

A European perspective on the use of Qualitative Methods in the study of homelessness – methods, findings, theoretical understandings and policy interventions

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Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to describe insights gained through qualitative studies into the lives of homeless people and homeless services that would not have otherwise been gained, and the policy interventions such insights can lead to. The policy driven push for quantifiable facts, figures and outcomes means that much research that is done is of a quantitative nature in many European countries, with qualitative research studies funded through individual Ph.D studies or by trusts or by agencies working with the homeless. Some research straddles the quantitative-qualitative divide using a mixture of interviews, surveys and quantitative analysis.¹

This paper describes five studies that used qualitative methods to understand people living as street or hostel homeless in the Netherlands, UK and Russia. Two of the studies researched older single homeless people predominantly, one researched older and younger single homeless people, one researched young homeless people and one homelessness among children and young people aged 7-17 years. These studies used a mixture of life histories, in-depth interviews and observation. They also used a mixture of analytical approaches: the observation/in-depth interview studies took a theoretic analysis approach, deriving their understandings from an intense analysis of the data; some in-depth interview studies took a thematic analysis approach deriving their analysis from the research problem and research schedule; one study combined thematic analysis with statistical analysis; two studies included comparative interviews with domiciled people who were not homeless. Each of the studies reported here produced new insights into the processes and lived experience of homelessness, two of the studies produced agency programmes.²

In Table 1 we list the studies, the locations where they were undertaken, their respondents, the settings in which homeless people were observed or interviewed and the title of the main reports. In Table 2 there is a summary of the main research methods used, the analytical tools, the important concepts for the studies, policy outputs and the theoretical insights that were gained.

A second purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the charge levelled against qualitative research, that the findings of qualitative research are dependent on the perspective of the researcher(s) and cannot be independently validated, is ill advised. This paper argues that it is possible to demonstrate the validity and reliability of qualitative research in different, but parallel ways, to that of quantitative research in the following ways:

- a) Action research in different countries and/or different settings can demonstrate the reliability of intervention strategies derived observation/in-depth interviews in one country but applied to another, or in one city but applied to another. For example the Eight Steps Model derived from the

¹ Additionally, in the field of homelessness the European network of NGOs (FEANTSA) produces regular studies based on the reports of country delegates. (FEANTSA plus European wide references).

² Additional publications derived from these studies are listed in the first bibliography attached to this paper; other publications of importance to this paper are listed in the second bibliography

observation of social work interventions with the homeless in different Dutch cities by Petra van Leeuwen has been applied by her in Kiev.

b) Parallel findings by researchers whose work is unknown to each other can demonstrate that observation/in-depth interviews with similar homeless populations find comparable insights. For example, findings in Utrecht on the relationship with time that develops among street homeless people can be validated by a re-analysis of observations made in the UK that had not previously been analysed in relation to this perspective.

c) Qualitative research findings frequently lead to the development of research tools used in quantitative research. The use of understandings gained in qualitative research in one city and one context can be validated through findings of quantitative research instruments based on qualitative findings.

Of course, there are always several ways to research any particular issues. We believe that none are wrong but some methods are more appropriate for different research problems. A chosen research method is influenced by a number of factors including: the research problem, the researchers' ideological stance, the amount of funding that is available and the requirements of funding bodies and participating organisations, the definition of homelessness adopted for the study, and the type of output required (report, programme, video).

This paper is divided into four sections. In the first section we discuss the qualitative methods used by the five different researchers to undertake their particular studies. In the second section we discuss the unique findings from each of the five researchers including both conceptual breakthroughs and policy outputs. The final section demonstrates how the texts generated by qualitative research can be re-interrogated in the light of parallel studies, be used to design practices that are proved in daily activity and through investigation of clients and workers, and be instrumental in the design of quantitative research tools.

Table 1. Five European Studies

Researcher	Date	Location	Clients	Settings	Title of study
Lia Van Doorn	1993-2000	Utrecht	Single Homeless	Street Drop-in Centres Hostels Own Home	'Time on the Streets'
Megan Ravenhill	1997-2001	London and Southern England	Single Homeless	Street Drop-in Centres Hostels Own Homes	'The culture of Homelessness:an ethnographic study.'
Svetlana Stephenson	1997-2000	Moscow	Young Homeless	Street	'Street Children in Moscow'
Joan Smith, Sheila Gilford and Ann O'Sullivan	1994-1998	Stoke-on-Trent,	Young Homeless, and their Parents. Comparative survey of parents and young people on local estates.	Hostels Own Homes	'Family Background of Young Homeless People' (1998) 'Taking Risks: (1999)
Irene Breugel and Joan Smith	1998	London	Young homeless and acomparative study of domiciled young people	Hostels Own Homes	
Joan Smith, Pauline Ing and Ann O'Sullivan	1999-2002	Birmingham, the Cotswolds (rural), and Stoke on Trent	Young homeless people 16-25 and comparative group interviews with non-homeless yp (Cotwolds)	Hostels Own Homes Schools	
Joan Smith and Megan Ravenhill	2004-6	London	Young people living at home in school, in out of school projects. Young runaways	Projects Schools Own home	
Petra van Leeuwen and Mariska Haasnoot – (one organization)	1998/9	Utrecht	6 types of clients	Hostels, Own houses Supported living	'Implementation of the Eight Steps Model'
Petra van Leeuwen and Daan Heineke - (six organizations)	2000/04	Utrecht Amsterdam Zaandam	Single Homeless men and women		

Table 2. Five European Studies

Researcher	Clients	Research Method	Analytical Tools	Concepts	Policy Outputs	Theory
Lia van Doorn	Single Homeless	Observation In-depth interviews Ego-documents	Theoretic analysis	Time Turning Points Space Hierarchy Fantasising about future. E.g. car	The identification of different phases of homelessness The identification of the best intervention strategies for each of these phases	Goffman Sub-culture Life-events Turning Points Social capital Coping Strategies
Megan Ravenhill	Single Homeless	Observation In-depth interviews	Thematic analysis of field notes Theoretic analysis using Atlas-ti	Space Inverse Hierarchy Loss Victim –blaming Death on the street Culture	3 types of resettlement (medicalisation, normalisation, battle for the mind) Predictive factors	Sub-Culture Structuration Risk Society Social Inclusion and Exclusion
Svetlana Stephenson	Young Homeless	In-depth interviews Focus groups Quantitative survey		Careers		Sub -Culture Social Capital
Joan Smith, Sheila Gilford and Ann O'Sullivan Irene Breugel and Joan Smith Joan Smith, Pauline Ing and Ann O'Sullivan	Young Homeless	In-depth interviews – young people and parents. Parallel estate study. Structured questionnaires with homeless young people and domiciled young people As above but including group interviews (the Cotswolds) Group interviews to be	Thematic analysis of transcripts Statistical analysis, odds ratios Thematic analysis Thematic and	Disrupted families Moral Order of the family Risk index School and social Exclusion Ongoing	Welfare support for older children i.e 16-18 year olds. Family Mediation Programmes for youth Identification of young people at risk tool for early intervention strategies in relation to: personal development, education and working with parents/families	Moral Order Family obligation Family narratives/scripts Risk, Social Exclusion

Joan Smith and Megan Ravenhill		followed by individual narrative interview.	theoretic analysis		Ongoing	
Petra van Leeuwen	6 client groups	Action research within agencies		Empowerment Social Competence/ coping strategies Holistic approach	8 step model for practice – setting roles for individuals to move on	Habermas White Schuyt Competence Empowerment

Section 1 The research problem and the type of qualitative methods used to undertake the five different studies.

