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Homeless in Europe

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Gender Perspectives on Homelessness



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, suzannah.young@feantsa.org.

Gender Perspectives on Homelessness

The theme of gender is a lesser-explored area of homelessness research and may be neglected as a factor that can shed light on homeless experiences. However, the articles in this edition of *Homeless in Europe* demonstrate that homelessness and housing exclusion can indeed be highly gendered experiences and suggest that efforts to end homelessness would do well to take gender into account.

The link between gender and homelessness can have several interpretations and relate to varying realities: from causes of homelessness which affect disproportionately members of one sex, to the different housing needs and requirements from homeless services of different sexes, to differing responses to homelessness conditioned by a person's gender, and variation in treatment coming from service providers depending on the gender of the service user. The distinction between sex and gender is a helpful one in relation to experiences of homelessness: some situations are related to physical characteristics – differing healthcare needs, for example – and others to the way in which interactions can differ according to the gender of the person in question.

The following articles present a range of examples of the ways in which gender can define experiences of homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe and elsewhere, and explore the state of social welfare systems in relation to gender equality and homelessness. They do not seek to provide a complete overview but to highlight some relevant issues which demonstrate the crossover between gender and homelessness. They focus on male and female experiences of homelessness, but it should be remembered that homeless experiences may differ across the gender spectrum. Many of the articles focus on female experiences, which is important as female-specific homeless situations are

often neglected when talking about homelessness in general.¹ However, the relative lack of articles on male experiences of homelessness could suggest a need for further research in this area, and a need to accept that male homelessness is not necessarily the 'default position' but is rather one aspect of a gendered phenomenon. The articles also suggest overwhelmingly that gender-specific provision is a way to address inequalities in homeless people's contact with service providers and can go towards preventing homelessness in the first place.

It is important to situate experiences of homelessness within the broader context of social welfare, and the first article by Bea Chityil of the Department for Equality Between Women and Men – part of the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment – does this by describing the status quo of gendered experiences of poverty and existing legislation which attempts to combat inequalities at European level. The articles that follow may go some way to explaining the disparities revealed in this piece.

Talking about 'gender' and homelessness shows us that experiences of homelessness carry different implications depending on whether they are male or female experiences. Ana Martins, Director of Assistência Médica Internacional (AMI), helpfully explores the impact of homeless people's gender on their homeless pathway, and their self-identification, with specific reference to homeless women in Lisbon.

Jörg Fichtner further highlights gendered responses to homelessness with a study of the ways in which some homeless men in Germany interpret their situation and suggests that a gender-specific offer could contribute to providing more suitable and therefore more efficient assistance to homeless people.

¹ For research on this theme, see for example *Women and Homelessness in Europe: Pathways, Services and Experiences*, ed. by Bill Edgar and Joe Docherty, (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2001)



Uta Enders-Dragässer also calls for an approach that takes gender into account in her article on homeless women's experiences in Germany. She notes that hidden homelessness is the 'typical' situation for women and women's specific needs are marginalized in German support and employment systems. Change is difficult because the debate is gender blind. The article argues that homeless services should take into consideration that the needs of women living in hidden homelessness should be identified much earlier by referral and counselling services.

Homeless women's invisibility is also explored by Marie-Claire Vanneuville, Director of the organisation *Femmes SDF* in France. Here we understand that the homeless women who have used the services provided by *Femmes SDF* have chosen invisibility as a means of defence. However, not only does the article describe these women as almost having lost their identity, it also shows how the work of *Femmes SDF* can help them to regain their sense of worth and move towards getting out of their homeless situation. It highlights that, although each woman is different, allowing each one to 'be a woman' is a necessary step towards improving their lives.

Katalin Szoboszlai, in a shortened version of a longer study that analysed interviews with homeless women in Hungary, presents the 'homeless journey' of one woman, trying to document her routes into homelessness and her life during and after her homeless experience. It is clear that many of the scenarios which affected her 'journey' were directly related to her gender.

The notion of gender can have implications not only on the identities of homeless people themselves, but also the nature of interactions between social workers employed in homeless services and service users. Carole Zufferey demonstrates how homeless services in Australia appear to use differing approaches depending on the gender of service users, which can

be experienced as 'invisible' forms of oppression by service providers and service users. She notes that examining gender and power relations in social workers' interventions and perspectives encourages reflexivity in social work practice, thereby improving the services provided to homeless people.

Gender-biased attitudes are also evoked in connection with housing rights by Nicolas Bernard's article on women's experiences of housing exclusion in francophone Belgium. We learn that the living situation of women in francophone Belgium is clearly defined by their gender, and is often related to disempowerment and lower standards of living as a result. Gender considerations clearly have their place in debates on quality of services and housing rights.

The risk of homelessness can be higher for people who exercise a highly gendered profession. This is demonstrated by the increased rate of homelessness among female sex workers in England, discussed by Kesia Reeve, Rionach Casey and Elaine Batty. Their article highlights that structural constraints on sex workers' housing options can cause them to become homeless and that homelessness can lead women into sex work. They propose that more research be conducted into the complex interrelation between sex work and homelessness.

Finally, Jonathan P. Schwartz, Stephanie Chapman, Laura Cote and Lori D. Lindley propose a social-rights approach to combating homelessness amongst women, suggesting that sexism and other systemic discrimination against women is a cause of their homelessness and that addressing homelessness among women must include working to eradicate attitudes, prejudices, and policies that oppress women.

As always, FEANTSA would like to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to the contributors to this issue of the magazine.



