

Qualitative Researches on Homelessness in Hungary

by Eszter Somogyi and Ivan Tosics

Metropolitan Research Institute, Budapest

Short paper for CUHP London meeting

2004 October

I. Introduction

Regarding qualitative research on homelessness, primarily it has to be stated that very few researches of this type has been carried out. The first qualitative research was undertaken in the eighties (Utasi, 1986) with the aim to examine the inner structure of the homeless' society. One hundred interviews were made in the framework of the research.

Subsequently two other larger researches were planned but none of them were completed. One of them started in the mid-nineties and 250 interviews were carried out with homeless from all around the country. The sample of the research was representative for the number of homeless staying in shelter services for homeless in cities. The aim of the research was to examine thoroughly the causes of homelessness, therefore in-depth interviews were used which were taped and typed but the analyses were never carried out. Péter Breitner, who analysed a total of 40-45 interviews made with male homeless in Budapest from a social psychological aspect, accomplished the only analysis that used this research material.

The other larger scale qualitative research was carried out in 2001 with the aim to gain more information about the life of young homeless. The qualitative research was planned as an additional research to a quantitative survey using the same sample of young homeless. The interviews were made, but unfortunately the quality of the interviews was so bad that the researchers were not able to analyse them. The reason mainly lied in the design of the interviews, as only the topic lists were defined for the interviewers. (For more detail on this research see the Appendix)

It is possible that several quantitative researches on smaller scale were carried out mainly in the form of university theses, but these have not been published. We present one of them in this paper.

Before presenting the researches in detail, we summarize the **main reasons for not using qualitative researches** in Hungary:

- One of the reasons is of theoretical nature: qualitative researches are less acknowledged in Hungary than the quantitative ones. The results of the quantitative researches, the "hard data" describing social problems are perceived more important deriving from the fact that in the socialist time no such data were available as the existence of social problem were basically denied.

- The phenomenon of (visible) homelessness was a "new development" in Hungary from the early nineties and therefore the experts' basic information on this population - such as the number of homeless, the distribution of homeless in the country, the socio-demographic features of homeless, the use of homeless institutions, the causes of homelessness etc. was very poor. To gain this information, quantitative research was more adequate.

- Most of the researches on homelessness were carried out by experts who worked in the homeless service system and they needed very practical information on the way how homeless use services, what kind of homeless groups use shelters, sleep in the streets, what demands of homeless had towards the institutional system etc. Furthermore, the results of researches were needed in short time for social policy programs; therefore quantitative research seemed to be more convenient.

- Lack of financial and human resources and time. To implement qualitative researches requires quite long time, considerable amount of financial resources and work of researchers.

The structure of our paper is as follows:

- First we present the research of Ágnes Utasi on “Homeless and Hobos” carried out in the eighties.
- Secondly, we introduce the study of Péter Breitner that deals with homelessness from social-psychological perspective.
- Then a smaller qualitative research of Erika Ladányi is presented that was made in a temporary shelter.
- A qualitative research on households’ arrears related to housing expenditures is shown as our last example, since many of those households are threatened by loss of their housing (based on a broader definition of “homeless”).
- In the Appendix, we quote Erika Ladányi, who summarized the main results of the surveys on young homelessness and the reasons why the qualitative research proved to be unsuccessful is summarized.

II. Ágnes Utasi: Homeless and Hobos

The research was carried out in the first part of the eighties, still during socialist times. Its main significance lies in the fact that it was the first study in Hungary dealing seriously with the phenomenon of homelessness. Until then, the few studies that had dealt vaguely with this problem examined only the young hobos, the runaway young people, who constituted the only group that was officially acknowledged. Consequently, homelessness was perceived as a lifestyle which was chosen consciously by the affected.

The research discussed below was a part of a large research agenda on the model of social-differentiation¹ during the eighties. The aim of the research agenda was to examine the inequalities within the Hungarian society with the help of a representative national survey. The survey sample consisted of 16,000 cases, with the housing unit providing its basis. During the analysis it became clear that in the survey certain subgroups and inequalities remained hidden. Primarily, the research did not include those 300,000 people who had no official residence, secondly it did not reflect the spatial inequities inside the settlements. Therefore several additional, mainly qualitative researches were carried out on a smaller scale in order to gain more information about the population living in marginalised positions. Two types of marginalisation were examined extensively: labour market and spatial marginalisation processes in urban areas. These researches have managed to find some marginalised social groups, among them the homeless and those unskilled workers who lived in workers’ hostels. This latter group is important from the point of view of our present research programme because with the closure of these workers’ hostels at the beginning of transition period (so just a few years after these surveys were made), a significant part of the people who had lived there became homeless.

The research „Homeless and Hobos” was a qualitative research. Within its framework 100 interviews were made with homeless people living in big cities. Most of the interviews were taped with some exceptions, where the interviewees did not agree. In these cases notes were taken during the interviews.

¹ The research was carried by the Társadalomtudományi Intézet (Institute for Social Science) and it resulted in series of publication: altogether 9 books were published from 1982 till 198XXX. The senior researcher was Tamás Kolosi.

