

Longitudinal analyses of homelessness in Denmark

Short paper for the third thematic workshop in CUHP
Copenhagen, April, 29-30, 2004

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In this short paper for the third CUHP seminar I briefly present a couple of longitudinal analyses of homeless people in Denmark. I first present the research project *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid...?* conducted by myself (Stax, 1999; 2003)¹. This is probably the first longitudinal analysis of once homeless people attempted undertaken in Denmark. I then present a project that is currently under way at The Danish National Institute of Social Research. This second project takes the longitudinal perspective from *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid...?* some steps further, and looks more into individual trajectories in and out of homelessness.

¹ Stax T.B. (1999): *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ... ?* Copenhagen, DK: Socialforskningsinstituttet (99:21).
Stax, T.B. (2003): Estimating the use of illegal drugs among homeless people using shelters in Denmark. *Substance Use & Misuse*. Vol. 38:3-6.

Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid...? *Attempting to identify overall changes*

The study I mostly reflect upon is conducted by myself and published by The Danish National Institute of Social Research in 1999. In English the title will be something like “Once Socially Marginalized – always...?” The overall aim of the project was to look at living conditions at different times for people who had used institutions for homeless (e.g. a shelter or a hostel) or centres for battered women in 1988-89. The analysis focused on the period *after* they had stayed at such a place in 1988-89. As such it was a study of what happened to people already having experienced homelessness and not a study of the causes leading to homelessness. The study drew upon two methods: analysis of data gathered from official registers and analysis of data gathered through qualitative interviews.

With *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ...?* I would basically have liked to answer a few very general questions:

- Does a given respondent have a more or less secure and normal position in society at a given number of years after having stayed at a shelter?
- Does a given respondent have a better, a worse, or an unchanged life at a given number of years after having stayed at a shelter?

And I would have liked to know something more specifically about the respondents’ living situation at the time the study was undertaken – like whether:

- a given respondent had a satisfying place to stay according to her or him self or according to some politically accepted standards?
- a given respondent had the finances necessary for sustaining acceptable living conditions according to him or her self or according to politically acceptable standards?

Of course I would also have liked to know about causes leading to an eventual better, worse, or unchanged situation – but first and foremost I was interested in getting to know something about the development in the actual living conditions of the – at least previous – homeless people. Currently we are, at The Danish National Institute of Social Research, looking more on the questions concerning causality (see below).

The population

Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ... ? is based upon a registration of 1.185 people who used institutions for homeless people and/or centres for battered women² between the summer 1988 and the summer 1989. Prior to 1998 the people who used shelters, hostels, centres for battered women, or other institutions³ established under the section 105 in The Social Assistance Act⁴ were not registered on a national level in Denmark. However, exactly the 1.185 analysed people were registered for another research project conducted by P. Brandt (1992).⁵

Intentionally the 1.185 people should include every person who

- used an institution for homeless people or a centre for battered women provided in accordance with section 105 in The Social Assistance Act
- in the Municipality of Copenhagen
- between July, 1, 1988 and June, 30, 1989
- as long as that person was between 18 and 35 years of age
- and used the institution for more than four days in a row.

Thus, there should be no differences between the population and the sample in this study: no one has been selected for the sample from among the population as the whole population is – at least intentionally – included.

About the people fitting the mentioned criteria the following information was gathered at the time of their enrolment at a shelter in 1988-89:

- A person's CPR-number, i.e. an unique personal identifier.⁶

² The reason that both types of institutions were included was that they there both provided in accordance with the same section in the social legislation.

³ I shall mostly refer to all the different institutions as shelters throughout the rest of the paper. Sometimes, however, I shall distinguish between centers for battered women and the rest.

⁴ Today the same type is organized in accordance with section 94 in the Bill on Social Service (for a discussion of the changes in the Danish social legislation and its implication for homelessness see Stax & Kæmpe, 1999).