Homelessness in Europe: The Role of Gender Equality Policies

By **Bea Chityil**, *Policy Officer, Equality between Women and Men, DG Employment, Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities, European Commission*

Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union, yet there are persistent inequalities between the sexes that permeate society. The role of gender equality policies is to eliminate these inequalities, and to do so the European Union has relied on a variety of instruments: legislation; the promotion of the dual approach of gender mainstreaming (the integration of a gender equality dimension into all policies and at all stages of policy-making) and specific actions; awareness-raising and funding programmes. The present European Year dedicated to the elimination of poverty and social exclusion gives a unique opportunity to call attention to gender inequalities and notably to raise awareness of the higher poverty risk women face throughout their life in most Member States.¹

The causes of gender inequalities are often structural and depend on traditional and cultural settings. Most evident are inequalities stemming from the labour market, caused by discrimination, stereotypes about the roles of women and men, vertical and horizontal segregation, and women's predominance in involuntary part-time and precarious employment contracts. The pay gap, which is currently 18% on average in the EU, is a significant contributing factor. The unbalanced share of carework between the sexes, coupled with a lack of affordable, available and quality care facilities, both for children and other dependents, exacerbates inequalities.

The European Commission has been actively engaged in addressing these problems. Through its 'Roadmap for equality between women and men' for the 2006-2010 period,² it particularly committed itself to: achieving equal economic independence between women and men; enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life; promoting equal participation of women and men in decision-making; eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking; eliminating gender stereotypes in society; and promoting gender equality outside the EU. Partnership with all stakeholders, at European, national, and local level, as well as with social partners and civil society, has been crucial.

Tackling homelessness is a particularly important domain both in terms of poverty-alleviation and gender equality. While studies show that the majority of homeless people are men, there are also indications that an increasing number of women are also affected by this phenomenon, in particular single mothers and women who have suffered violence. A 2006 study prepared for the European Commission on 'Gender inequalities in the risk of poverty and social exclusion for disadvantaged groups in thirty European countries'³ showed that in the UK, for example, "men account for the majority of 'rough sleepers' among homeless people, women's lack of housing is more associated with temporary provision which is overcrowded or poor quality. More than half of the women and young girls who become homeless do so due to domestic violence or sexual abuse, and they are more likely to secure temporary accommodation with family or friends or to be accepted for emergency re-housing by local government under the statutory provisions."⁴

The promotion of gender equality in strategies to address homelessness is crucial, as women's and men's experiences and needs are often divergent, which requires personalized approaches and solutions to their problems.

In the context of the Social Inclusion Process, such an approach is promoted in the context of active inclusion policies. This policy advocates a mix of three strands: minimum income provision; access to the labour market and access to services, as the best way to tackle extreme forms of poverty, including homelessness. Available information on Member States' strategies shows that almost all identify homelessness and housing exclusion as a concern and have adopted national or local strategies that help to raise awareness, improve policy coordination and implementation, and identify resources. It is also found that these are generally made more effective with targets such as the prevention of homelessness, a reduction in its duration, targeting the most severe homelessness, the improvement of the quality of services for homeless people or on the supply of affordable housing.⁵

1 <http://www.2010againstopoverty.eu/?langid=en>

2 http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/equality_between_men_and_women/c10404_en.htm

3 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1997&langId=en>

4 p. 53

5 See the Commission's Proposal for the 2010 Joint Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection, COM (2010) 25 final, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=757&langId=en>



Addressing homelessness in the context of the current economic crisis is particularly important. As the Commission's proposal for the 2010 Joint Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection underlies, "integrated strategies to address housing exclusion and homelessness have an important role to play in post-crisis policies, with a view to build cohesive and environmentally sustainable societies".⁶ However, housing strategies face multiple challenges. The sharing of responsibility for policy and delivery between national and local authorities, service providers and NGOs is often complex. The most successful strategies display effective governance with strong co-operation between all those involved. Tackling housing exclusion and homelessness therefore requires integrated policies combining financial support to individuals, effective regulation and quality social services, including housing, employment, health and welfare services. More attention needs to be paid to the quality standards of social services and the specific obstacles homeless people face in accessing them.

Taking into account gender equality concerns in service delivery has shown to contribute to the design of more effective policies. The implementation of such an approach in tackling homelessness entails an analysis of the respective situation of homeless women and men and ensuring that policy responses are sensitive to providing solutions that respond to their specific needs. The collection of sex-segregated data and the improvement of comparable statistical information on the phenomena are important steps in this regard.

Adequate resources, integrated strategies and the political will to effect change are indispensable.

[A]nalysis of the respective situation of homeless women and men [ensures] that policy responses are sensitive to providing solutions that respond to their specific needs.

6 COM (2010) 25 final.



Gender and Homelessness: Homeless Women in Lisbon

By Ana Martins,¹ *Director of Assistência Médica Internacional (AMI), Portugal*

This study intends to understand the social causes and effects that lead women to become homeless. The study falls within the scope of the Social Sciences and, in particular, of studies on women in general, given that this is a social reality, i.e., a set of phenomena that are produced and reproduced inside a certain social group.²

Classification of the study's population was carried out through questionnaires carried out on 56 homeless women and 252 homeless men between 2003 and 2006.

Traditionally, the private space belongs to women whereas the public space belongs to men. Women take care of others at home, which makes one assume that a roof is present. The lack of such a space, as inadequate as it may be, is determinant upon any woman's life. It is of these women that this study speaks, women who have lost or, worse still, never had a home.

This study intends to establish a gender approach to the study of homeless people and to try to understand the social causes and effects that lead to being a homeless woman in Lisbon, and at the same time catalogue her profile.

It will be necessary to examine the differences between genders, bearing in mind certain cultural aspects and, reluctantly, isolating a certain type of variable common to both genders and analysing what makes them different. We would outline three aspects: maternity, domestic violence and prostitution. These are not exclusive to women, but remain nevertheless dominant factors relevant to the female gender.