The research **defined homeless** anyone, who had no stable housing. The study used the words homeless and hobos as interchangeable synonyms. The starting point of the research was that, due to the accelerated process of urbanisation, there was a considerable group of people without housing in the big cities. The group of homeless during socialist times consisted of people who (1) moved into the cities to find jobs (2) rebelled against existing social norms (this included mostly young people). For the first group („the immigrants”) it was almost impossible to have an access to housing with legal means, especially as in the “market”² there was a significant housing shortage. The second group lost its housing opportunity together with its family and social relations. It is important to note that homelessness in the socialist period was directly connected to criminality as all people had to have a registered address and a registered work place. Those who lacked either one were treated as criminals and could be imprisoned.

The aim of the research was to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness and of the inner structure of homeless society. Therefore it examined their lifestyles, where they lived, where they spent their nights, how and why they became homeless and what social categories existed among them. The interviews were analysed by different topics and the statements under these topics were illustrated with citations from the interviews.

The study examined the **type of lodgings** that homeless used and it noted that at least as much energy was needed to find shelters as to acquire their „own” (not necessarily owner occupied but subletting, rental flat etc) dwelling. The reason why they did not choose the latter option was related to their lifestyle. The different shelter categories were as follows:

- unconventional dwellings: cottages, weekend houses (which were not used most of the year) – often those that belonged to friends or friends’ parents, unfinished houses, empty public rentals before allocation etc
- sleeping opportunities at the workplace: many homeless had casual work and some of the employers offered them to stay there during the night as „payment” for their work, for example in porter’s lodge, cellar, storeroom, etc
- friends, acquaintances, relatives who gave shelter for the homeless for shorter or longer time periods. They themselves often followed similar lifestyle. Most frequently it was a partner who housed the homeless, but this relationships usually did not last long. Sometimes homeless communities were formed at least for a while.
- Shelters, illegal hiding places for those who could have access to any „housing”: cellars, drying rooms, huts, wagons – but without the permission of the owner
- Huts built without permission
- Institutions: workers’ hostels, jails, homes for detoxication, hospitals, psychiatry, elderly homes etc. Problem arose when they were released or they escaped.
- Bed- and sublettings, with varying quality and temporality

The important finding of the study that almost everybody found some kind of a place, a shelter to sleep for night, consequently rough sleepers practically did not exist. A difference was pointed out between the elder and younger homeless in their strategy: the elderlies had more „stable” opportunities (some kind of institutions, they could stay for longer time in friend’s houses etc), whereas the young homeless only stayed for a shorter period at one place. As they knew more people they had a better chance to get a place for a couple of nights. Younger also stayed in bigger groups.

² The housing „market” in the cities largely consisted of the state owned rentals, that were distributed by administrative way. However an informal market emerged trading with the tenancy rights, as there was a severe housing shortage in cities. The „illegal ways” refers to such informal market transfers.

The other important question which was examined was the **income sources** the homeless had. The hypothesis was that people who belonged to the same social group had very similar attitudes toward work and followed similar a strategy to make their living. It was true for homeless as well. The common feature was that the priority was freedom and independency when they considered a job. Practically two types of life strategies were found: (a) first one was of those who only wanted to reach a minimum living standard, (b) the other one was of those who wanted to lead a luxury life with very little work, usually illegally. In case of the first group usually some „unskilled help” was generally regarded as work. Only a small part of this group had a permanent job, most of them occasionally went to the same place(s) to have some work, and many had only casual one-day work (any kind) in different places. This group quite often did very heavy physical work.

Regarding the illegal income resources quite high variety was found: begging, many times together with stealing, ticket taut, gambling (mostly the elderly did), prostitution, illegal currency change, faking prescriptions. Those who lived from illegal currency exchange mostly used currencies originating from prostitution. The involvement in prostitution and currency business was the feature of the younger homeless. To forge prescriptions was related to the fact that young people used medicines as drugs.

A third strategy was defined as “being supported”. Some of the homeless belonging this group got money from their families /parents, many of them from their partners with whom they lived together usually for only a short period of time. This was true both in case of men and women. Furthermore there were some elder people who were dependent on state allowances (they did not have pension), and the „servants” who were paid in kind, and got food and bed for their work.

Along the dimension of the **reasons for becoming homeless** a typology of the homeless was defined. The study classified homelessness as an alternative lifestyle based on the rejection of norms acknowledged by the majority of society. One of the basic norms of the socialist society was the necessity of labour, so everybody who reached the adulthood had to start working (especially the male population). Not to have a job meant a confrontation with the authorities that pushed the homeless towards the direction of criminality. The following typology was defined:

- Homeless in illegality: those who were wanted by the police, who violated the law. The seriousness of their crimes was very different, a significant part of homeless were wanted because they had not paid child alimony.
- Those who had lived in different kind of institutions (orphanage, elderly homes, homes for detoxication, jails etc) and were released, many of them became homeless as to get a dwelling without the support of the family was almost impossible. These people never had families or they had already lost it. The study emphasised that one of the most vulnerable groups was of those who were released from orphanages, as they had got hospitalised in the social care system and could not acquire effective patterns to make their own living.
- Those whose social prestige had changed: it indicates those whose social position has changed mainly because of historical changes, or changes in the social norms. People had to adapt to new requirements, which might cause significant personal conflicts if someone cannot adjust himself/herself to the new circumstances.
- Those who seek „easy money”. Primarily those who wanted to make big money in a short time, usually from illegal activities. Some people consciously chose this lifestyle and many of them regarded this lifestyle only a temporary one, until they can get enough money to buy an apartment. However, usually their lifestyle became permanent as they could not return to the „normal” everyday life with very different norms and requirements.

