions on previous homeless episodes in surveys of the general population, which has given some insights into the prevalence of homelessness (Arduin *et al.*, 2002).

In the first two methods, a question to be explored concerns the circumstances in which a person manages to get out of a homeless situation. Depending on the type of situation considered as “being no longer homeless” and their length, the results may vary. For example, part of the “episodically homeless” described by Dennis Culhane in his record-based study can be in institutions or precarious housing between two literally homeless episodes (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998). This is why the HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) in the United States is now defining as chronically homeless not only those who “have been continuously homeless for a year or more” but also those who “have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years”.

D1. Panel data

Description

Panel surveys include one baseline survey (see “point-in-time surveys” above), and one or several follow-up surveys with the same interviewees (or rather, with those who have accepted to be interviewed several times).

Some examples

* USA

- 1985, the (first?) longitudinal survey of homeless people on a group of *voluntary* homeless men (not a random sample) by Sosin, Piliavin and Westerfelt in Minneapolis (Sosin *et al.*, 1990)
- 1990-1991, the Rand Corporation “Course of Homelessness” survey (Marshall *et al.*, 1996) (among several surveys of this type in the USA);

- 1991-1993, the survey by Wong and Piliavin in the county of Alameda (California) (Wong and Piliavin, 1997, 2001)

*** European Countries**

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Germany

- the Munich survey in 1995 (Fichter and Quadflieg, 1998);

Spain

- the Complutense University survey in 1997 (Munoz and Vázquez, 1999);

Examples of qualitative longitudinal data

Antonio Tosi's study on rehoused homeless people in Milan (together with a few other European studies carried out in the IMPACT research program, also funded by the European Commission) is an example of a qualitative longitudinal study (Tosi, 2002). Another is Lia van Doorn's very detailed follow-up study of homeless men in Utrecht (2000). In UK, the resettlement of older homeless people has been studied by Warnes and Crane, 2002.

Obtainable results

These surveys give insights into the duration of homelessness, the characteristics of persons who find housing again, and of those who stay in housing once they have found it. The questionnaire is devised by the research team for research purposes and can be detailed, especially regarding the homeless person's past (prior to the first interview). The questionnaire approach also makes it possible to ask about the period between two interviews and to decide, when analysing the data, whether the persons have had a non-homeless episode or not.

These surveys can also be used to evaluate the effect of a program, with a sample of persons following the program and a control sample of persons not following it; or to compare two subpopulations and how they change over time.

Difficulties

The main difficulty is to locate the persons who had previously accepted to be re-interviewed; another is to include new persons in the data if the sample is to remain representative of homeless people at any point in time during the study. There are also ethical issues concerning the use of incentives, the need to find people again while avoiding harassment etc.

Several reports and articles have been written on procedures for limiting attrition, that is, the loss of previously interviewed persons (Cohen *et al.*, 1993). Various strategies can be built on the knowledge of places frequented by the interviewees and of the people they regularly meet, be they family, friends or caseworkers; and, more than anything else, on an intense mobilization of the interviewers, even outside data collection periods (for more details see Arduin *et al.*, 2002). It might be expected that "lost" interviewees are those whose situation has worsened, who have perhaps died or been sent to an institution. In fact, it seems that some of the people who are "lost" have improved their situation and don't want to be reminded of a difficult episode.

D2. Data collected from shelters and other services

Description

Data is entered in a file each time a homeless person enters or exits a service (for example, a shelter). The records of several services are combined and unduplicated (individuals are counted only once, even if they use several services and are on several files) by means of an identifier. This results in a file giving some information on the person and his or her episodes in and out of homelessness. Various precautions have to be taken to protect confidentiality.

Some examples

This form of data collection seems to be favoured in countries of Northern Europe, and is, I believe, also used by the Australians and the Canadians.

* USA

It has also been attempted in the United States by Dennis Culhane, with the records of public shelters in Philadelphia and New York (Culhane *et al.*, 1994; 1996; Kuhn and Culhane, 1998).

* European countries

Denmark

In our network, the Danish team (and maybe others) have been using record-based data (Stax, 2000).