The predominant profile of homeless women in this study is as follows: young; between 21 and 49 years old; of employment age but working discontinuously (at the time of this study) or unemployed; single; with a low level of education (primary and secondary); not having professional training; living on the street for less than six months; with living relatives and maintaining some kind of relationship with them and with friends; receiving income support; not having made – or having made irregular – tax deductions on payments to Social Security; living on the streets (32%) or in shelters (39%); depending on begging; not consuming addictive substances; having a family doctor and not suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Roughly 8% of the women declare having stable and/or unstable employment. This figure is 2% for the men studied. The activities carried out by the women relate to cleaning and those by the men in the study to occasional odd-jobs.

When taking into account the prevailing characteristics in homeless people in general, a higher percentage of women experience exclusion and poverty related to education and training. This is mainly due to less schooling, greater difficulty in getting a stable and better paid job, as well as the fact that they must look after their children.

Regarding educational variables, 4% of the women in the study have an average/higher level of education. In spite of this, the majority of the female population are characterised by having a low level of schooling (primary or secondary education) or being illiterate. The study confirms that the majority of people having received a level of education below secondary level are female: the figures are 77% of women and 75% of men. As for professional training, 71% of the population declares having no training at all and women have less training than men.

Since work is determinant relating to integration and equality of opportunity, a detailed reference to this subject is critical, so that we may better comprehend the reality of women within a social-economic context. Social and economic disadvantage always becomes more absolute and irreversible whenever schooling is reduced, along with job security, low salary rates, access to welfare, housing, and other types of social integration.³

"She always had precarious jobs for periods of 6 months, the last of which as a hairdresser. Since her daughter was born 3 years ago, she has not worked outside the home because her child has serious health problems and she must be close by." (Cristina 28, married, 34 years old, 2 children).⁴

"She used to be a cleaner. Currently, she is unemployed because she is pregnant." (Mónica 25, single, 25 years old).

The women in the present study first look for the support of friends and family. Then we find they look to the street, shelter, hostels, abandoned buildings/cars, shanty towns, staircases or lobbies and, finally, illegal dwellings.

When it comes to an overnight place to stay, it is important to mention that the majority of women (25%) find themselves in the *other* category, which comprises the situations they were living in at the time of interview: precarious and unsafe, in an undefined place, or not specified (e.g. in houses, with friends, in hospital, housed working as a sex worker, at their grandmother's with two children).

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2 Mauss, 1950

3 Torres, 2005

4 Names have been changed.



Slightly more women than men had a place to stay overnight, whatever this may be (hostels, shanty towns, abandoned buildings/cars).

It is true that women value other forms of protection which men generally ignore, as is the case of searching for refuge in the family, even if dysfunctional, with friends, in institutions or even in sex work.

As for marital status, the percentage of single people prevails. The population studied does not usually have a partner, although this is mainly a characteristic of men. 29% of women are married or live with somebody, whereas 8% of men are in this category.

In our analysis, the majority of the women are mothers, and stay with friends and/or sleep on the streets. Some of them share(d) their lives with more than one partner, even if in an unstable and irregular relationship, almost always without their children (who are looked after by family and/or institutions); among those having children, 72% are separated from their partner.⁵ In the lives of these women, neither family nor state has ever played a protective role or allowed them to grow independently (socially, economically or psychologically).

"... she is staying with friends. She left home due to domestic violence over a period of about two years and she could no longer cope with the situation." (Maria, separated, 49 years old, 3 children).

"She lived with her husband and their four children in a shanty town, due to domestic violence and because he was in another relationship, he threw her out of the house. She and one of her daughters are temporarily staying with a female friend. The remaining 3 children are with her mother-in-law. She also lived at her brother's for some time, but she was forced to leave because of problems with her sister-in-law." (Isabel, separated, 49 years old, 4 children).

"She lives with someone who, like her, is a drug user. Presently, she sleeps in an abandoned car. She is willing to participate in a drug rehabilitation programme." (Inês 15, single, 31 years old, 2 daughters).

Victims of extreme poverty, women are forced into begging, or live on minimum income support because not entitled to unemployment benefit or any type of social subsistence payments that provide food, clothes or help with rent. They live in what is commonly called 'social exclusion'. They have no voice since they do not vote; they do not claim because they are afraid that some of their scant resources might be taken away from them and also because they are not able to write claims by themselves.

"I have never voted" (M.J., living with someone, 29 years old, 1 daughter).

These women's profiles do not fit into any social model whatsoever. They are victims of extreme poverty, a species becoming extinct, and in their lives practically everything has failed. Within a specific context of extreme poverty, these women are particularly subject to discrimination.

Poverty leads to a situation of double discrimination for these women in comparison with the majority of women. This kind of woman is the most excluded of all and there are no specific measures of social protection for her; even social responses within the scope of the homeless population are specifically addressed to men, as their number is greater. This kind of woman does not fit into any existing social model because in her resides almost every kind of nonexistence.

Yet, these women do exist, but they hide, they do not want to come forward and, because of that, they are forgotten and, therefore, there are no specific measures addressing them. Many people work with them side by side every day and are more aware than most of their struggles (e.g. NGOs through social workers and street teams, Regional Welfare Centres, municipalities, charities, hospitals).

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE INVESTIGATION

Some studies approach mental illness as one the dominant causes and effects with reference to homeless women. This is rather controversial. Although it is not the object of the present study, it is important to mention it, since available studies are not enlightening enough and do not conclude whether it is mental illness that leads women to homelessness or whether it is environmental conditions that lead to mental illness.

Our conclusions do not reflect mental health problems as a differentiating characteristic of the homeless population's profile. We believe that those conclusions considering mental health problems as characteristic of homeless women may maintain cultural prejudices and stereotypes related to gender itself.

As for the difference between homeless men and women, we leave some questions for reflection:

Do maternity and children relate to the low percentage of women in our own and other studies (replies from specific shelters for women with children) whose object is to understand the causes and effects of being or becoming a homeless individual?

This kind of woman is the most excluded of all and there are no specific measures of social protection for her.