- The disabled, those who came from very disadvantaged families. Many of the young homeless in the bigger cities came from villages and generally experienced family disorders, such as divorce (their parents or themselves), alcoholism etc. An important statement of the study was that the differences (spatial, cultural, educational etc) between social groups were intensified by the big cities more than by any other type of settlements. Therefore vulnerable groups in big cities were marginalised considerably.
- The outsiders with a peculiar ideology: on the contrary to the developed capitalist countries, where the main opposition ideology was the rejection of the norms of consumer society, in Hungary – which was a socialist and less developed country that was just at the beginning of the process of modernisation - the rejection of social norms focused rather on the laborious way of acquiring the basic goods of consumption (housing, car, washing machine, TV etc). There are two possible consequences of such a rejection: on the one hand some homeless led a very simple life with the philosophy of the „inner peace” sometimes accompanied by a strong religious faith, on the other hand some homeless over-evaluated the role of money, thus they followed the quick, often illegal forms of growing rich.

To **explain the phenomenon of homelessness**, the study referred to Merton’s concept of “withdrawal” describing deviancy in the society. Merton basically states that the reason for deviant behaviour is that someone chooses to reject the norms and requirements of the society because he/she cannot reach the required goal with his/her means. Therefore he/she leaves the society. It might seem that the reasons for marginalisation have personal nature but in reality it originates from the underlying inequalities of society: for some people it would require enormous efforts to reach the goals socially required. The study pointed out that only a smaller part of the examined homeless population left the society consciously, the majority of homeless were marginalized because of their disadvantaged social position.

The study presented the **basic distribution of the sample**. Although it was emphasized that the sample was not representative, it gave some rough information and showed tendencies about the homeless population. Regarding the scale of deviancies in homeless life the following data were presented: one-fifth of the homeless had already been in prison or they had been searched for by the police, one-third was addicted to alcohol or drugs (mostly medicines and glue-sniffing – typical in the eighties), one-fifth obtained their income from illegal activities and one-fifth had an ideology for withdrawal from the society (half of them rejected poverty and the other half rejected the plodding needed to make a living).

The **age distribution** was as follows: slightly more than the half of the homeless was young, under thirty years old (one-fifth of the sample was under twenty and one third was between twenty and thirty years old); the middle aged were represented on very low rate and the elderly, above sixty made the majority of the other half of the homeless. The study explained the lack of the middle aged from the sample with the fact that above the age of thirty people tended to calm down, return to society and establish a family. Although it does not mean that later conflicts in their life would not endanger their structural position in the society.³

The research examined the **family background** of the homeless in order to obtain information on the social status of their family. The social status was defined along very rough dimensions, but it gave an overall picture. One-fifth of the homeless came from high-prestige families, 1/3 from middle and another one-third from low prestige families. Comparing this to the total distribution of population, the middle prestige families were represented on a lower rate, the high and low prestige families were represented on a higher

³ It is important to note that the lack of middle aged homeless is more interesting if we compare the data on homelessness of the nineties. After 1989 the majority of homeless consisted of middle aged people, many of them were released from the worker hostels, lost their jobs, etc. These facts highlights the structural factors in becoming homeless in the sense of rooflessness. These middle-aged people were homeless living in worker hostels, sublettings etc but got roofless with the big structural changes of the economy and society.

rate than their ratio in the general population. The explanation was that the social integration of the young generation is most successful in the case of the middle class. However, there is a significant difference between those who came from the upper and from the lower prestige families: homeless from the upper prestige groups are mainly "visitors" and have quite good chances to exit from homelessness, while homeless from the lower prestige social groups often follow a negative pattern of their families, which leads to homelessness and sometimes criminality as well.

The **final conclusion** of the study is that homeless society had a strongly differentiated inner structure. Homeless had a very different family and social background and as a consequence their chances to exit from homelessness were also very different. The homeless from higher prestige families and the young homeless had better opportunities to return to the mainstream of the society, while homeless with a lower prestige family background and the elderly were more likely to remain in a marginalized position permanently. (Utasi, 1987)

III. Péter Breitner: Stages of becoming homeless

The study examines the reasons for homelessness: whether the reasons lie in the personal histories or in social structural problems. The study intends to prove that homelessness has micro and macro level reasons and it is a result of the interaction of personal and social processes.