Lia van Doorn, Netherlands

Van Doorn's study used **in-depth interviews and participant observation** (as a volunteer) to study the processes that underlie the episodic nature of homelessness. Her research problem focused on the origination, continuation and termination of episodes of homelessness. The study was longitudinally structured and was conducted in Utrecht, the fourth major city in The Netherlands. It focused on a specific part of the homeless population: those who do not have at their disposal a guaranteed shelter for the night, that seek refuge in the public domain and avail themselves of the day and night shelter and other temporary accommodation, improvised or otherwise. The use the expression from the United States: 'the literally homeless' (street and hostel homeless). The main source of data gathering consists of the monitoring of two cohorts of respondents. The first concerned 64 persons who at the outset of this study were practically all homeless. They were monitored during 1993 and 2000. The second concerned a cohort of 20 former homeless persons that were monitored between 1997 and 2000. The method used was that of qualitative data gathering. The respondents have been interviewed in dept, to reconstruct their life histories, and during the years the research took place, several follow-up interviews have been undertaken. The study also used observations of the lives of homeless people while they were living on the street.

The conceptual framework of this study was based on two perspectives. The first perspective concerned the development in the lives of homeless people and the biographical elements in it. This had not been paid sufficient attention in research literature in The Netherlands where, up to now, homeless people were studied at one moment in time exclusively. By means of following homeless people over time it was possible to focus on the dynamic processes that could be observed at three stages in the origination, the continuation and the termination of homelessness.

The second perspective was directed at the relationship between homelessness and its institutional environment. Although research literature provided formal policy knowledge on agencies that are involved with the homeless, little detailed knowledge is available on the social arena in which institutional policy is being implemented in daily practice: on the dynamics that arise wherever institutions and the homeless meet or seek to avoid one another. It was investigated in what way government measures and institutional interventions in the lives of homeless people come together and accumulate.

The study also offers a detailed methodological description of the way this qualitative longitudinal research on homeless people was undertaken: how the respondents were selected, how they were tracked during these years, how was dealt with the privacy of the respondents and what kind of ethical questions come along with doing longitudinal research.

Megan Ravenhill, UK

Ravenhill's study used **life-story interviews and observation methods** to take a grounded theory approach to look at homelessness in London and Southern England. She looked at why it is that despite the fact that previous research appears to have established the causes of homelessness and formulated solutions to it, which have been implemented, homelessness still persists. The research looks at people's routes into through and out of homelessness. It is based on 48 life-story interviews,

52 formal and informal in depth interviews, with homeless and ex-homeless people and over 1020 hours of observation (on the streets, in hostels and drop-in centres). To counterbalance this information 24 interviews were carried out with people who had never been roofless but had experienced several triggers of rooflessness.

The 48 life-story interviews were analysed through the use of 'Life Route Maps' using which people's own account of their descent into rooflessness could be drawn as a flow chart diagram. This showed their age at the time of the various events and episodes that contributed to their rooflessness. Their date of birth identified the historic era in which they were living and therefore the social policies that existed at that time. The life-route maps also showed the individual's decisions they made in response to their circumstances and how their decisions contributed to or alleviated their homelessness (or potential homelessness).

The in-depth interviews were also through a computer package – Atlas Ti – using a theoretic coding frame constructed through codes that were found within the interviews rather than pre-constructed from a coding frame i.e. a computer-aided application of grounded theory.

Svetlana Stephenson, Russia/UK

The research project on street children in Moscow took place in 1997-2000. A *triangulation* of various techniques and methods was used to improve the quality of research results and combine the benefits (and limit the disadvantages) of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The project included a questionnaire survey. The total sample in Moscow comprised 123 street children. The age bracket was limited to 7-17 years (children under seven were not interviewed, as they would not have been able to complete the standard questionnaire). Age distribution was as follows: 7-11 years – 22%, 12-14 years – 41%, 15-17 years – 37%.

The questionnaire included closed questions, but also many open-ended questions. In most cases an interviewer, after the completion of a questionnaire, continued a conversation with the child, trying to engage him or her in a more informal discussion, and wrote down additional information provided by the respondent, either during or after the interview. Most of the interviews took place in agencies - in the militia reception centre (67) and charity shelters (24). 32 interviews took place in the streets. For interviews that were conducted in organisations we used age and sex quotas, based on the registration of all the children who passed through the militia reception centre in 1997. In the streets we used a random sample. The majority of the interviewees - 73 per cent - were boys. Twenty in-depth interviews, each about three hours long were also conducted. Another element of the research was four focus groups with children selected by sex, age and their status as migrants. One group was conducted with Moscow boys and girls aged 9-13. Three groups were conducted with migrants – one with boys from 9-13 years, one with boys from 14-17 years, and one with girls from 14-17 years. Each group consisted of six to eight people.

The survey results can only be treated as having a limited reliability. It is impossible to build a truly representative of a hidden and oppressed population such as street children. Also, although the children were interviewed only after participant observation in the institutions and in the streets and so had established a prior contact with most of them, the researchers could not be sure that this contact was enough to enable them to talk freely to them. Also, the researchers could not be sure that the categories they were imposing on children, when they were asking them

about the reasons for their being in the streets or their experiences in the streets, corresponded to their own definitions and perceptions.

Qualitative methods proved to be much better suited than the survey in trying to answer the specific research task of studying children's experience in the streets. Focus groups were particularly important in getting access to collective representations and norms governing interaction in street communities. In-depth interviews were important for obtaining individual life-stories and representations of personal strategies. It proved to be very easy to talk to children (particularly in focus-groups, when, after some initial hesitation, they gave each other a sanction to discuss the behaviours which could be seen as problematic or illegal). In qualitative research the researchers did not try to judge whether the children's accounts were true, but rather hoped to understand the meaning of different practices and social structures for the children as social actors.

Petra van Leeuwen, Netherlands

During the last year of her study of Social Work Petra van Leeuwen conducted an **action based research** in one homeless organization for 23 addicted and/or chronic mentally and/or psychically ill women established to improve the quality of help for the homeless women. The agency was not well organised and, therefore, two student social workers (Petra van Leeuwen and Mariska Haasnoot) tried to organise the work of social workers and introduced action plans in 1998-9. This was based on a review of the documents, and which was being used and which not being used. It was apparent that action planning was not working in the current method and homeless people got confused all the time, without structure, and the kind of goals were not appropriate e.g. SMART criteria were not being used, social workers had not idea of what goals clients could have, and no idea of working with clients. The action plans didn't involve the clients. In one year a method had to be devised for this agency and implemented. Therefore the two student social workers drew on methods that were being used in youth care and mental health services. Their action-research study resulted in the development and implementation of a method that helped social workers and clients to structure the support of clients through action plans.

Following a Dutch-Belgium prize (1999) the model was adopted by NIZW (Netherlands Institute of Care and Welfare) and introduced to other Dutch agencies that had the same problems, which were:

- no clear individual trajectories for homeless people and therefore no planned improvements in the lives of their clients;
- chaos within the organization that reflected on homeless clients; social workers couldn't structure the help they gave and therefore confused their clients;
- no clear view on the contribution of clients themselves during the support; social workers traditionally focussed on their clients' problems and not on their strengths and possibilities.

In 2001 NIZW used the information of this small action based research to create a larger scale intervention to test in what way this method could also contribute to other organizations. First, expert meetings were held to discuss the method following which NIZW wrote a report about the method and 'baptised' the method into an 'eight steps model'. NIZW made it possible to start a two-year action based research project on the method with 50% co-finance of the Orange Fund, a national private fund on social issues.