Given the fact that younger women are the major group of our analysis, although their number is still far fewer than the men, would this percentage increase if we counted those women who do not have a home and yet are protected by the status of maternity and/or children in adequate institutions; those who stay at home for their children's sake even if victimized by domestic violence – as if it were the lesser of two evils – and those that are sex workers with no other alternatives?

Is sex work a way out, restricted or facilitated to women? And a factor of postponing or safeguarding the status of *being or becoming* a homeless individual? This premise is not clear in the study, since, if prostitution were in reality a way for women to guarantee their household, that would make the average age of this group of homeless women increase, which is not so. Quite the opposite, in the study the percentage of women decreases at a higher age. Prostitution may be a (precarious) way of getting money for a room to stay and for daily expenses but it may lead to street homelessness. Whilst they are under a roof, the visibility of women in homelessness statistics, is nil.

Taking these questions into consideration, regarding the discrepancy in number between homeless men and women, if we could sum all the situations together (if they were verifiable), would not the percentage of homeless women increase to be identical or even higher than the male level?

Another aspect that could be a subject for future research in this area is to analyse how civil partnerships and/or marriages relate to the space occupied by the couple; in other words, to discover who 'owns' shanty town houses, derelict houses, abandoned cars, stairwells, etc, and if women seek protection in such relationships, i.e., discover the true reasons that lead them to remain in this sort of relationship.

Maternity may take away a homeless status before, during or after maternity (when children are still young) in terms of social solutions both at institutional and family level. Maybe homelessness is merely postponed, or it can serve as a restructuring space to invert the ascending tendency of poverty and not reach to the extreme status of homelessness?

Domestic violence, a decisive factor in this matter, may however be a so-called 'lesser evil' in view of the prospect of the cold, fear and abandonment of becoming homeless in 'non-places'. The situation is far more complicated and serious when we speak of an unemployed woman with children, and a low income.

All the factors stated above and others not comprised in our analysis are decisive in outlining the difference between homeless men and women.

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Male Homelessness as an Apparent Matter of Course

By Dr. Jörg Fichtner,¹ *Chartered Psychologist, working as a Social Researcher in Munich, Germany*

RESEARCH CONCERNS AND PROCEDURES

The study presented here intends to examine homelessness and men's issues concurrently, with a particular focus on social conceptions of gender.² It is based on the results of interviews with 35 men with experience of homelessness from across Germany.

The underlying premise of this study is that marginalised men cannot be located outside the existing gender system. Homeless men have a severe lack of resources. Against the background of complex forms of impoverishment, their options are usually restricted not only by homelessness, but also by extreme poverty, exclusion from working life, the rupture of social ties and relationships, and physical and mental illness. Nevertheless, a gender approach to socially-determined constructive masculinity must be based on the assumption that such men continue to be competent gender constructors who endeavour to construct active masculinity in accordance with their situation.

Patterns of interpretation of masculinity by the people interviewed were reconstructed against the background of experiences of homelessness when analysing individual cases. The aim was to explain how objective living conditions and their subjective interpretation are intertwined on the basis of social gender conceptions, and to identify 'typical' groups, i.e. specific situations of males in precarious living conditions linked to the gendering of homelessness. Such a typology will help elucidate how situations are determined through a gendered approach to the subjective interpretation of scope for action and problem solving. The typology does not relate exclusively to social structure nor to individual behaviour, but to patterns of interpretation, in which those concerned connect the one with the other; this is based on Pierre Bourdieu's idea of the male 'habitus' of homeless men.

The 35 men interviewed were recruited from seven different cities in Germany. A wide array of institutions was contacted in order to reach men with their own housing space as well as those accommodated in shelters and those who live on the street.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PEOPLE IN URGENT HOUSING NEED

The data contains different patterns of interpretation concerning the three essential dimensions of urgent housing need: the interpretation of a main cause for housing loss; the assessment of the current housing situation and recognising one's own role in causing such loss.

In spite of comparable objective poverty indicators, people's subjective interpretation of their own agency or passivity in their housing need is highly significant. More than one third of men considered themselves as personally incapable of acting in this situation, i.e. looking at things retrospectively, they had had options for avoiding homelessness, but were not in a position to take such a step at the time. However, a large majority of the men interviewed, owing to objective conditions – such as unawareness of assistance or illness – were unable to ward off the impending emergency. Finally, another third spoke rather tersely about the significance of their own activity, as they explained becoming homeless as a result of their own action, in which external circumstances were only occasions for giving up their housing.

Finally, a series of patterns of interpretation and of action became visible that represent 'tactics' in using available temporary accommodation. A particularly effective tactic turned out to be implementing demands on referral systems. Various tactics emerged which were strongly oriented to traditional male role patterns of 'conquering' the 'hostile outside world'. From a gender approach, they should be seen not only in terms of appropriation of space, but also as an opportunity to take action to position oneself as a man in societal gender categories.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Specific patterns of interpretation could be gauged as regards financial and occupational situation. The types of income mentioned concern income once earned through gainful employment and the overall financial situation. Two patterns emerged in dealing with indebtedness. Debts are largely ignored, or the subject wishes third parties to assume responsibility for them.

As regards occupational and income situation, in addition to personal resignation, characterised by intense dissatisfaction owing to a lack of prospects for change, there was an illusionary view, whereby the dissatisfaction was contrasted with unrealisable alternatives. A third pattern concerned a persistent belief in the possibility of gaining employment, even if this had previously appeared unfeasible. A fourth pattern was characterised by emphasis on personal autonomy.

The underlying premise of this study is that marginalised men cannot be located outside the existing gender system.

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² The study presented was conducted in 2003 with financial support from the research association "Wohnungslosigkeit und Hilfen in Wohnungsnotfällen" [Homelessness and Support for People in Urgent Housing Need]. The full study is available in German: http://www.gsfev.de/pdf/maenner_in_Wohnungsnot.pdf



The relationship to the informal network appears to be shaped by distance and delimitation, whilst relations with the institutional network persist more than personal relations.