The study first gives a brief overview on some of the structural reasons for homelessness, then it examines in details the personal reasons based on the personal development theory. The study has a qualitative nature as it uses interviews with homeless made in the mid-nineties to support its statements about different personality distortions that may have a role in becoming homeless. From the approximately 250 interviews of the mid-nineties only those were used which were made in Budapest with male homeless because homelessness outside of the capital and female homelessness had very different characteristics. Altogether 40-45 interviews constructed the base of the research. No special methodology was used to evaluate the interviews, the researcher read through the whole text of the interviews 2-3 times and made notes but did not develop any quantitative information/data from the interviews. It meant an advantage that he had considerable experiences about homeless' life as he had been working among homeless as a social worker already for 5 years. These experiences allowed him to make several presumptions that could be tested with the interviews.

The study emphasises that homelessness can be examined from **different perspectives**: legal, labour market, education, economic, housing, psychiatric, personal development psychology and others. The study deals with the effects of the state administration system, social isolation, housing problems and briefly with personal relations.

As for the state administration system, the study argues that the current central and local regulations have significant effect on becoming homeless as they practically push people toward homelessness. People whose housing situation becomes unstable lose the opportunity to receive allowances in the normal social allowance system and they are forced to register themselves as homeless (and at the same time they delete their registered residency) in order to obtain allowances and services designed for homeless.

Social isolation means isolation from the majority of the society, therefore homeless have mostly relations with other homeless (longing for any kind of relationship), they live in small communities consisting of 2-3 persons, as this is the way they can keep their original personality. Nevertheless, since the institutional system is designed to handle single homeless, these relations are torn to shreds. Another kind of relations that homeless have is the working relations in order to be more efficient with division of labour (for example during bottle collection), or sometimes self-defence (for example when the casual employers do not

want to pay the homeless workers). Only homeless with better mental condition can have longer, constructive work relations.

Regarding housing problems, the study argues that the cause of homelessness is not merely the lack of housing; though there are some people who could avoid homelessness if there were more cheap housing, but their number is very limited. The real problem lies in the homeless personality, more precisely in the harms and deficiencies that he experienced throughout his life. Home means not only a housing opportunity but also a background, which helps people to satisfy their basic human needs: family, relations with the beloved ones etc. Being without a home resulted in such an apathetic, nihilistic state, which disabled work and self-support of homeless.

Concerning the role of personal relations, one of the most serious consequences of homelessness is the loss of social relations, which has a very negative effect on their labour market position (the study refers to a research that proved that most of the people find jobs through their personal, informal network rather than with any kind of labour market intermediaries.)

The researcher sees homelessness as a result of several factors. It is emphasized that homelessness is a result of a long process in a person's life, although there is always one particular reason (unemployment, divorce, poverty etc) but usually this reason in itself would not cause homelessness. For example, many people lose their jobs but only few of them become homeless because of unemployment. The research raises the question what the determining factors are that make some people homeless and others not in a similar situation.

The main hypothesis of the study is that the explanation of homelessness lies in the **personal development**. The breakdown of a life is originated in unsuccessful socialization process, when someone could not acquire positive behaviour patterns that would be needed to cope with difficult life situations. To examine a person's socialization process, the study uses E. H. Erikson's theory on personal development. Erikson has defined eight stages of personal development that lasts from birth to death, and each stage means the main abilities that someone should acquire in order to develop a mature personality. The eight life stages are the infancy, toddling-age, age of play, school age, puberty, young adulthood, adulthood and mature age. The research follows these stages and defines those disorders that occurred in the homeless' lives. Below we present a summary of this analysis.

In **infancy**, the feeling of confidence has to be developed. Although not too many facts are known about the homeless' infancy, it turned out from the interviews that many homeless experienced traumas and deficiencies in their early childhood. Many homeless spent shorter or longer periods in orphanage and often they were given to state care at this age. Generally the lack of emotional ties to the mother causes that they are unable to establish long lasting relations and family in the adulthood. Beside the effects of the age of infancy, the whole childhood is determinant in the aspect of the homeless' emotional ties toward other persons. In most of the cases those disorders can be found in the homeless' lives that impede the development of abilities needed to establish long lasting relations.

In the **toddling-age**, the feeling of confidence has to be strengthened. The consequent education of children and setting up clear rules are very important in small children's lives. Children have to feel that the pile of regulations to their lives have a meaning, and this is also the age when the children's sovereignty starts to develop. The interviews show that many homeless experienced divorce and brutality in their families. The brutality was mostly connected to the father's alcoholism, but quite often the mother was alcoholic as well. Not only alcoholism could cause substantial harms, but also it was pointed out that many homeless' fathers belonged to an authoritarian organisation (army, police etc). Furthermore, it was shown that since these fathers could not make any advance in the hierarchy of the relevant organisation, aggression was generated in them and they tended to require the same order in their home as they experienced in their workplace.

At the **age of play** the creativity starts to develop and the learning of different roles begins. The type of requirement standards that children create in themselves and the roles that they attribute to women and men are very important from the aspect of nature of rules they can accept and the behaviour patterns they follow in their later life. Many homeless experienced serious tensions in their family. In other cases the wandering lifestyle of the family caused harms in the personality. Often the interviewees followed the same lifestyle repeating the same bad patterns. For those who were grown up in state care, the lack of parents' patterns (female and male) are an obvious disadvantage, they have to adjust themselves to institutional rules instead of family relations.