The second, testing stage, of the findings of the action research was executed from 2000 until 2003. Three different organizations and six different hostels took part in this research: two hostels for homeless man and women with 70% diagnosed mental problems, one hostel for homeless man, two for supported living and finally one for floating living. Indirectly, over 300 clients were involved. NIZW focussed the project on the role of social workers and working methods. NIZW supported local project leaders during the implementation of the eight steps model.

In the beginning of the project, all six hostels were visited in order to construct a base measurement for the evaluation of the method – this base measurement was both quantitative and qualitative. Key respondent interviews were undertaken and all social workers and clients were asked to fill in questionnaires. The questionnaires for social workers contained 20 questions, the ones for clients 10. These ten items overlap the questions for social workers, in order that their different viewpoints could be compared. After one year, social workers and clients were asked to fill in the same questionnaire, which made it possible to compare these outcomes with the outcomes before the introduction of the eight steps model. The questionnaires were analysed in SPSS. Together with the results of interviews, the results of the implementation became clear.

Joan Smith, UK

Smith, with Gilford and O'Sullivan, began the study of the 'Family Background of Young Homeless People' in 1994 when it was known that up to one third of young homeless people who became homeless had spent some time in local authority care i.e. were 'looked after children'. However this still left the circumstances under which two thirds of young homeless people left home unexplained, although at that time the Government assumption was that they were 'runaways' i.e. had left of their own accord to become independent and had made themselves homeless. This research programme sought to explore the family background of young homeless people made homeless from their family home through in-depth interviews with both young people and, where possible, their parent(s) using a two-page focussed interview schedule/ topic list. In order to compare young person and parent accounts, each topic on the focussed topic list even if the interviews were conducted as a narrative.

Interviews with young people and parents were conducted by separate interviewers with no knowledge of what the young person or parent had said. Fifty-six interviews were undertaken with young people of whom thirty gave us permission to contact their parents. Among the young people whose parents were not interviewed, were those who reported abuse or extremely difficult household relationships or no longer knew where their parents lived, but there were also those where the young person was themselves in the midst of negotiating better relationships with their parents and did not want to jeopardise the contact that they now had. Of the parents contacted who refused to be interviewed some offered similar reasons saying that their relationships with their children were improving and they didn't want to 'bring it all back'. Other parents refused because of conflict with their partner (usually a step-parent) over whether they should be interviewed. Overall it was possible to interview parent(s) of 10 young men (a third of the young men we interviewed) and parents of 12 young women (nearly half of the young women).

As well as interviewing young homeless people the project also interviewed parents of young people living at home and their children in 40 households on local estates. This study used a structured interview schedule that explored both the

parents' histories of leaving home and setting up their own home, and their relationship with their children, and the young person's attitudes.

Table 1. Family Background of Young Homeless People (1998)

YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE	ESTATE FAMILIES
Theoretically sampled; young people without an institutional history	Identified from families previously interviewed on two local authority or Coal Board housing estates
Focussed interview schedule – topic list	Structured interview schedule including 'vignettes' of homeless experience
Young People 30 young men 26 young women	Parents of young people 16-25 40 households on two estates
Parents of young homeless people of 10 young men of 12 young women	Young people of 40 households on two estates. 55% response

There were two reasons for using a structured interview schedule in the estate survey. First, from the in-depth interviews with young homeless people and their parents we had extracted the issues we wished to pursue in the estate survey. Second, issues in relation to leaving home would not necessarily be as 'salient' with the parents on the estates as they were with the parents of young people who were now homeless, and in-depth interviews would not necessarily uncover similar information.

To explore family obligation in relation to young people the study borrowed a method that Finch and Mason had used in their study of 'care in the community' i.e. care by the family of elderly or disabled relatives. Finch and Mason (1993) presented members of different households with a series of stories about obligation within families and asked for their response. We adapted this method presenting different family conflict scenarios in separate interviews to mothers, fathers, sons and daughters in the estate survey. These vignettes were designed to explore both household conflict and patterns of accepted family obligation towards young people. The vignettes were taken directly from the stories that homeless young people and their parents had told the research team of how homelessness had occurred.

Section 2 Findings and conceptual breakthroughs of the five different studies.

Lia van Doorn, the Netherlands

The main unique finding of the study is the distinction of three different phases in the development of homelessness: the origin, the continuation and the termination of homelessness.

Origin of homelessness

First the study describes the background of homelessness. The actual loss of accommodation is usually preceded by many years of accumulated problems. However, this does not apply to a minority of respondents whose had led a regular life: they can look back on a respectable working career, have lived in a family context and some were reasonably well off. For them, the decline towards the streets usually took place in a short period of time. In addition it was concluded that it is practically impossible to explain the origination of homelessness on the basis of appeal of the street culture: hardly anybody deliberately relinquished their home in order to lead the life of a vagabond.

The study offers insights into the initial introduction of the recently homeless to street culture, shelter provisions and their new peers. The decline towards the street causes discontinuity in the respondents' lives and marked an abrupt rupture with their familiar way of life. Then, just as suddenly, the practical, material and psychological consequences of the loss of accommodation presented themselves and the loss of accommodation set its own dynamics in motion. Whereas the recently homeless as a rule are very much oriented on the usual cultural goals –striving for a house of their own and a job- the decline towards the street causes changes in them that in the long term will almost inevitably result in an orientation on street culture.

Continuation of homelessness

Secondly the study offers insights in the continuation of homelessness and describes the attempts of the homeless to improve their circumstances and prepare themselves for the homeless way of life are described. It was found that the adaptation strategies homeless people develop in various areas are accompanied by the paradoxical implication that on the one hand these strategies make life on the streets more bearable, whereas on the other they hamper social integration and thus continue the state of homelessness.

The study describes which institutional options are available to homeless people to improve their circumstances and which obstacles they encounter in the process. It was found that interaction between the homeless and agencies was rendered more difficult also because their perceptions of reality are diametrically opposed. Several examples of this are presented in the report. In addition, the report outlines the motives that the homeless have for not availing themselves of the institutional services that are offered or for using them in a different manner than the one for which it was intended.

The study also offers an analysis of the social networks of homeless people and sketches how the nature and extent of these gradually change. In the long term social contacts are mainly restricted to peers and it is a characteristic of the mutual contacts between the homeless that they help each other through the day. However, they hardly support one another in their attempts to extricate themselves from life on

the streets. With the fragmentation of their social networks their chances of reintegration diminish further. The study also offers an outline of the characteristics of street culture. In addition it clarifies how a gradual a process of adaptation to this subculture takes place. On the one hand the advance of street socialisation causes homeless daily life to become somewhat more bearable and pleasant. On the other it hampers chances of social integration as the distance to the dominant culture in society increases.

Besides describing the social networks and street culture of homeless people, the study also describes strategies used by the homeless to acquire an income. Amongst other things begging, selling street newspapers, swindling, prostitution, dealing and theft are investigated. There are two sides to every coin, this also holds true for these strategies. The activities the homeless engage in regarding the informal street economy enable them to make a living and improve their circumstances to a certain extent. However, the other side of the coin is that these strategies generate new problems: they lead to contacts with the police, fines, a record or detention.