VIOLENCE AS A LAST RESOURCE

The living conditions of the men interviewed are marked by violence; they are victims but also perpetrators of violence. Several men reported unexpected, partially life-threatening assaults, especially when living on the street. Owing to structural and situational differences, this violence is non-reciprocal, as the men concerned can in such a situation appear exclusively to be victims. However, violent confrontation among men with interchangeable roles of victim and perpetrator appears just as constitutive an element of their environment. Daily confrontations are trivialised as typical and normal behaviour in their environment. But they also serve to maintain the social order. Various men had been convicted of causing (serious) personal injuries. Such actions are not explained through specific social standards and thus through normality but, contrary to daily violence, require justification. Violence against women, on the other hand, is not considered legitimate by those questioned. However, the taboo against such violent behaviour against women clearly reduces the extent to which such acts of violence are reported in interviews.

IMAGES OF WOMEN AND MEN

Four formative patterns can be distinguished as regards the way men interpret male roles. Masculinity based on individual assertion places one's own ability to dominate and demand power in the foreground of one's concept of masculinity. A second pattern is masculinity based on the division of labour along gender lines, whereby the division of labour and the role-casting of men as more libidinous than women go hand in hand, thereby approaching the traditional hegemonic image of masculinity. The power resources from this interpretation must be assessed as fragile – not least because the man cannot at present fulfil his role as provider. A third pattern that emerged was the interpretation of a masculinity shaped by a change of rules through a challenge of gender-typical role patterns. Finally, the most frequent pattern was a masculinity characterised by diffuseness – shaped especially by the lack of a male role model as a guideline for masculine conduct.

Masculinity based on individual assertion appears to be characterised by the interpretation that urgent housing need is a result of a failed partnership. The way to housing need is assessed more strongly than by other men in terms of pro-active behaviour and the current situation is temporarily accepted. As regards the current situation, one's own autonomy is stressed, and very often no reference is made to indebtedness. The current situation creates a taboo about the family

network. The relationship to the informal network appears to be shaped by distance and delimitation, whilst relations with the institutional network persist more than personal relations. This pattern tends to be found among those living on the street more than other patterns.

Masculinity based on the gender division of labour appears to be characterised by the fact that unemployment or a collapse of the ability to cope constitutes the cause of urgent housing need, and the loss of one's dwelling is therefore connected to personal inability to act. The current situation is experienced more as a disaster and one's own autonomy to act or illusionary ideas of change are cited. Continuity seems to be secured more often than not with families, and the relationship with one's family tends to be associated with greater stability than with institutional networks. Men of this type constituted the oldest sub-group and did not live on the street.

The pattern of masculinity shaped by a change in roles in the sample is determined by men for whom their occupational residence played an important role in the loss of their dwelling, and where, conversely, a personal breakdown played no role at all. Accordingly, they experience this situation more as a structural incapacity to act. Their social networks are characterised particularly through continuity as regards the family, while they identify with persons from the informal network and build personal relationships with people from the help system.

Masculinity shaped by diffuseness was characterised by young men, who attributed urgent housing need to family problems, and old men, who cited in particular the end of partnerships or a collapse of the ability to cope as the cause for their housing need. The former therefore considered themselves structurally – and the latter personally – incapable of acting. Both subgroups interpret the current situation as one of transition. The way forward in the current situation among the older men in this situation is characterised by occupational orientation or resignation, with no perceptible trends among the younger men. Family relations are characterised by continuity among the younger subgroup, and by disruption for the other men. Both subgroups indicate that their own families are inaccessible at present, and contacts with the informal network appear limited. Institutional networks tend to be used by the younger men as the need arises, while the others appear to make greater use based on dependence. Both groups find themselves more often than other men in supported residential establishments.



These patterns of masculinity show important internal differences for the help system with regard to the use of resources and autonomy of action: individual assertion is strongly connected with the experience of one's own ability to act, but also connected with living on the street and use of services. The role-change pattern corresponds to the highest use of services. The pattern of the traditional division of labour is connected with average scope of action and use of services. Finally, there were scarcely any perceptible options for action and scarcely any usable services in the diffuseness pattern.

The patterns that are closest to hegemonic masculinity – assertion and distribution of labour – cannot use many social services, but appear to make up for this by a strong perception of autonomy. However, a great deal of the data indicates that this own scope of action is essentially limited to maintaining the status quo, and this interpretation is strongly characterised by an illusion of autonomy. On the contrary, considerably fewer such possibilities are to be found in the pattern of masculine diffuseness, which is characterised by a perception of helplessness and by lacking resources. The small group of men who more or less deliberately change their male role confirm that alternative patterns of masculinity are possible. The high utilisation levels of resources by the few change-oriented men in the sample indicate that such a model can be beneficial to men.

THE HELP SYSTEM

Those interviewed draw a distinction between three forms of help: authorities such as social welfare and housing offices or employment agencies; institutions, which the men use daily and where they often live; and personally responsible care providers.

The men interviewed had the strongest reservations about the work of the authorities, including employment agencies. Key aspects of such negative assessments included the subjective perception of low self-esteem and the problem of dependency on help or the restriction of autonomy connected therewith. Another picture is drawn of various homeless services. These are perceived as being vital for survival and as appropriate for the needs of the people concerned. They are understood as part of the world in which they live and also where they are active. As such they tend to erase the polarity between those seeking and those providing help. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed considered contact with specific persons providing care in the help system to be of decisive importance, as two thirds of those questioned

describe such contacts as close, personal relationships. The professional skills of such people, considered essential by those concerned, include commitment to people, and knowledge of the health system and the situation of those in need so as to be able to provide appropriate help, and finally, the ability to establish close, personal contact with the men.