At **school age** many homeless experienced failures during their school carrier, many of them were or were qualified to be slightly mentally disabled, therefore they went to special school, which actually meant a heavy stigmatisation. Others had other kind of failures, e.g. they could not meet school requirements, some of them were sent to young offenders' institutions. The parents' extreme requirements concerning school results also led to the feeling of failure independently of children's actual performance. The real serious problem was the parents' attitude towards their children; the lack of emotional support in their problems strengthened the feeling of failure in the children. Children in state care meet the outside world first time when they start going to school, and a feeling of exclusion and stigmatisation accompanies with this. The outside world is complicated and confused for them and these experiences make them stuck to the institutional rules. As a result, in their later life many of them live in different kind of institutions rather than to live on their own.

Puberty is the age of developing self-identity; at this age, it is very important for the young ones how others see them. It is also the time for finding those roles, ideas about life and profession that they want to use in their later life. The success of development in puberty will define whether people will be able to show intimacy in their relations, whether they can „collect“ enough self-confidence to deal with other persons and to take responsibility for others as well, or they can just deal with their own insults in their later life. The research pointed out that only few homeless were raised in a family where the “original” parents lived together, more often the parents divorced and step parents appeared, which could lead to children's exclusion from the family. Regarding the choice of profession it was the father (or step father) who had a final word, often against the child's wish. The children in state care often develop hatred in themselves against the world and a destroying behaviour model towards themselves and the rest of the world.

At the **age of young adulthood** the abilities to love and work have to be acquired and the ability of intimacy has to be realised. At this age, the relationship between the young adult and parents usually worsens, resulting in escaping from home, in early marriage and blank future. It was a new phenomenon in the nineties that with growing poverty, the parents were those who sent away the young adults from home. Many young people escaped into such relations where they thought they could substitute their parents. Another version was when the young persons were not able to leave the parents' house to start their own lives, they stayed with their parents without establishing a family and when the parents died the person was not able to make a living on his/her own. The failure of this age is mostly based on disorder of the earlier life stages, the study says. The young adulthood can be a failure in itself if the young person cannot implement his/her life plans. Those who grew up in state care were released from the orphanage at this age. Many of them had no knowledge, abilities to find their way of living, and became homeless in a very short time.

At the **adulthood** the „real interests“ of the personality have to be defined and the wish to establish a family and have children has to be realised. Also the sense of responsibility for a family has to be developed by this age. People have to follow a convenient and possible life carrier, in which work and satisfaction with work have an important role. A lot of interviewed people already experienced homelessness at this age; they could look after and take responsibilities only for themselves. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of homeless are lonely and only some of them live in marriage, partnership or in small communities.

At **mature age** it is important to gain satisfaction concerning the past, in order to leave the world in peace. Among the homeless there are only few elderly people because it is rare that someone becomes homeless in this age and those who become homeless in an earlier life stage, only very rarely live that long. (Breitner, 1999)

IV. Erika Ladányi: Homeless shelters in Békéscsaba

The research was carried out in the temporary shelter in Békéscsaba, a city in South-Eastern Hungary. The aim of the research was to examine the quality of services in the institution and what homeless think about the temporary shelter, and how effectively the shelter can provide help to homeless. The hypothesis of the study is that the temporary shelters cannot handle the problem of homeless efficiently as it deals with only one dimension of homelessness, namely the lack of housing, and other deficiencies in homeless life are not entreated.

The methodology of the research was as follows: interviews were made with 22 homeless living in the temporary shelter (out of the total 30 homeless who lived there). The interviews were structured, which meant that the questions and the order of questions were defined in advance. The interviews were processed with content analysis. At the end of the interviews the official/statistical information was collected from the homeless people. The research also contained participatory observation, the result of the observation was written down afterwards. Documents provided by the Family Children Social Service Center (the temporary shelter is maintained by this center) about the operation of the shelter, and further interviews were made with the deputy director and the senior social worker.

The temporary shelter has male and female rooms. The shelter is open from 4 p.m. until 8 a.m. The opening hours could be longer but the social experts thought that homeless should spend the daytime hours with making efforts to improve their situation. People can spend up to six months in the shelter, this period can be prolonged if needed.

Regarding some **features of the homeless** living in the shelters, the study showed that only one-fifth of the people being interviewed were women, the majority were men. The age of the interviewees was between 21-60 years, and the distribution among age categories was quite even. Half of the homeless were divorced and only 3 were married or had a partner. One-third had some kind of profession, one-fifth graduated from high school, two-fifth graduated from elementary school and one-tenth did not finish the elementary school. The majority (three-quarter) of the homeless did not have permanent work, and some of them had official qualification of being disabled. Roughly every fifth homeless had no income at all.

The research examines the **causes of becoming homeless**, and has found that the two main reasons were family conflicts and divorce. Family conflicts most often emerged in the relation with parents: some homeless were cast off but others left voluntarily. In the case of divorce it was general that the men left all their wealth behind, even when the sentence of the court judged half of the property to them. Often they did so in order to avoid paying alimony after the kids in the future. The other reasons were mostly that they could not pay rents in the private rental market, thus, this group's situation was very unstable even before they got homeless. Regarding the personal relations of homeless, a bit less than the half had no tight personal relations, the other half of homeless had close relationships with either someone living outside the shelter or in the shelter. The relations and lifestyle in the shelter differed significantly in the case of women and men. Women did the everyday things, such as cooking, eating, cleaning etc. together, while men tended to be more on their own, eating outside the shelter, etc. Hence, they seem to be more indifferent towards one another.