France

The Orsas (Regional Observatory on Health) in Lorraine, a French region, has been using such a method in the CHRS (long-stay shelters) of the region (Orsas-Lorraine, 1996, 1997).

The studies conducted by the Paris "Samu Social" (an emergency outreach service), based on records of phone calls received asking for shelter, can be considered as using the same methodology (see the annual report).

Obtainable Results

The advantage of this method is twofold. First, it can be used by service providers in their assessment of a person's situation. Second, it can be used by researchers, as it enables them to study moves in and out of "homelessness" (and specifically shelter-using or service-using homelessness). It is cheaper than a survey (but to be done properly, trained staff are needed to enter the data, and to provide computer assistance). New entries are easier to include in the files than is the case with a panel survey. Attrition ("loss" of people concerned) occurs (as when the recording system connects the services of one city and the person moves to another city) but if the services (often shelters) of a given area all participate in the gathering of data, it is less of a problem than with panel surveys.

This kind of data has been used by Kuhn and Culhane in USA to describe three patterns of shelter use by the homeless (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998): the chronically homeless (few episodes, long total length), the episodically homeless (many episodes), the transitionally homeless (few episodes, short total length). If, in a period of several years, the proportion of chronically homeless people is not very high (in New York, 10% in a three-year period), the proportion of nights they spend in the shelter is much higher (47%) (for this kind of issue see also Table 2). Tobias Borner Stax has used data of a similar kind in Copenhagen, combining it with qualitative interviews.

Another aspect is that this method requires a degree of cooperation between service providers and this can be a positive (or in some cases negative) factor in their relations.

Difficulties

It is most difficult to gather data in emergency shelters, where it is most important to know the needs and patterns of shelter utilisation of those who use them as a long term solution; this is true at least in countries where these shelters are organized as they are in France (many people entering in a short time span, high levels of stress, etc.). As a result of these organizational problems, the relationship between the social workers or volunteers and the homeless persons is made more difficult by data gathering and some people (for example, illegal immigrants) may be discouraged from using the shelters. Confidentiality aspects must be taken into consideration. If the necessary resources in qualified staff and computer equipment are not available, it can significantly increase the work load for social workers and service providers, with negative effects on the quality of the data recorded. There is no follow-up for the people who leave the geographical area for which the recording system has been implemented. (For a complete analysis of the advantages and difficulties in the French case of the Orsas-Lorraine, see Arduin *et al.*, 2002). Even if there is a questionnaire at the first entry to the service system, or if the identifier, such as an official identity number (as exists in France, Denmark etc.), has given access to other files within the framework of existing laws protecting confidentiality and the rights of citizens, the data is less detailed than with a panel survey and, since it was collected for other (usually administrative) purposes, it does not necessarily answer the researcher's questions. It is not always possible to know the situation of the persons between two registered episodes.

D3. Questions on previous homeless episodes asked in general surveys

Description

These questions can be included in any survey of the general population. They ask about previous episodes of homelessness, doubling up, etc.

Obtainable results

They are an inexpensive way of obtaining a rough idea of the prevalence of past homelessness or previous housing difficulties in the housed population.

Difficulties

- 1) The questions must be carefully worded and the interviewers well trained, to prevent any misunderstanding;
- 2) In Europe, unlike the USA, there are still some people who were homeless during the war, when they were fleeing their homes; this case must be anticipated and allowed for in the questionnaire;
- 3) It is not possible to know much more about these homeless episodes due to the difficulty of remembering them, sometimes years later.

Examples

*** USA**

- 1990, telephone survey by the Columbia University (Link *et al.*, 1994);
- between 1994 and 2001, with the collaboration of Paul Toro, telephone surveys were conducted on small samples in USA, England, Scotland, France, Belgium, Germany and Canada (see <http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~ptoro/>).

*** European countries**

- the surveys initiated in some European countries by Paul Toro (see previous entry).

France

- some questions in a telephone survey by the Credoc in 2001 (Simon, 2001);
- INSEE is introducing some questions in the next Health survey (large sample).

E. Housing difficulties other than literal homelessness (workshop 5)

Most other housing difficulties (as defined by the 4-dimension classification presented earlier, or by criteria of affordability or suitability) can be examined by the insertion of appropriate questions in surveys of the general population.