All in all, the use of the help system by men in urgent housing need is determined by two premises: a very extensive reliance on help, and an ensuing action to counteract threats to masculinity, leading to stepped-up efforts to ensure one's own freedom of decision and autonomy. The contradiction between the two structural concerns of men in urgent housing need can scarcely be resolved in the highly administrative help system; conversely, the assessment of the various services shows that their adaptation to the needs of the persons concerned reduces the tension between dependency and freedom of decision considerably. Finally, the various social workers manage to establish such personal relationships with the men concerned, that the latter can delegate part of the decision-making powers and perceive this action as an autonomous decision.

CONCLUSION

Various 'images of men', i.e. patterns of interpretation of masculinity, can be gauged among men in urgent need of housing, which are to be seen as adaptations of existing structures, and as determining action in these structures. Similarly, different patterns of interpretation can be gauged as regards the housing problem, the use of social networks, questions about employment and unemployment, health, partnership, violence, etc., which comprise the interviewees' interpretations of how these situations came about and their explanations of their own actions. 'Images of men' and other patterns of action and interpretation appear to be strongly interconnected. They in the very least co-determine the activities in and barriers to overcoming the situation of homelessness or urgent housing need of the men concerned. Taking these images and patterns of interpretation duly into account in a gender-specific offer of help could contribute to providing 'more suitable' and therefore more efficient help.



Women and Homelessness in Germany

By **Dr. Uta Enders-Dragässer**,¹ *Director of research at the GSF e.V. (Gesellschaft für Sozialwissenschaftliche Frauen- und Genderforschung e.V., Society for Social Science Research on Women and Gender), Germany*

The women's debate, research and model projects [...] have resulted in the acknowledgement of homeless women as a specific target group with specific needs differing from those of men.

A SPECIFIC TARGET GROUP

In Western Germany at the beginning of the 1980s, women working in welfare and social research started a gender-specific debate referring to the issues of the new women's movement, such as gender division of labour, (un)equal opportunities, male violence against women, sexism, and gender role-stereotyping. Their critique emphasized the impact of structural inequalities on women's homelessness instead of personal deficiencies as causes for homelessness. Women's risks of poverty, of violence, their conflicts and crises because of unpaid family work, occupational disadvantages and harassment, their needs in the event of pregnancy, separation or divorce, and as single mothers, came into view. This changed the perception of homeless women in the welfare system. It made them visible as a heterogeneous target group.² And it made visible specific traps women have to cope with: no matter what they decide about their way of living, whether dependent on a partner as 'breadwinner' or trying to reconcile work and family life to be economically independent especially as single mothers, whether leaving a violent partner or staying with him, they bear considerable risks of extreme poverty and sudden social decline. Women at risk have to cope with multi-dimensional problems which are embedded in gender-specific biographical events and crises which have to be considered as 'normal' for larger parts of the population. A homelessness episode comes about when all economic, social and other resources collapse and other types of social assistance and support networks are unreachable. Then external support is of crucial importance but often insufficient, too late or not available, especially when children are involved.

The women's debate, research and model projects funded by the German government have resulted in the acknowledgement of homeless women as a specific target group with specific needs differing from those of men. Innovative new services for women were set up and women-related working standards were developed.³

VISIBLE AND HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

Women are underrepresented in both German support systems, the municipal one and the one developed by welfare organisations and small charities. Within mainstream debate, women and their specific needs are marginalized. So long as this debate is gender blind, the gender-specific needs not only of women but of men as well are not adequately addressed.⁴

In all types of mixed-sex support provisions, women have to cope with male dominance and harassment. They have to fear the violation of their privacy and social degradation. Protection against male violence is insufficient and often not even considered necessary. This exposes both female clients and female staff. Mixed-sex support provisions are not places where women can speak out about disastrous experiences of male violence and the specific degradations of social decline of women. Therefore women avoid these services and try to conceal homelessness at all costs. They seek private solutions. They try to stay with family members, neighbours, friends and 'acquaintances' in temporary and often precarious accommodation. With this they risk exploitation and violence and even their entitlement for support. If they find short-term housing, for instance, with an 'acquaintance', municipal agencies and social authorities may not consider them homeless and therefore refuse support. With the general lack of early and easily accessible referral and counselling services, their extreme poverty and needs are perceived too late and tackled too late.

As a consequence, women who are visibly homeless on the street, sleeping rough, who are thought to be destitute, mentally ill or helpless, are assumed to be 'typical' homeless women. But they are a minority. Hidden homelessness is the 'typical' housing situation of women, single or with partners and surprising as it may seem, mothers with children, whose needs of support and relief are not even acknowledged.⁵

ECONOMIC SITUATION AND RISK FACTORS

Qualitative research on women living in visible and hidden homelessness situations⁶ showed that the women interviewed expressed interpretation patterns about their everyday coping with their acute lack of resources and about their reference points. One of their interpretation patterns was about the importance and necessity of employment, with a good school education and occupational training as prerequisite. Women with the experience of homelessness spoke out about their experiences of discrimination in education and employment. They described the impact on their often long-term unemployment as well as on their difficult life situations.

Most of the women with the exception of the very young had been in employment, some up to 30 years and with differing levels of qualifications, half of them in low-paid employment. Only a third of them had been poor before they became homeless. The women

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2 Enders-Dragässer 1999

3 See Enders-Dragässer et al. 2005

4 See Enders-Dragässer et al. 2005; Fichtner et al. 2005

5 Enders-Dragässer et al. 2005

6 See Enders-Dragässer et al. 2005



defined themselves as excluded from the work force. They explicitly stated that employment was for them crucial in solving their problems, regardless of their level of qualification. They expressed that they considered housing support and occupational reintegration as equally important. With this they expressed needs by far exceeding housing services.

The women saw poverty, poor school education, violence and addiction in their families and relatives as the main causes of their homelessness. Some women explained how their parents' permanent lack of resources had kept them in a poverty trap. As daughters of disadvantaged parents they had been deprived of the means to break the vicious circle of poverty, which were, according to them, good school education and good employment training. They considered this as the best way to gain employment and earn a living.