⁵ Brandt, P. (1992): *Yngre hjemløse i København*. Copenhagen, DK: FADL's forlag.

⁶ This number follows a person during life – and stays after death – and it does not undergo a change like the rest of our identity. The number is unique in the sense that there should not exist two alike. The number includes date of birth (ddmmyy) and four personal digits where the last indicates sex (equal for female, unequal for men). In almost any encounter with public institutions – and in many encounters with private institutions as well – the number is provided and registered, e.g. when visiting doctors, dentists, taxation offices, educational institutions, trade unions, employers, libraries, sports clubs, banks, video rental stores...

- Which shelter within the Municipality of Copenhagen that were used by each client during the registration period, i.e. between the summer of 1988 and the summer of 1989.
- How many enrolments each client had during the registration period.
- How many days the client stayed at an institution during each enrolment in the registration period.⁷

These information were gathered in 1988-89, and they were handed over to The Danish National Institute of Social Research as we began the project. We could include no further information on the clients' use of shelters during the period of registration should we have wanted to.

During the project the sample declined from the initial 1.185 people to 1.016 people: 96 people were taken out of the population due to what turned out to be an invalid CPR-number (see below), 68 people had not spend five days or more at the institutions, four people did not fit the limitation in age or information on the use of institutions were missing. One person was left out due to a discrepancy between the use of institutions and official date of death.

The information obtained through official registers

In *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ...?* information on about 250 variables from 11 registers was included. Almost all of the information – except those concerning criminality (see below) – was immediately ready for statistical analysis.

Where the data came from

The information that was handed over from a previous research project (Brandt, 1992) consisted (as written above) of people's CPR-numbers as well as registrations of use of institutions in 1988-89. With the CPR-numbers it was possible to gather a whole variety of information pertaining to each person in the population. The information included in the project *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ...?* was:

⁷ Regarding people who were staying at an institution at the time where the registration period began, these were counted as if they enrolled at the specific shelter on the first day of the registration period. In regard to people who were enrolled in the registration period, and stayed beyond the June, 30th 1989 the number of days counted for the research project were only those within the registration period.

1) Each person's **criminal record** did such exist. Here we obtained information on previous criminal charges that led to conviction and ongoing criminal charges not yet settled. The information was obtained from the police. The information was passed on to us as 7.000 sheets of matrix-printed paper that we then had to register electronically. The register included any encounter leading to a criminal sentence independent of date. We thus obtained information pertaining to the life prior to the registration at a shelter. However, two years after a person's death he or she was removed from the register, and therefore we only received information pertaining to the people being alive in 1996 as we got the information in 1998.

2) Information on an eventual **death**, and the registered causes for such. These information was obtained electronically from The National Board of Health. The information received included an assessment of the cause of death – i.e. was it for example caused by alcohol, drugs, AIDS or simply unknown - and way of death – i.e. for example natural, accident, or suicide.

3) Information on whether a person had received any **treatment for the use of illegal substances**. These information was also obtained electronically from The National Board of Health. The period covered by this register was two years. When an additional year of information was added the oldest was deleted, thus no more than a two year time span could be included in the research project (we included information on 1996-97). Through this register we obtained information on a persons eventual enrolment in drug treatment, we obtained information on what illegal drugs the person told he or she had used within the month prior to the enrolment in treatment, and what type of drug a client saw as his or her main drug.

4) Information on the person's **current address, type of dwelling** where this address was registered, and the **household composition**. These information was provided through two sources: the *National Register* supposedly containing every citizen's formal address and through various different registers kept at Statistics Denmark.⁸ The information used from Statistics Denmark

⁸ "Statistics Denmark is Denmark's central statistical office and is responsible for the co-ordination of all official statistics concerning Denmark and Danish society. These statistics cover a broad spectrum of topics within the areas of population, business, industry, the environment and the economy." <http://www.dst.dk/HomeUK/About/PresentSD.aspx>
See www.dst.dk for a presentation of the institute.

covered the years 1990 and 1996. The information from the National Registers covered the situation on a single day in 1996.