The study has shown that one-third of the homeless stayed longer time in the shelter and although they had left the shelter several times, they returned. These people usually lead a more structured life, they work regularly and they leave the shelter when they find a work in other cities and/or when they have enough money to rent a room or a flat. Their labour

market position is quite unstable (the economy of the city and its region is very depressed) so when they lose their income source they go back to the shelter.

It turned out from the interviews that one-fifth of homeless had no any idea how they could leave the shelter, and it was very probable that they would have no chance to return to the society. But the majority of homeless had concrete plans to **leave the shelter**, many of these plans had the same elements: first to find a permanent work (quite a few already had), then save money and ultimately to rent a room/flat on the private market. It was important that none of them could see further or had more optimistic hopes than renting in private market. This shows the very limited opportunities of these people. A few homeless had other kind of plans (especially men) which first of all meant finding a partner who had a flat.

The conclusion of the study is that this form of homeless service is not adequate for reintegration of homeless. It puts together very different homeless people with very different mental condition, and the quality of social work does not meet the professional requirements of efficient help. (Ladányi, 2000)

V. Judit Vida and Erika Vidákovich: Arrears related to housing expenditures and households in arrears

We present here a quantitative research that was not made on homelessness directly but dealt with a social group, the households in arrears with housing expenditures. From the beginning of the nineties, this group is seriously threatened by homelessness and its size is considerably large in the society. According to recent information, 10-15 percent of the total households are in arrears (in absolute numbers it amounts to 400-500 thousand households) and 4-5 percent (approx. 200 thousand households) has accumulated arrears on such a large scale that they are already threatened by the loss of their housing.

The research was carried out in 2001 in one the poorest districts in Budapest. In the framework of the research 79 interviews were made, 53 interviews with households in arrears and another 26 interviews with households without arrears, as a control sample. It is interesting that from these 26 households 23 had arrears before. The sample included households with small, medium and large debts. The research used structured interviews, and consisted of questions that focused on the family structure, income situation, labour activities, housing conditions, household management and family life history. The interviews were first taped and then the whole texts were written down. The texts were analysed with a coding system that also enabled the researchers to make some quantitative analyses, despite the fact that the sample was not representative.

The aim of the research was to examine the causes that lead to the accumulation of large arrears that already could threaten the stability of the family and also to examine how households could cope, if at all, with this problem. The research analysed the interviews very thoroughly from many aspects. It examined the scale of indebtedness, the reasons for debts, the income situation of the households and their strategy to save money, and the faces of poverty. It also dealt with the households' position in the labour market (the kind of disadvantages they experience). Regarding housing conditions, the ownership structure and the utility service restrictions were examined (e.g. cut off electricity) which were the results of the households' debt. It was also analysed how the households lived through the phenomenon of indebtedness psychologically and what effects it had on their health. The strategies that households followed to get out from arrears were also detected. (Vida, Vidákovich)

References

- LADÁNYI ERIKA (2000). *A hajléktalan ellátás Békéscsabán* (Homeless services in Békéscsaba), manuscript
- BREITNER PÉTER. (1999) *A hajléktalanná válás lépcsőfokai* [The stages of becoming homeless] *Esély* 1999/1. Pages 84-108.
- UTASI ÁGNES. (1987). *Hajléktalanok, csavargók* [Homeless and Hobos]. In, *Peremhelyzetek, rétegződés-modell vizsgálat*. Budapest: Társadalomtudományi Intézet, VIII, 181-213
- VIDA JUDIT, VIDÁKOVICH ERIKA (2004) *Számlapassziánsz, A nagyvárosi szegénység arcai* [Bills of housing expenditures. Faces of poverty in a city]. BMSZKI, Budapest

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF A RESEARCH ON YOUNG HOMELESS

THE RESEARCH

Commissioned by the Ministry of Social and Family Affairs, the National Institute of Family and Social Policy made a survey among the homeless and the responsible institutions in February 2002. This survey included interviews and questionnaires of 150 young homeless, aged between 18 - 29.

Based on the experience and the statistics of experts working in this field, the proportion of young people among the homeless has grown over the past few years, at the same the information available on them is scarce – this justifies the choice of this target group. Besides, the appearance of the young in the homeless-care system has led to severe professional and provision conflicts. On the one hand they “outplace” the elder homeless from the institutions, on the other hand there is no guarantee that by “occupying” these institutions they get the adequate and sufficient provision and help that they need. The present institutional system is not prepared to handle the task of integrating or re-integrating these young people into the society and the labour market – neither regarding the conditions, nor regarding the services or the staff’s level of expertise.

We had found it necessary to examine the situation of this group and to learn about its characteristics and special features, so that the prerequisites for adequate and efficient help could be defined more exactly than before.