In addition the study focuses on the psychological adaptations of the homeless to their way of life. It describes how gradually their notions on social reality change and what expostulations they use. Gradually their perception of time and space changes, as does their self-image and identity and shifts occur in their cultural orientations. The adaptation strategies by means of which they attempt to reduce the mental incongruity and psychological stress that accompany the homeless way of life at the same time reduce their chances of a return towards a regular way of life.

Termination of homelessness

Finally, the study deals with the termination of homelessness. It outlines which persons –after a period of homelessness- succeed in becoming resettled and how they do this. It reports which events in their lives set a process in motion that resulted in the termination of homelessness, at what moments and under which circumstances the motivation for a behavioural change increased and / or what external opportunities presented themselves that caused the respondents to succeed in settling. To this effect a typology of ‘turning points’ is presented and three routes are distinguished, that provide an impetus towards accommodation of their own. A further investigation relates to what are the operative factors in the integration process and in what way (care) interventions can be made to support this. The study emphasises that living independently is not an option open to all (one time) homeless people.

Furthermore the study focuses on the respondents that do succeed –after a certain span of time- in living independently. It describes the course of the process of social restoration, what problems homeless people encounter in their attempts to build a regular way of life for themselves and what causes them to relapse to the streets. In this, it describes, among other things, how gradually their social networks change, how they adapt mentally to their new situation and to what extent they extricate themselves from street culture in the long run, and integrate into the mainstream of society. The role of (care) agencies in the process of restoration is also discussed as are the causes of a relapse towards the street.

Megan Ravenhill, UK

There are a number of unique findings stemming from this ethnographic research study which would not have come to light had the research been of a quantitative nature. Similarly they were less likely to come to light with a semi-structured questionnaire and quantitative analysis of those findings. The research predominantly used Structuration and Risk Society theories as a framework and therefore Glaser and Straus' (1967) grounded theory approach was the method that fitted the theoretical framework. Both the theoretical stance and methods used are rarely used in British homeless research. This research uses both the narrower concept of rooflessness to describe the street homeless and the wider concept of homelessness as is common in UK research.

Origins of rooflessness: the accumulation of triggers

From the study there were a number of clearly identifiable factors that increased people's vulnerability to rooflessness. Contrary to existing research, it was established that it is not the triggers of homelessness themselves that result in rooflessness, but the accumulation of triggers especially if they were experienced in quick succession. In fact, rooflessness appears to be predominantly a solution to existing problems rather than *the* problem. Contrary to popular perceptions, on average, 7-9 years elapse between triggers commencing and rooflessness occurring. Furthermore, there appeared to be an average of 1-2 years in precarious housing, episodic homelessness (not rooflessness) and continuous vulnerability to rooflessness before rooflessness occurred, despite, in many cases, determined attempts to avoid it. Homelessness could only be viewed overtime in this way because the life-stories of homeless and ex-homeless people were taken and analysed through 'Life Route Maps' as well as qualitative data packages.

Childhood factors among those who become roofless

There was also a unique insight into the childhoods of roofless people. The research showed that the majority of people's routes into homelessness (especially rooflessness) began in childhood. Most of British literature on homelessness focuses on the last few events or circumstances that led to homelessness. Thus the focus is on the crisis point rather than the slow gradual build-up of problems circumstances and decisions that precede the crisis point when a person arrives on the street. The family backgrounds of homeless people have rarely been focused on at all in British literature³. Family background and the build-up of triggers of homelessness over time is important when considering attempts to prevent homelessness.

Street culture

This study provides an ethnographic exploration of homeless (especially roofless) culture in the UK, its nature and impact. A culture that developed and exists to serve specific needs that mainstream society has historically proved unwilling or unable to provide for. The research highlights the intensity, vibrancy and attraction of the culture in the context of individuals' need to belong, to be respected and to be able to feel ontologically secure. There is unique insight into the process of becoming homeless and fitting into the culture and the allure of the culture. This includes the strong intense friendships developed, the inverse hierarchies and a glimpse into the violent side of the culture as well as the fun side. Although gender is not a main

³ With the exception of Smith et al 1998

theme, there is a brief look at women within the culture and the impact on homeless people of losing contact with their children.

This study provides information that is unattainable through questionnaire and survey work. Homeless culture is, in fact, a vital part of understanding why it is so difficult for homeless people to resettle into mainstream housed society and why so many experience repeated episodes of homelessness. It is only by understanding what a homeless culture offers an individual that we can understand the hold it has over an individual. It is only by understanding the process of exclusion from society and inclusion into the homeless culture that we can understand the trauma that can be involved in exclusion from homeless culture and inclusion back into mainstream housed society and the enormity of the task faced by homeless people as they fight to be included within the society that rejected them.

Exit Strategies

There is a detailed look at the routes people take out of homelessness. This includes the catalysts that start the exit process; the obstacles and hurdles experienced as they try to get the help they need to leave the streets and a look at the way the success of rehabilitation and re-integration is largely dependent on the assisting organisations theoretical stance. It is shown that the current system is often inadvertently counter-productive. Holding people back and preventing them from leaving the streets, entering substance abuse rehabilitation, finding accommodation, re-integrating back into mainstream society. The British system, though getting better, is counter-productive not by design but by default. The absence of any real multi-agency co-operation, led to legislation and policy that has been allowed to develop, but which has as its aim getting people off the streets, not re-integrating people into mainstream society and assisting them until they can function in that society.

Svetlana Stephenson: Russia/UK.

The project addressed the social behaviour of homeless street youth as directed towards 're-placement' in the new social milieu. Qualitative methods made it possible to observe the changes in social affiliations and identities, and analyse the 'alternative careers' that street children make in the informal economy and society.

The reasons for displacement

In-depth interviews confirmed that young people living on the streets were displaced from their role as children entitled to be 'looked after' by adults. While the quantitative part of the research revealed a high incidence of disrupted families, family poverty and insecure employment among the parents (Stephenson, 2001b), qualitative interviews confirmed that family disruption produced explosive and erratic parent-children interactions. Most kids ran away from homes after a prolonged campaign of violence, although some reported a single violent episode. The kids described their emotional and physical suffering in their families, but also expressed their perception of such family life as being abnormal, unsuited to their needs.

Strategies of re-placement

In-depth interviews and focus groups, as well as the information collected at the end of the formalised interviews, made it possible to look at the social behavior of displaced street children and youth as structured by their attempts to get re-placed in society, to find new physical homes and to build immediate and long-term social memberships.

Contrary to common assumptions about the children choosing excitement and risk over the stability and boredom of family life, research has shown that, while the sensuous elements of freedom and lack of adult control are definitely important for the young people's street experience, our interviews demonstrated that maximization of security was viewed as the primary objective. Most of the interviewees experienced the street as a very dangerous place. Fear of violence was overwhelming, and there were particular groups of people who children encounter in the streets – militia officers, adult homeless people, drunks, drug addicts – who children cited specifically as sources of fear.

Finding company on the streets was viewed as a strategy, which served to minimise the risk. Far from being pathological individuals leading isolated hand-to-mouth existences on the streets, the kids build supportive relationships with each other and demonstrate compassion, kindness and altruism. Their solidarity is a response to profound insecurity, and human warmth they give each becomes an answer to deprivation and exclusion.

Accumulating 'alternative' social capital

Qualitative research made it possible to uncover the unique reality of underground communities that children join on the streets, and their efforts to accumulate specific social capital to become recognized members of these communities and even make alternative careers (Ennew and Milne, 1997). Some of the street children, mostly those from middle class families, are able to join an agglomeration of youth subcultures (the so called Sistema – the System) where they pool their resources and through which they impose normative codes ensuring a minimal conflict with the law. Others (predominantly underage girls) join the structures of organized prostitution, where, although being subjected to exploitation and abuse, they believe they find relative stability compared to risky and dangerous street existence. Still other young people (who tend to be teenage boys who have had direct contact with adult criminals in the past or had a spell in underage detention) attempt to join street criminal gangs and develop connections with adult criminal groups.