When marriages or partnerships became unbearable because of domestic violence, poverty or illness or after deaths, some had tried to cope with alcohol or drugs. This often failed and left them addicted. Some women had experienced extreme verbal abuse and saw their lives shattered. They had left their abusive partners and homes abruptly. Perceiving everything as futile they had travelled aimlessly, sometimes for years.

Individual attempts to cope with emergencies could be analysed as economic exclusion or discrimination in employment. The crucial importance or structural factors and risks and biased perceptions of 'personal deficiencies' became evident. Some women, for example, had lost their employment because they were discriminated as mothers. Others had lost children to foster parents, to foster homes or by adoption because they had been denied support as single mothers.

Certain risk factors emerged as sometimes early indicators for later homelessness: poverty and violence since childhood; parental alcohol or drug problems; insufficient family resources; educational disadvantage in school; disadvantage in employment; serious offences; lack of external support, often since childhood.

LIVING WITH CHILDREN

One interpretation pattern shared by all women was the importance of motherhood and of living with their children. Mothers wanted to be able to stay together with their children or to have them back. Those who had lost their children, by death, adoption, fostering, were mourning their loss intensely.

Mothers expressed that they not only needed housing support but occupational qualifications and reintegration as well, because they saw the only solution to their problems in employment. Therefore the recon-

ciliation of the demands of family and of employment was of high importance to them. They valued a good school education for their children highly. Some of them had had their children adopted to give them better choices.

The public debate in Germany about 'child poverty' does not take into consideration the fact that children are poor because their mothers are poor, that mothers lack basic resources and are in urgent need of support. Mothers' homelessness is hidden; it does not seem to exist. Thus mothers' agency is ignored and their risk of losing their children when they are not able to 'pay' or to 'barter' within their social networks for the many needs of their children for their continuous physical, mental, psychological, intellectual and social growth, such as adequate housing, food, clothing, education, interacting with other children, sports and cultural activities. Accordingly, women described ambivalent or negative experiences with social welfare, employment and youth authorities.

HEALTH SITUATION

Health reasons, disability, addiction, stress and severe depression were considered by the women in the sample as important causes of homelessness too. Specific support needs resulted from violence, disabilities, addiction, trauma and problems concerning their reproductive health.

The health situation of homeless women seemed worse compared with that of average women. Health services were difficult to access or insufficient. Women avoided psychiatric support services and found the services for homeless women much more supportive.

WOMEN'S INFORMAL SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

The interpretation patterns of the women were much about actively coping with their problems. They contacted support services for women, watching, listening or asking for information and support. They tended to meet other affected women in connection with the women's services. Informal networking with them was valued as an important means of support. These informal networks differed from family networks considerably since they included access to professionals and to external support resources. The women networked within public spaces where they were protected against male violence and dominance. They set up small informal networks with women especially when they wanted to leave male-dominated drug scenes or violent milieus.

WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES

Most of the women emphasized that they could actively work on their problems with the professional women of the women's support services, often set up by smaller charities. They felt respected and appreci-



ated and held them in great esteem as experts. They appreciated very much when they could solve problems and find their personal ways back to 'normality'.

The often-debated 'crisis' of the complicated German mainstream support systems does not seem to apply to the developments of women's support services. Various research studies and the evaluation research of the model projects funded by the German government have considerably influenced practice developments because the inequalities and deficits of both support systems were brought much more strongly into view by the debate on the situation of women. The new innovative services are exclusively for women and exclusively staffed by women, on the basis of women-related working standards. Referral and counselling agencies, day care services, new housing schemes, new schemes for gaining qualifications and re-integration into employment were set up, often by smaller independent charities. The working standards which are formulated as women's rights ensure safe space for unhindered communication, counselling, support, occupational qualification, empowerment, participation, places for women which are free of males and thus male violence and dominance where women can communicate with female professionals about their experiences and needs without gender-specific restraints. They acknowledge women's specific social commitments. These working standards were groundwork for the expanding field of 'good practice' support services for women.⁷

CONCLUSION

The multi-dimensional problems of women are embedded in gender-specific life events and crises which tend to be considered as 'normal' for larger parts of the population. Homelessness results when all resources collapse. Therefore further develop-

ments have to take into consideration that women living in hidden homelessness or at risk need much earlier problem identification by referral and counselling services. All support services, including mixed-sex ones, have to consider and address women's specific life situations and their specific work load and problems because of their social commitments. Effective ways of cooperation between all the different support systems are necessary in order to work against the exclusion of specific risk groups, such as young women, mothers with children, mentally ill women or women who use substances, and women with disabilities. Besides all further developments, gender mainstreaming is needed in all fields of social work for women as well as men who are homeless or at risk.

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⁷ See Enders-Dragässer et al 2005



Transient women, suffering women, beyond appearances: the association *Femmes SDF* by their side

By Marie-Claire Vanneville,¹ Director, Femmes SDF, France

Who are these women we come across more and more frequently, who beg, or just wait, discrete and self-effacing, surrounded by bags, in a train station, in an emergency reception centre, etc? What kind of trouble or rather troubles have led them to wander so, to flee endlessly from extreme internal suffering, unable at times, to lead a real life?

Even though the situations are quite different, they all share a long history of wandering driven by a lack of material wherewithal.

Such errant backgrounds may entail stints of living in the street. The street is the magnifying mirror of our society, where relations between men and women are exacerbated, and it appears that society leads women to experience transience differently because they are women. Because in our culture and in our representations, the street, the public space,² is the space held by men. It is therefore essentially bathed in violence, a violence that is growing by the day as economic instability increases.