We have involved 150 young homeless (aged 18 – 29) in the survey, from 8 large cities chosen by us (Budapest, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Kecskemét, Szolnok, Győr, Pécs, Székesfehérvár) for both the interviewing and the questionnaires. We have asked the same 150 by both methods. The above cities were chosen partly because these were places where the number of young people among the homeless had been registered to grow, and partly to achieve an even spread – so that the capital, the eastern and western part of the country would be represented as well.

The sampling was not random, anyone who was available in the social institutions of the above cities (night shelters, temporary shelters, rehabilitation institutions, and on the

streets and in public places) was included in the survey (since we had no information on the number and other characteristics of the young homeless therefore no representative sample could be made). In each city we asked the management of social institutions responsible for homeless-care for some guidance about where (which institutions, where on the streets) we could find the homeless in their city.

We considered those homeless, who had no safe, permanent places to live. Those who spend their nights in public places, on the streets, in deserted buildings or empty railway wagons; those who can not tell for sure where they would spend the next few nights, and finally those who live in homeless shelters.

The questioning was done by interviewers (social workers and experts), so in each case the question was asked by the interviewer and the answers were marked by them. The same interviewers made the interviews as well. We had a short group meeting for the interviewers where we informed them about the purpose of the research, and two of our senior researchers gave them instructions about the method of using the questionnaire. (e.g.: ask the question orally and make a note of the answers; we went through each question of the whole questionnaire with all the possible answers).

In principal, using of the above mentioned two methods would have served the purpose of getting the most possible and complementary information about the young homeless; in practice however, the interviews were not processed due to their poor quality.

Drawing up the questionnaire our main aim was to get results suitable for a quantitative analysis. The qualitative information to be acquired from the interviews would have served the purpose of complementing the data from the questionnaire as well as gaining more detailed information on the important issues. We had asked the interviewers to make unstructured interviews, outlining the main directions and topics of the conversation only, without providing the exact questions and their order. As a result, the interviews turned out to be of rather diverse standard and content, not suitable for an analysis. (We had planned to process them by content analysis: to type them all and code them if necessary, to make a search for certain words or expressions; and to identify relations, differences, or outlining groups within the interviewed. It would probably have been better to make structured interviews for this purpose.) The most important information we wanted to acquire from the qualitative research were the following:

- family background and upbringing (e.g.: relationship with parents and siblings, family atmosphere, punishment and rewarding in the family)
- the experiences of school years (e.g.: conflicts at school, performance at school, and the circumstances of choosing a school)
- addictions, their development and antecedents (e.g.: addictions and delinquency in the family, the first cigarette, drugs, alcohol).

The survey contained open questions as well, these were processed by the abovementioned method. Our aim was to limit, to minimalise the number of open questions in the questionnaire – with regard to the interviews – therefore only the following question groups were complemented by open questions:

- the block of close-ended questions concerning work experiences, ways of earning money („What did you do in the job you spent the most time in – irrespective of the fact whether it was a registered job or not? ”)
- the series of questions concerning earlier relationships with social institutions („What kind of help did you expect or asked for?”, „What kind of help did you get?”)
- the series of question about previous prosecutions, convictions, criminal record („Reason for previous conviction(s) – if any?”, „Reason for any current prosecution(s)?”)
- questions concerning future prospects („What do you think would make your life better?”, „What should change so that you could go back to your family?”)

Due to the above reasons, the interviews were not analysed / processed. We have summarized the results of the questionnaire survey as follows.

We have published the results and experiences of the quantitative research, and sent it to the responsible experts working in the field of homeless-care (“Periféria Füzetek”, December 2003). It is also available for the commissioning Ministry, that is going to use it – together with the results of other related research – for the development of the social sector in general, and for the preparation of a specific concept to develop and restructure homeless-care.

ABOUT THE YOUNG HOMELESS - Results of the questionnaire survey in detail

The survey contains data from 144 questionnaires. 54% of the young people participating in the survey are men and 46% women..

Age: we have found that 62% are 25 years old or younger, and 15% is aged 20 or younger

Place of birth: 32,2 % were born in cities, 25,9 % was born in the capital, 21 % in villages or towns, 19,6 % in county seats and 1,4 % abroad.

Geographical mobility: 46 % were found to be immobile regarding the comparison of the type of settlement at birth and at present. Only 3% of those considered mobile have moved to a smaller settlement. At the time the survey was made, 60 % of these young people were not living where their families.

Education: 8,3% has not finished primary school, 44 % finished primary school only. 35% completed specialized/technical secondary school and 11% had secondary grammar school education. 40% had to repeat the same class during their studies.

50 % has a *trade*; the scale of these is rather wide. A few examples in the order of decreasing frequency: dressmaker, shop assistant, gardener, house-painter, stone mason, waiter/waitress, metalworker.

8, 3 % were *still at school* at the time of the survey (evening primary school, specialized/technical secondary school, and other courses).

22 % has given up school at school-age. It is less surprising then to learn that one fifth of the sample started working at the age of 14 - 15, that means that these children had to start so early presumably due to economical reasons, the poverty of their families.

Family conditions: 44 % were brought up by both of their parents, while 34 % grew up in a single-parent family.