Organised prostitution and crime are not just exploitative of street children. For some, they appear to provide surrogate families. Comparing to the destitution and danger on the streets and lack of prospects in the mainstream economy, organised prostitution and crime can be construed by children as offering security and pathways into careers in the informal economy.

This research has shown that street children in Moscow are far from being a dispossessed mass of individuals, leading hand to mouth existence and being on the receiving end of abuse and exploitation. There are subtle, but crucially important, class, ethnic and economic differences between groups of children and young people on the street, which define their life chances. The efforts of these children to use their available resources and construct social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) bring a further differentiation in their trajectories. Being transplanted beyond the spaces of homes, family and local community, they try, although at a high price, to find alternative homes and memberships.

Petra van Leeuwen, Netherlands

To understand the unique findings in the research on the 'eight step model', one should understand the history of the help for homeless in the Netherlands. For a long time the help for the homeless had been given by volunteers but from the nineteen eighties the support for homeless become more and more professionalised.

The unique findings in the research are not unique in terms of methods or concepts in general, but indeed for homeless organizations in The Netherlands.

The eight-step model and changes in the culture of organisations working with homeless people

The main success factors are:

- an integrated approach homeless people on eight spheres of functioning (holistic approach);
- the emphasis on the strengths and possibilities of homeless people themselves, instead of regarding them as only having problems (empowerment);
- an increased responsibility among the homeless themselves for their own trajectory (social competence/empowerment);
- a systematic approach (work with realistic action plans).

The main breakthrough was indeed the change in the way of thinking about and approaching of homeless people; that indeed it was possible to make changes in the lives of homeless people. This change in the culture of the organizations was most difficult, but turned out to be necessary for these changes to happen.

The results of the eight-step model from the client perspective

From the client questionnaires there appeared to be positive results. An evaluation of the method was made in 2003 with 6 agencies that participated in the project. Point Zero was the start of the project and the clients, workers, management of the projects were interviewed at the beginning. Semi-structured and questionnaires were distributed to the clients (and social workers) at the end of the programme.

There were 10 questions for clients –

Do you have an action plan?

Do you know what is in it?

Do you have one social worker?

What other kind of professionals do you have contact with?

Do you feel that the professionals were working together well?

There were other general questions about themselves and their individual help in the hostel.

The general satisfaction of clients stayed the same during the two year period, however increased satisfaction was shown with their outcomes (10% or more satisfaction) across several topics. The homeless felt they were taken more seriously and also knew better whom to turn to in case of questions or help. Also they received more help from external caregivers. These caregivers provided more specialised care than the social workers, so it might indicate that the help the homeless received was of a higher quality. Agreements and goals were better described (by both the social worker and the client) than before the implementation of the eight steps model. Also the co-operation between social workers improved according to the clients.

In the second questionnaire, more than 50% of the population of the homeless were more or less satisfied about the analysis (86%) and the plan (97%), two instruments that had been developed during the project. In 71% the analysis was made together with clients, according to clients.

Some of these results could also be achieved due to other reasons, but are highly related to the implementation of the eight steps model, since other circumstances stayed more or less the same in the main.

The results of the eight-step model from the perspective of social workers and management

Interviews with social workers and management strongly suggested that the improvements that had been achieved, were due to the eight steps model. The main results according to social workers and management:

- ❖ The help given is more transparent and open. Because of the use of action plans and evaluation, the real content of the support became more clear. This was true for both social workers and clients themselves who received more insight in their trajectory. The support was also clearer to external caregivers.
- ❖ There is more structure and coherence. The eight steps model gives the social workers and clients concrete and practical instruments to work together. The content of the support was also more consistent, because of the use of the same topics all the time. Dividing different phases in the support was supporting for social workers.
- ❖ The help is more goal orientated and focussed on moving on. The use of SMART-goals in action plans made the support more goal orientated, although some goals were maintenance orientated. Not only were the clients who asked for help being helped, also the quieter clients received the help they needed, which they had not asked for. This allowed the possibilities for all clients to become clearer. Therefore more clients were moved out of the hostel to other kind of housing where they had more responsibility for themselves (e.g. from a hostel to supporting living, or from supported living to floating help).
- ❖ Co-operation has improved, both internal as external. Due to the reasons mentioned above, social workers and other caregivers within the organisation, were better aware of each client's trajectory. This made it easier to observe, communicate and to make agreements. Also the co-operation with external caregivers improved, because who was doing what was more visible. Both improvements were also commented on by clients (see above).

Joan Smith, UK

The 'Family Background of Young Homeless People' created a unique perspective on youth homelessness at the time it was published. First it identified that young people were not 'runaways' but had actually left home after family relationships had broken down or after they had been thrown out.

Types of families and the reasons that young people become homeless

One of the purposes of undertaking qualitative research is to build generalised models as described in the work of Glaser and Strauss (1968). The in-depth interviews with young homeless people and their parents produced a distinction between three types of families whose categories were not those of the traditional social survey:

- ❖ Non-disrupted families were those who had been stable since the child was quite young and included two birth parents, long-term single parents, long-term step-parents and long-term foster parents.
- ❖ Disrupted families were those where there had been a break in the young person's life, or several breaks, from 8/9 years on to 14/15 years. Primarily this could be the introduction of a new partner of their parent into the household or it could be serial partnering on the part of a parent.
- ❖ Abusive families could be either non-disrupted or disrupted but were more likely to be disrupted families.

Associated with these three types of families were differences in patterns of family conflict leading to homelessness for the young person. In the first type of family – non-disrupted – it was frequently the case that the behaviour of the young person caused the conflict; one parent was re-hospitalised in a mental hospital through worry, another was attacked, another had their special possessions stolen. In the second type of family – disrupted – it was more frequently the case that the parent's choice of partner caused the conflict; a new male in the household could be controlling and dominating. In the third type of family young people were frequently at risk from parents who themselves had mental health issues. The incidence of self-reported mental illness among young people - overdosing, self-harming - was higher among those from disrupted families and most high among those who came from abusive families.

Ruptures in the social fabric: changes between the lives of parents and young people on the estate and between young people who became homeless

The history of the estate parents compared with the estate young people also established the huge changes in the social fabric in which the young people were now living. Estate parents were a generation for whom both jobs and housing (from the local authority) were available. All except three estate parents lived with both birth parents until they left home, usually to establish a family of their own whereas one fifth of their own children had been brought up in families with a step-parent. Estate young people were more likely to go from school to a youth training scheme rather than a job, or into a succession of low paying jobs; only four young men found the sort of employment that their fathers had found.

Even though there were differences between the estate young people and their own parents there were also substantial differences between estate young people and those interviewed as homeless in relation to family backgrounds and school histories.

Abusive families could be either non-disrupted or disrupted but were more likely to be disrupted families.

- ❖ Four fifths of young people in the estate sample had been brought up in by both birth parents or a long term lone parent compared with only one third of the homeless sample.
- ❖ The majority of young people were in difficulties at school at least by age 14 and 15 years and for some these difficulties happened much earlier. Only a quarter of estate young people reported have difficulties at school.
- ❖ Estate young people were less likely to be unemployed after leaving school although the employment available to them was equally low paid and with little prospects.
- ❖ Similar patterns of early relationships and leaving home were found among homeless young women and young men and women living on the estates. Nearly half of the young people living on the estate had left home (28) but nine had returned. Some young people had been thrown out from the homes on the estate but had subsequently returned.