In France, for example, the Housing Survey contains questions about housing costs, the number of persons in the household, available space, and the quality of housing; at INED, questions have been tested dealing with precarious housing (along the lines of the stability/insecurity classification), and on housing quality and occupational status.

Questions concerning persons doubling up with the household were introduced a few years ago in the French Housing Survey (Bessière, Laferrère, 2002).

Caravans and various forms of dwellings such as huts or tents used all the year round are included in the French Census but less well covered by surveys. Now that the French Census is conducted on a permanent basis (instead of every ten years or so), coverage of this type of housing can be expected to improve.

The most difficult problem seems to be squats. This is mainly because of their disparate nature, ranging from good quality dwellings to dilapidated industrial buildings, etc. Ordinary dwellings are included in the Census and in surveys but their squat status is not always known. Others are hard to survey, and in some cases can be dangerous for the interviewers. Here also, the new Census may be of some help but this is not yet sure. A number of investigations by NGOs or governmental agencies have provided some insights, but we have no global estimate.

In addition to the surveys of the general population presented in Table 1, surveys of special populations, such as hospital patients, prison inmates, etc. could include questions about previous episodes of homelessness and the last and future places of residence (suggestion of the Spanish teams).

F. Surveys of the general population about attitudes towards homelessness

A last type of survey in the general population of potential interest for studies on homelessness are surveys about public attitudes towards homelessness and about related issues such as the NIMBY syndrome etc. (Toro and McDonnell, 1992).

Table 1 . A first attempt at classifying sources on homelessness and homeless people, with some examples

	Interviews of service providers, use of service files (record-based data) or administrative data	Interviews of homeless people	Interviews of the general population
Point-in-time data (or very short period), including retrospective questions	<p><i>Quantitative data</i> : Surveys or files (record-based data) on homeless users of one service or a list of services, without direct interviews of the people concerned. If the person concerned can use several services during the data collection period, double counting is possible and must be corrected by using an identifier, for example.</p> <p>Eg: In France, the ES survey “on a given night” (conducted by the Department of social affairs); studies conducted by associations based on their records.</p> <p>Application: to know the number and basic characteristics (age, sex, etc.) of service users; to collect data on the services they use.</p> <p><i>Qualitative data</i>: makes it possible to take into account the point of view of the people interviewed and functioning system of the services.</p>	<p><i>Quantitative data</i>: Surveys of service users, with computation of weightings to correct the overrepresentation of people using several services.</p> <p>Eg: INED (Paris) and INSEE (national) surveys in France, surveys of the Complutense University in Madrid, several American surveys at the local and national level, a yearly survey of homeless people in Budapest (from 1999 on). The surveys conducted by associations on their “clients” are similar to this kind of survey.</p> <p>Applications: to know the characteristics, background, living conditions, etc. of homeless people at the time of the survey. The questionnaire can collect detailed data on the past and present of homeless people, but nothing on their future.</p> <p><i>Qualitative data</i> : helps take into account the point of view of the people interviewed, the connections between the situations in which they have found themselves, and is of help in discovering little known practices.</p>	<p><i>Quantitative data</i>: Surveys of the housed population, in which respondents are asked, for example, if they have experienced a homeless episode or if they are housing someone (the rest of the questionnaire can deal with completely different issues). Related to this kind of survey are those about public opinion on homelessness, on the building of a service (shelter, day center etc.) in the neighbourhood etc.</p> <p>Eg:</p> <p>1) On previous homeless episodes: in France, a question in a Credoc survey; some questions in the INSEE Health survey ; in the USA, several surveys, Link et al., Toro et al., etc. ; in England, a question in the survey of English housing.</p> <p>2) On the housing of family or friends: in France, questions in the Housing survey.</p> <p>Applications: to know how many people have experienced homelessness in the general population and their characteristics (these persons exited homelessness); to know how many persons are housed by their family or friends and their characteristics.</p> <p><i>Qualitative data</i> : not applicable to 1) or 2) ; applicable to questions of opinion..</p>