Grandparents and other relatives took a significant part in the upbringing of those children, who were in state care (25%) for a shorter or longer time.

Work experience: 91 % has had a registered job before, 60% of which lasted for more than 1 year.

One third of the surveyed said that – irrespective of it being registered or not – they have worked in their trade, for an average period of 34, 2 months, that is nearly 3 years.

At the time of the survey 51,4 % had a registered job, 87 % had casual work.

37 % said they worked 8 hours per day, another 37 % works more than that, while 26 % works less, 4 hours in average.

Among those who do not work and not study, 27 % are on maternity leave payment, 40 % is looking for a job but has not find a suitable one yet, 10 % said their current circumstances are the reason for this situation, 8 % has a permanent illness.

Residence: 80% lives in an institution – 53% in night shelters or temporary shelters, 15% home for single mothers, 12% in rehabilitation institutions.

6,3 % was living on the streets, in public places or in other inadequate dwelling – 8% had a place in a winter crisis center at the time the survey was made.

Leaving home: 70 % of the young people participating in the survey had left their homes for the first time.

Among those who left their homes more than once already we found that 80% was 18 or younger the first time it happened, and 24% was 14 or younger.

The reasons behind leaving home: Family conflict was mentioned by 67,6 %, and a desire to become independent by 24,6 %. Escaping from maltreatment or insult was marked by 17,7 % and from psychological harassment by 16,3 %.

17% left home because of their love relationships, addictions of family members were mentioned by 16 %, their own addiction by 5 %.

In the vast majority of cases, it was the combined effects of several reasons that led to home-leaving.

The results of content analysis show that two-thirds of the *family conflicts* had aggravated between the young person and his/her parents, and 10% of the conflicts were with siblings. In 15 % of the cases the person named as the root of the conflict was the new spouse or partner of one of the parents. Difficulties with making a living – poverty, no jobs available, inadequate housing conditions - was mentioned by 8% as the reason for leaving their homes. The same percent referred to problems at work, another 5% mentioned the death of parents and 4% problems at school.

Last time they left home 48,9% of the surveyed youth did so with the consent of the parents, 17,3% ran away, while 6,5 % were turned out.

The parents of 6 %, knew about, but did not give their consent to their child' decision, another 6% left with the consent of only one of the parents.

We aimed to examine where these young people went after the last home-leaving and how much time they spent in each place in chronological order. The 144 person asked spent an average of 395 days in the first place. 125 of them lived in two places after leaving home, they spent an average of 408 days in the second place. 98 person lived in three places, they spent 357 days on average in the third place.

We find more significant differences if we look at where they went to live for the first, second and third time.

The first, on average 395 days were spent by 28 % with relatives, friends or acquaintances.

The second most frequent locations were public places, streets, and other inadequate shelters like cellars or sheds. 20% lived in places like this for the first 13 months. The third group of 17% lived in a rented apartment during this period.

15 % found an institutionalised solution, they lived in night shelters or temporary shelters, rehabilitation centers or homes for single mothers. 9% moved to their life-partners.

After two-three years in 50% of the cases the social exclusion becomes permanent, stigmatizing, since they become inmates of institutions, while a smaller number, about 20% manages to hang on to the brim of the housing market as lodgers.

The optimal procedure would be to provide a fast and efficient institutional help to these young people right after they loose their homes / dwelling, offering them a market-like solution. Unfortunately the reality is that instead of moving out of the institutions in time, these young people gradually move towards the institutions, resulting in an institutional segregation and a forced “career” rather than integration to the society.

Examining their *relationships with institutions*, we find that 65 % of the people asked in this survey have turned to a *labour center* before, but only less than one third tried it more than twice, so a regular relationship is not typical. 28% has found a job through the labour center, half of them succeeded more than once.

45% had been in contact with the *institutions responsible for homeless-care* before.

We found that only 12% had been in contact with the homeless-care institutions only, the others had previous relationships with other social care institutions.

26% had previous experiences with the *family care service*, 18% with the *child protection institute*, 11% with *charity organisations*, 10% with the *children's welfare service*, 8% with a *detoxication centre* (drugs or alcohol).

Most of their time is spent at the institutions (52 %), showing a strong hospitalization, depression and a lack of contacts; 17 % spends the most time in public places, 11 % in places of amusement, in pinball arcades or shopping centers.

Crime: 22 % has been convicted before, mostly for theft (50%), and other violent crimes - robbery, disorderly conduct, taking the law into their own hands, etc. – (58 %). At the time the survey was made, 8% was being prosecuted..

To our open question “*what should happen so that you could go back home*”, most of them (38 %) said that nothing would make them return anymore. 18 % said the changes necessary are of financial nature (e.g. a flat, a job, etc.) 13 % found that the behaviour of the family members should change, at the same time 11 % thought that the mutual and better adaptability would be the solution and 7 % said they themselves should change.

To the other open question “*What would make your life better?*” almost everybody (94 %) gave an answer related to financials (a flat, a job, etc.), while 29 % mentioned the proper family background as well. The majority of the rest (7 %) finds it necessary to change themselves, and one young person said the solution would be to die.