Moral orders and family obligation towards young people

There were several interesting results from responses to the vignettes that sought to discover whether the parents living on the estates would have supported the action of the parents of homeless young people who had asked them to leave home under particular circumstances.

- ❖ The majority of parents agreed with parents asking a young man to leave if there was conflict with a new partner, or a young girl to leave if there was conflict over her choice of boyfriend.
- ❖ Estate parents would only ask a young person to leave if they were aged 16 years or over – if they were aged under this they thought the new partner should leave or they should try and deal with the young woman's boyfriend.
- ❖ There were still different attitudes towards young men and young women in relationship to bad behaviour. Young men could be forgiven more in relationship to drug taking than young women in relationship to sexual behaviour.
- ❖ All parents had difficulties in resolving conflicts between siblings, frequently supporting the older even if they were violent towards the younger, or had difficulty resolving conflicts over resources such as when an older daughter returned to live with a baby putting a younger sibling out of their bedroom.

The results of the *Family Background* study were summarised in a 'Circle of Risk' for young people in relation to becoming homeless. These risks included both the biographical risks identified for young people and also the enhanced social risks given changing education requirements for the labour market, and changes in social welfare entitlements. This was a first construction of a model that was linked both to Beck's theory of risk and also to theories of Social Exclusion.

Section 3. Practitioner / Policy outputs from qualitative research

Lia van Doorn, Netherlands

Possibilities of resettlement

The study resulted in the following quantitative findings, which offered policymakers an indication of the percentage of the homeless population that was able to get out of their homeless situation. Of the first cohort of 64 respondents that were monitored in the study from 1993 on, 11 could not be traced in 2001. Of the other 53 five had died in the meantime, and one had been deported, 17 were still homeless still. The other 30 (just under half) have settled in various ways: 18 live independently and 12 have settled –temporarily or otherwise– by moving in with relatives, friends or acquaintances, they live in caravans or have a place in a sublet or found shelter in an institution. Of these 30 persons approximately 10 extricated themselves from street life to a considerable extent and appear to be permanently resettled. The other 20 still have one foot in the homeless circuit and some seem to be on the brink of losing their accommodation once more. Of the second cohort of 20 former homeless persons living independently and monitored since 1997, 6 had gone back to the streets by mid 2000. Therefore the relapse percentage of this relatively favourable category of former homeless persons was approximately 30% after 4 years.

The findings regarding the two perspectives that together make up the conceptual framework of this study can be summarised as follows.

The importance of culture and socialisation in becoming homeless and in resettlement from homelessness

The first perspective in this study was aimed at understanding developments in the life of homeless people. The main conclusion for policy in this respect is that great importance should be attached to the influence of culture and socialisation processes. The loss of a house and the decline towards the streets sets in motion a process of integration into street culture. This contributes to a considerable extent to the continuation of homelessness and prevents a return to regular society.

The decline towards the street causes the homeless to end up in another world where they are being pulled into street culture. They still tend to carry with them the remainder of their former cultural context and accompanying identity. As a rule their orientation focuses on the usual cultural targets; their ambition is for a house and a job. They resist assimilation with street culture and refuse to identify themselves with the homeless identity. However, in order to hold their own in the streets, it is necessary for them to adapt to the homeless way of life. In the long term they become familiar with street culture and its logic. They socialise with other homeless people, are seen as homeless by the environment and in due course will start viewing themselves as such. Being homeless gradually turns into a way of life. In the process their cultural orientation becomes ambivalent: it sways between the ambition for a regular existence and further adaptation to the homeless way of life. Most long-term homeless people are therefore confused as to culture: they have double standards and double identities. After several years but few of them succeed in extricating themselves from this dilemma by reconciling themselves completely to the state of homelessness and by accepting the homeless identity. Once they have arrived at that point, in general return to the mainstream of society is no longer an option.

The termination of homelessness can also be viewed as a socialisation process. Among the former homeless the paradoxical situation occurs that the learning processes they went through in the streets in order to hold their own hamper their social re-integration. The way of life and skills they acquired during the period of

homelessness must be unlearned. At the same time they must go through new learning processes in order to re-familiarise themselves with the regular way of life that goes with a settled existence. In doing so the former homeless usually struggle for quite a long time with the aftermath of their adaptations to the homeless way of life. They are also characterised by ambiguous orientations: they keep double standards and identities and struggle with loyalty conflicts as well. In due course some of them succeed in extricating themselves entirely from the subculture of the street; they find a partner, a job, extend their social network and acquire a certain extent of material affluence. However, the majority will stay single in the long term, will depend on social benefits and be socially isolated. As a rule they will feel related to the street culture and for them there is an increased risk of a relapse to street life. The following holds true for all former homeless persons: after the decline towards the streets and the arduous way back, life will never be the same again.

Homeless people and agencies for the homeless

The second perspective in this study was aimed at understanding the interaction between the homeless and the institutional environment. It was concluded that the relationship between these elements is highly problematic largely because institutional culture is at odds with street culture. There is a conflict between the perceptions of reality held by agency workers and those held by the homeless. This contributes to a considerable extent to the fact that a joint perspective and joint working between the homeless person and the institutional environment is difficult to achieve. Many homeless people have a dualistic approach towards (care) agencies. Such agencies present solutions to the problems of homeless people but at the same time they also create problems for them. Agencies contribute to both the social inclusion of the homeless person and their social exclusion.

Practitioner Outputs

Another policy output is the transformation of the Ph D in 2004 in a study book for highschool students for social work. In the study book the different phases of homelessness and the possible intervention strategies for social workers in each of these phases are described. The book goes along with a website with additional material and study tasks for students. In 2005 four High schools and a Police academy where using this book in there lessons.

Megan Ravenhill, UK

Resettlement Processes

The study of street and hostel homeless people in London and Southern England also offers a perspective on the resettlement process and the obstacles that need overcoming by homeless people wanting to resettle into mainstream society. This process is viewed from practical, behavioural and emotional viewpoints. Access was at issue at all levels, from hostels through to inclusion within the community. The current system for dealing with homeless (especially roofless) people appears to be counterproductive, actually discouraging them from trying to resettle, or locking them into dependency on the homeless culture for survival. The resettlement process offered by agencies depended on the level of desperation of individual homeless people rather than an early intervention with gradual rehabilitation through preparation, support and assistance. This situation has developed, by default, over a significant period of time. Conversely a number of factors were also shown in the study to support successful re-integration into housed society, including motivation, self-identity, economic factors and long-term support.

Catalyst for getting off the street.

The majority of homeless people need some form of help and support to resettle and that this needs to be flexible enough to allow people to progress forwards and backwards along the programme according to their needs and abilities. There were clear identifiable protecting factors, which protected people from becoming roofless (or at least counterbalanced the negative impact of roofless triggers) and predictor factors that indicated those most at risk of becoming roofless (either for the first time or for repeated episodes), as well as the people or organisations in the best position to spot the predictor factors as they occur.

The resettlement process in existing literature tends to focus on housing, making people ready to be housed and tenancy failure. This qualitative study, based on life-stories and in-depth interviews, allowed the decision processes, the impact on ontological security and the different coping strategies employed by homeless people to be explored. The process and mechanisms for settling into a community and the mechanisms for making friends and achieving a sense of belonging are also explored. Most of this information is inaccessible through quantitative research methods and analysis.