	Interviews of service providers, use of service files (record-based data) or administrative data	Interviews of homeless people	Interviews of the general population
Longitudinal data (collected about the same persons over a long period)	<p><i>Quantitative data:</i> Follow-up over a long period of files or records, either of persons using one service, or of persons using a list of services. In the latter case, people who have used several services over the period are on the records of those services, hence an identifier is needed to eliminate double-counting.</p> <p>Eg: in France, the studies of the Samu social, of the Regional Health Observatory of the Lorraine region on the CHRS shelters. In Denmark, the work of Tobias Boerner Stax. In USA, the work of Dennis Culhane.</p> <p>Applications: to know the number and characteristics of people according to their type of trajectories in homelessness (chronical, episodic, transitional), and the type of services they use.</p> <p><i>Qualitative data:</i> more adapted in this case for studying the services than for studying the persons using them..</p>	<p><i>Quantitative data:</i> After a baseline survey which gives the basic characteristics of people, several follow-up surveys interview the same persons sometimes over a total period of several years. Difficulty: to recontact the interviewees.</p> <p>Eg: no such survey in France; in Spain, survey of the Complutense University in Madrid; in the USA, several surveys of this kind (Koegel and the Rand Corporation; Wong et Piliavin).</p> <p>Applications: to know which type of trajectory is the most frequent for a given type of person; to evaluate a program by comparing a group having benefited from the program with a control group.</p> <p><i>Qualitative data:</i> Follow-up across time of a group of homeless people, giving detailed information on their practices and their adaptations to changes in their resources and the constraints that weigh on them.</p> <p>Eg: Lia van Doorn (Netherlands) has followed around sixty homeless people from Utrecht over several years; a team from Ined has followed a group of homeless people over several months; in UK, the resettlement of homeless people has been studied by Warnes and Crane and in Italy by Tosi.</p>	<p>In Europe, the European panel could in theory be used, but the “attrition” (the loss of interviewees in the course of the study) is greater in the case of people with housing difficulties, and the sample size is small for any given country.</p> <p>The British Household Panel Survey has been used to track episodes of eviction among young people.</p> <p>Applications: to document episodes of homelessness (in a narrow or wide sense) and their outcomes (rehousing, moving to an institution etc.)</p> <p><i>Qualitative data:</i> not applicable.</p>

Table 2 : Variation in the population structure of a shelter according to duration of stay concerned

Length of stay	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Summary		
	bed	bed	bed	bed	bed			
1 st quarter	M1	M2	M3	M5	W1	1W 4M 20%W	2W 6M 25% W	4W 8M 33% W
2 nd quarter			M4	M6	W2			
3 rd quarter			M3	M7	W3			
4 th quarter			M4	M8	W4			

How to read the table : a shelter is occupied at a certain time by one woman (W) and four men (M). Each person stays there between one and four quarters, with possible returns. According to the duration of the stay concerned, the proportion of women varies from one in five to one in three (different) persons.

This figure shows that depending on whether we investigate at a given date or over a given period, there are important differences in the structure of the population. Columns represent beds. In a five-bed shelter, we can look at the occupation of beds over four quarters. M1 is a man who stayed in the shelter for one year and occupied the same bed for four quarters. The same is true of M2. M3 is a man who was accommodated for one quarter, then found another type of residence for one quarter: a personal dwelling, with friends, in a hospital or another institution, then he returned during one quarter, then he again left for one quarter. M4 is in the same situation. M3 and M4 are people who alternate periods in the shelter with periods during which they find a dwelling, or at least exit the literally homeless category. M5, M6, M7 and M8 are four men who were accommodated in this shelter for a short period of time and then found a dwelling. W1, W2, W3 and W4, are four women, each of whom also had a short period of one quarter without a dwelling. At a given time, four men and one woman occupy the shelter, that is, a proportion of 20 % for women. If we now consider all the men and all the women who stayed in this shelter over a period of one year, there are four women and eight men, the proportion of women is then one-third.

According to whether the survey concerns the persons who occupied beds at some point or all the persons who stayed in the shelter during the year, the proportion of women varies from one-fifth to one-third. When conducting a survey, it is thus necessary to specify which duration we are working with, because duration changes the results for both the number of persons concerned and the structure of the population concerned.

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Point-in-time surveys

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