5) Information on the types of **incomes received** – for example whether a person did receive unemployment benefit, social welfare, or early retirement pension – the **connection to the labour market** – for example the degree of unemployment – and information on **civil status** and eventual **children**. These information was as well obtained from the Statistics Denmark.

With these information we then tried to compare the populations position on various variables as close to the period where we knew for certain that they had used a shelter – i.e. during 1988-89 - with their position on the same variables as long as possible after this known use of a shelter.

Besides the problems originating from the different registers included covering different time spans there is (at least) one significant shortcoming that I shall mention: we did not know anything about the population's use of shelters other than their use of such institutions between the summer of 1988 and the summer of 1989. There exist no information on such use for the period we looked at.

A project under way: attempting to reconstruct trajectories⁹

Currently The Danish National Institute of Social Research is carrying out a second register based research project on a homeless population. This project is still in the phase of collecting data and no results are yet available. Here I will outline the project as it tries to take the use of register based research further than it was done in the study *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ...?*

The Sample and the data

This second study is a follow-up study where persons who have used a shelter¹⁰ in at least one of six¹¹ Danish regional counties in 1997 will be included in a register created at The Danish National

⁹ I will like to thank I. Koch-Nielsen for helping with this part of the paper.

¹⁰ Centers for battered women are not included.

Institute of Social Research. Intentionally everybody having used a shelter within any of the six counties during 1997 should be included – independent of the length of stay. The counties were chosen so that they would include the biggest cities in Denmark (Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg and Odense). The register containing the sampled people was created by visiting each shelter in the six counties, and writing down the CPR-numbers of clients from 1997 from the shelters own internal files. These files were of different quality, but almost everywhere did they exist in 1997 – one exception was the largest shelter in Copenhagen, where we could only obtain information for half the year of 1997. All together approximately 4.000 CPR-numbers were collected. These approximately 4.000 numbers were run through The National Register, which resulted in a little more than 3.000 persons identified as being alive and with an address. From among the 3.000 around half was then selected for survey interviewing. Through a survey we tried to obtain peoples own assessments of the various social services they have encountered during their life on the margin.

About the 4.000 people included in the sample we shall draw information from Statistics Denmark on 417 variables from 20 registers, e.g. a register on mobility, a register on housing-units, a register on activation, a register on hospitalisations, and a register on transfer incomes. The information will be obtained for as long a period as possible. Thus also information about the time prior to a know enrolment at a shelter will be collected. In regard to some of the information this is back until 1980. In addition we, by now, have a continual registration of users of shelters, and this registration includes the client's CPR-number. This registration has been in place since 2000. Thus it is now possible to find out whether any of the people included in the sample have been using a shelter in 2000 or later.

The research questions

Through the project we hope to be able to find out how many of the former users of shelters can be said to have achieved a more stable life (or to have exited from homelessness), and how many that are still or again experiencing such spell of homelessness? This question is somewhat similar to some of the questions asked by Stax. But with this project we hope to be able to say more about the

¹¹ Out of a total on 14 counties plus the cities of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg (which have a special status as they are not actually part of a county, but instead are municipalities also having the obligations of the regional counties.

different trajectories lived by the sampled people. For example, is it possible to identify typical trajectories leading to more or less marginal positions? For answering such questions - when we are dealing with complex issues where many variables are needed together for obtaining a valid picture – we are in need of a large sample. In *Én gang socialt marginaliseret – altid ...?* it was not really possible to identify trajectories over time – even though we, in regard to some of the information gathered, had information on a whole period between 1990-1996. Too few people could actually be followed as many had missing information on one or more of the variables that were used for one or more of the years that we would have liked to look upon. With this second study we hope that the sample has been made large enough for such analysis, and that the quality of the register-based information has been improved. But it is yet to early to know.