Predictor factors - Family background

The family, relationships within the family and the home environment were the strongest factors that either triggered or protected people against homelessness. Experiences during childhood often began a series of experiences, decisions and gradual disaffection or alienation from society, the family and home. These events are depicted using the route-maps that outline these processes and the accumulation of triggers over time. The age at which a person first experiences rooflessness is linked to the number of episodes and duration of homelessness. Similarly the age an individual first leaves home appears to have a direct impact on the degree and duration of rooflessness, with those leaving home early and/or experiencing homelessness at a young age far more likely to go on to become homeless or roofless long-term.

Svetlana Stephenson

Displaced children: state strategies

The Russian state reacts to the displacement of street children with a range of re-placement strategies. In Moscow, public resources are directed to 'containing' the street youth within educational and leisure establishments. More radical re-placement strategies are applied to those who have gone beyond the reach of educational establishments – persistent truants, migrants and homeless children and youths. The efforts of the state mainly involve taking them off the streets and sending them back to their parents, or, when this is impossible, putting them into an institution: a children's home, a shelter or even a hospital (as practiced by Moscow authorities during their periodic sweeps of the streets). There is also a range of quasi-penal strategies, including placement of children into militia reception centres or into special schools for underage delinquents. Any specific efforts by young people to construct their own social reality are completely ignored. Furthermore, whenever young people form their own street-based groups, these are perceived as vehicles of pathology and danger. Suspicion and fear seem to be the dominant reactions to any spontaneous youth organization. In the criminal justice system, when adolescents commit group crimes, such as theft or robbery, they get tougher sentences.

Displaced children: children strategies

This research has shown that re-placement strategies adopted by street children themselves are radically different from those exercised by the state. By running away

or drifting towards the streets, children hope to be able to settle with their friends, find new families or new opportunities in the city. This survey showed that a complex system of social relations emerges on the street, with children finding their own positions alongside other urban actors. This complexity of the street social world and of the children's experience has to be taken into account in intervention programmes designed to take the children off the streets. The need for child welfare programmes to recognise the importance of children's continuing identification with the street, and with street children groups, have been highlighted in a number of works (Glaser, 1990, Ennew, 1994, Lucchini, 1996). It seems crucially important in designing programmes of work with street children to realise that they have developed idiosyncratic responses, practices and notions which reflect their participation in various street subcultures and communities. Currently in Moscow the local authorities, under the impression that the causes of the problems of street children are in the lack of children's clubs and Pioneers' Palaces, allocate resources to build substitutes for such institutions - new centres for children for after-school hours. The most needy groups - migrant children and those Moscow kids who run away from family abuse and who have to develop ingenious strategies in order to survive— do not benefit at all from such investments. What they need (apart from the resolution of their care needs), are individually designed programmes of support, which would take into account their past experiences and identifications, and address the specific problems in their families which force the kids to run away. .

Petra van Leeuwen, Netherlands

Framework for social work with homeless people

The main policy output of the 'Eight step programme' was a framework for social workers to structure the support of homeless. A personal, individual approach was proven to be necessary to achieve goals in the lives of the homeless. Eight phases in the work with homeless were divided, from application to exit. See figure below. The first three steps on the left deal with application (1), intake (2) and admittance (3). Phases 4 to 7 are a cyclic process between social workers and clients: from analysis (4) to planning (5), execution (6) and evaluation (7). This process goes on until the last phase: exit (8). Each phase has its own goals, way of working and instruments.

Model

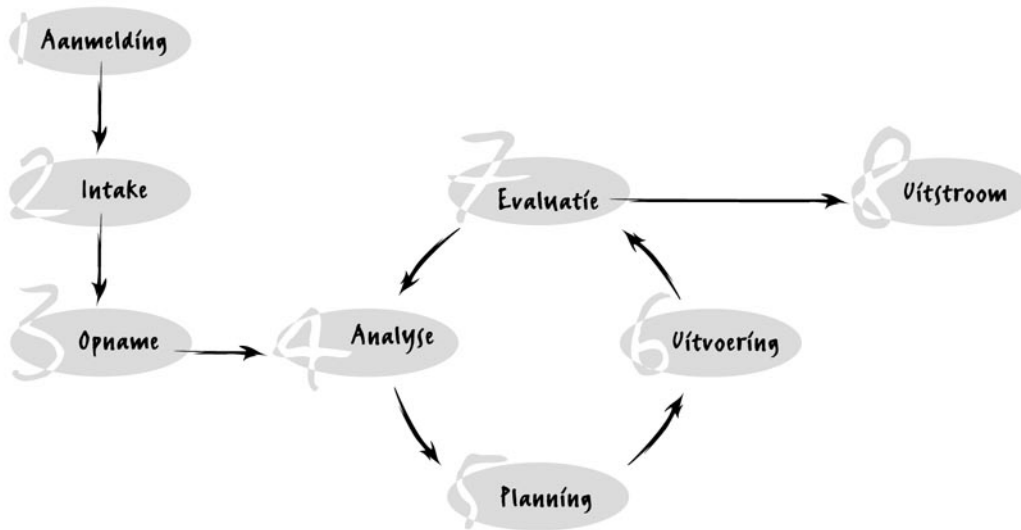


Figure 1: The Eight Steps Model

During the process between social worker and clients eight different areas of welfare are used as the framework for observation, planning and evaluation. These are

- **Finance**, like income, debts, way of spending money;
- **Accommodation**, which means way of living;
- **Social behaviour**, with family, friend and society;
- **Mental health**, including psychiatric problems and addiction;
- **Motivation**, like religion or main reason of living;
- **Physical health**; including use of medicine;
- **Practical skills**, like housekeeping, writing and administration;
- **Occupation**, like hobbies, (voluntary) work, activities or study.

Implementation at a national level

The eight steps model has become very popular among homeless organizations in The Netherlands. Because of the practical outcomes, it was easy for other organizations to implement the eight steps model. Also the pressure of the Dutch government to improve the quality of the help and to decrease the duration of the stay in institutions leading to changes in the financing of homeless organisations contributed to its popularity can explain the popularity. The norms of HKZ-model become more and more important and the eight steps model covers a lot of items on the level of the primary process.

Practitioner Outputs

From January 2004 to July 2005 1300 books about the eight steps model have been sold to approximately 200 different organizations, and it has therefore reached half of all homeless organisations in the Netherlands.

Joan Smith, UK

Investigating the risk of homelessness among young people in London

The second study in the 'Family Background' research programme came about because of the establishment of a new initiative designed to prevent youth

homelessness through the development of an early intervention strategy. The '*Taking Risks*' study undertaken in London built on the 'Circle of Risk' findings from the 'Family Background' study. The *Taking Risks* study compared two groups of young Londoners aged 16-19 years, 198 living in homeless hostels or supported housing and 152 young people living in deprived areas, but still living with their family. The purpose was to identify more precisely the particular risk factors that led to youth homelessness in order to guide the identification of young people at age of 13 or 14 who might become homeless. It was not designed to quantify the risk factors of age, sex and ethnic group, but to quantify the factors associated with family background, family violence and other individual factors. The questionnaire designed for this study was based on the results of the qualitative study into the Family Background of Young Homeless People. Questions on causes of arguments and violence within the home, on relationships with mother, father (step-father) and siblings, and questions on school experiences and the process of leaving home were all drawn directly from the in-depth interviews that had previously been undertaken.

The two samples of young Londoners (the homeless sample and the domiciled sample) were not drawn through a representative sample. The purpose of the research was to understand the risks of homelessness facing local young people i.e. young people from London, for whom services could be provided while they were still at school, or of school age, and to identify the types of service required. Therefore only young people living in London, and attending school in London, at the age of 16 could be included in the homeless sample drawn from hostels and advice agencies across London. Young people, still living at home, were interviewed in local housing estates.

The information collected from the two London samples produced a measure of difference between currently homeless young people and those living at home. The data from both sets of interviews were put together and then the prevalence of particular factors was measured against whether the young person was currently homeless or not. This comparison produced odds ratios that are summarised in Table 2 from which it was apparent that young people were thirteen times more likely to be found in the homeless group if they did not get on with your mother than if they did and so on. Overall the odds of being homeless were at their highest if the young person: didn't get on with their mother, had moved house more than twice, had a younger mother, was badly off as a child, was not living with either a sole birth parent or both birth parents at age twelve, had been hit frequently during the course of an argument, had shared a bedroom, had lived in rented accommodation, had no car in their household, had been school excluded.

Table 2 Odds of being in the Homeless Sample.

London 'Safe in the City' Survey 1998

Variable	Odds Ratio
Didn't get on with mother/ got on with mother	13:1
Moved house more than twice/ less than twice	11:1
Mother aged below 25 years at first child/ mother older	6:1
Badly off as a child/ not badly off as a child	5:1
Living with foster parent/care, step parent, or relative at 12 years/ in two birth parent or one birth parent family at 12 years	5:1
Hit frequently in course of argument/not hit, not hit frequently	4:1
Shared bedroom at 12 years/ not shared bedroom at 12 years	3:1
In rented accommodation at 12/ in other tenure	3:1
No car in household/ at least one car	3:1
Excluded from school/ never excluded	2:1

Of course there was a relationship between many of these variables. For example homeless young people not living with two or one birth parents but with a step-parent or other situation were more than twice as likely to have been school excluded. Therefore we also ran a discriminant analysis on all the young people to see which variables, and their weights, best differentiated all the respondents into the categories of currently homeless and not currently homeless (our local sample). Using seven variables it was possible to place 82% of the homeless sample into the correct category. The variables in that equation showed that living with a step-parent, foster-parent or other relative has an effect on the probability that a young person will be homeless, that was independent of poverty, school exclusion, relationships with mother or violent arguments. Similarly moving house more than twice had an independent effect.⁴

Safe in the City cluster model

This research into the risk factors of becoming homeless was used to select 5 criterion on which it was possible to identify young people at risk of homelessness.

⁴ **Probability of Being Homeless. Regression Equation** London 'Safe in the City' Survey 1998

Variable	Co-efficient
<i>Constant</i>	-0.578
Didn't get on with mother/ got on with mother	+0.658
Moved house more than twice/ less than twice	+1.242
Mother aged below 25 years at first child/ mother older	+1.112
Badly off as a child/ not badly off as a child	-0.896
Living with foster parent/care, step parent, or relative at 12 years/ in two birth parent or one birth parent family at 12 years	-0.639
Hit frequently in course of argument/not hit, not hit frequently	-0.375
Shared room at 12 years/ not shared room at 12 years	+0.668
Excluded from school/ never excluded	+0.471

These young people were then offered a programme of early intervention in order to prevent youth homelessness through the Safe in the City programme in eight London boroughs. This programme was based on three different types of support services offered to each young person:

- Personal development
- Skills and employability
- Family Support

The above order was found to be important. The process of empowering the young person had to precede skills and employability training and both had to precede any attempt to engage with their parent (s).

The whole programme was described in the booklet '*Safe in the City: a practical approach to preventing youth homelessness*' 2002. The 'Safe in the Cities' programme has now ceased with the ending of the 5 year pilot funding. But the programme itself has now been expanded into a national pilot scheme under the umbrella of the Foyer Federation called 'Safe Moves', and the findings of the *Risk Studies* have been used to inform the services and the selection of young people.

Section 4. Conclusion: Qualitative research – a different form of validity and reliability in relation to the study of the homeless

Three different claims are made for quantitative research methods in relation to scientific status of those methodologies, these are: validity (the research instruments measure what they purport to measure), reliability (research instruments, questions, are replicable) and that results are true for a given population (within specified confidence limits) based on representative sampling. How far can one argue, based on comparative study, that qualitative research can provide different, but compelling, versions of these benchmarks.

The validity of ethnographic studies

One of the interesting outcomes of CUHP network has been the knowledge gained of ethnographic studies undertaken in different European countries. Lia van Doorn, in the Netherlands undertook two studies of the street homeless in Utrecht over a seven-year period, observing them on the street and in relation to the organisations that worked with the street homeless. Her methods were classically ethnographic – field notes, notes of interviews, manual analysis of the notes and herself a walking record of what she had seen. Megan Ravenhill, undertook a four-year study of the street (and hostel) homeless in London and Southern England using observation and in-depth interviews. Her methods of analysis were tape-recorded interviews, field-notes, analysis of narrative interviews through time-lines and computer-aided qualitative analysis. (Both worked as volunteers in organisations helping the homeless.) Svetlana Stephenson combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, using a variety of research methods to study the background of street children and their social practices on the streets.

It is notable that Lia van Doorn's results on the attitude to 'time', published in a paper to the CUHP network, could be found in Megan Ravenhill's observation notes and interviews with homeless people, although this particularly aspect of the work had not been analysed previously. (Doorn 2000, Ravenhill 2003). The similarities between Doorn (2000) and Ravenhill (2003) suggest that the relationship to time that develops on the street among the street homelessness in Holland and England have a number characteristics that bare very strong similarities. Both pieces of work can be compared to Liebow's qualitative research on USA homelessness suggesting a robustness in the findings and the method used.

The reliability of qualitative research findings

In two of the studies reported here the reliability of their findings have been tested, not through other research programmes, but by practice. The action research programme of Petra van Leeven (and other members of NIZW) resulted in a simplified eight- step method of working with clients that spread beyond Utrecht to other cities in the Netherlands. Since that date it has also been trailed in Kiev.

The research into the risk of youth homelessness by Joan Smith (and Irene Breugel) led to an action research programme across eight London boroughs that sought to provide an early intervention programme to prevent youth homelessness through three interventions in their personal development, employability, and family relationships. This programme was replicated nationally through the Foyer Federation pilot programme 'Safe Moves'.

Theoretic versus representative sampling

None of the studies reported here attempted to use any form of representative sampling. This does not mean that there were not sampling strategies. The *Family Background of Young Homeless People Programme* has, over the past 10 years, adopted several theoretic sampling strategies. In the first stage only young people who became homeless from the family home (not from institutions) were interviewed because of the demands of the research problem. In the second stage the 198 young people interviewed in London hostels for the those under 25 years of age were only interviewed if they had been born or brought up in London and had been eligible or in a London school at age 15 years i.e. before the school leaving age of 16. The research problem was to consider the issue of young people becoming homeless in their own city and what early intervention programme could be produced in that city.

Megan Ravenhill's research also searched for two particular samples to compare with the male street homeless population. First, a deliberate recruitment of women who were street or hostel homeless within the type of shelters used by older men. The second sample was of those who had experienced many of the same triggers as those who became homeless but did not become homeless.

Svetlana Stephenson's research interviewed young Muscovites and non-Muscovites, boys and girls, as well as children of different ages.

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