Vulnerable and weakened, women become easy potential prey in the street. They know it and through their survival instinct, develop highly elaborate tactics³ to protect themselves. For it is necessary "to save face," to "manage." These tactics assume different forms depending on the age, culture of origin and story of each one. But the essential characteristic is to make oneself invisible as much as possible so as not to be noticed. This common point – invisibility, opacity – is cited in all the studies conducted on this population in the West.

That is why, a secret, a deep silence surrounds the place where they sleep; we sense an effort to protect their life here, because it is a matter of life and death.

They also make themselves invisible because of a sense of shame and guilt.

They have not met the expectations and demands of society, expectations which they appropriated. And society does not cease to feed the shame they feel through the looks cast by passers-by. They have not managed to assume any of the roles vested upon them: they have no "home," an essential place attributed to women; their emotional life has consisted of repeated failures, and they have not had a successful relationship in a couple; their children have been taken away, they have not succeeded in their role as mother either; suffering often turns them to drink; and our society does not look kindly on women alcoholics...

The lack of material wherewithal and the exclusion into which women sink with time, exacerbate the feeling of shame. This feeling in turn reinforces the low self-esteem, lack of respect, and scorn so embedded in them.

A poor diet, stress, cold, and addiction take their toll on their bodies which are all the more bruised and aching because they are exposed. The women "no longer take care of themselves," and this reinforces and feeds their deep dislike of themselves. This woman's body they no longer feel is gradually forgotten, ignored and denied. In fact, they shut themselves off against themselves and their suffering and, little by little, forget themselves. Existence is wiped away and erased. That is why women who gradually sink into a life of restless wandering, even if they are not many, experience an irreversible break from their innermost being, which turns into a physical deterioration much more rapid and pronounced than among men.

Nomadic, these women are in a perpetual state of flight, always moving forward to survive, with no other timeframe than the immediate, a way to flee from oneself in daily life, to flee the unbearable buried within oneself.

These are stories of very old wounds and difficulties: stories about one's place as a woman, of a close friend affected, where often the woman was not accepted from birth; stories of life and death, experienced in great loneliness.

They are stories of physical and mental violence, of sexual violence, and of rapes long kept silent.

To all this are added, with time and age, repeated failures that reflect the difficulty of overcoming old traumas, a repetition of situations ad infinitum, an infernal cycle: successive pregnancies, continual changes of accommodation...

The situations are repeated also because they are the ones where these women know how to live, because something needs to be said and to be understood.

Clearly being itself is difficult – being a woman.

For some, the pursuit of administrative formalities is part of transience, of this unconscious fleeing strategy. They excel in them and over-consume all offers of services, through endless applications. They get lost in the formalities, applying to several services for the same things, until they exhaust both themselves and their contacts. Behind these incessant demands hides another quest, a constant emotional quest. Living in repetition is also seeking happiness that appears impossible.

And yet an unwavering strength and energy emanates from them which attaches them energetically to life.

They adapt their story to each contact by fragmenting and truncating it, until they forget "their" personal story, "their words." One more opportunity to forget the pain of the past, to get lost in the chattering and to retreat behind silence, to forget their "secret garden."

The street is the magnifying mirror of our society, where relations between men and women are exacerbated, and it appears that society leads women to experience transience differently because they are women.

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2 S. Condon, M. Lieber, and F. Maillolochon, "Insécurité dans les espaces publics: comprendre les peurs féminines," *Revue française de sociologie*, 46-2, 2005, pp. 265-294

3 Michel de Certeau, "L'invention du quotidien," Vol. 1, "10/18," 1980.



Not to be seen, not to be heard, not to leave any trace, not to exist...

Transient women gradually lose the bearings of their identity: they no longer occupy a dwelling, they no longer live in their body, they no longer live in the language they speak. Often, they lose their identity documents, an loss not devoid of symbolism...

In fact, it all comes down to forgetting oneself, one's identity, one's gender identity.

And all this leads to a profound fatalism. Constantly degraded, the image of oneself is effaced and has to be reconstructed.

THE APPROACH OF THE ASSOCIATION FEMMES SDF

To reinvent their existence, it seems essential to enable them to rediscover their words, to involve them in all actions. The association *Femmes SDF* has relied on this approach ever since it was founded.

A project is therefore constructed with them based on their words and their needs gathered over time. It led to the opening of a "Women's centre," a small day reception centre in December 2004. Its philosophy and operating principles have been developed with the women concerned.

- It is a reassuring and protected space, where women are received anonymously.
- It is a place without – but not against – men.
- Women can go there during the day as often as they like.
- Their animal companions are accepted.
- There is no distribution, rather moments of sharing: every person is rich in her personal resources.

By coming to this facility, women find their body again, the first element assaulted in their situation of female destitution: they can take a shower, a bath, put make-up on, rest in a nice, cosy bed... this place offers them different possibilities to partake of well-being.

As they relax, they gradually start to speak and become "familiar again" with words. In reviving their intimacy, they get closer to themselves and thus to others, and gradually venture again without fear into relationships with others. They come out of loneliness; solidarities are revived.

Their participation in the life of the "centre" is in terms of daily life: choosing together what they want to eat, what they can think of to live together better... The women rediscover rituals, bearings in time.

They offer to organise outings themselves, such as parties and birthday celebrations. They want to participate in cultural, even political events that are not stigmatising and are open to the general public.

All these small things of life promote the return of a lust for life, the return of a will to live in these women who have lost themselves.

Thus the women can again, with time, inhabit their body, a space... their life.

Perhaps they can gradually, with time, break with the process of transience.

Since the facility was opened, 270 different women have used it 3973 times.

After five years of operation, we have noted that the women who have been coming to the facility for some time make progress – very subtle but deep progress. In establishing a link, albeit fragile, we feel that the person gets a hold of herself.

We have noted that some women "are doing better": the possibility of being able to go somewhere during the day and take care of oneself, rediscover the rituals of daily life, find "her" words again, etc. – all this contributes to feeling better and to better health.

Feeling better in this way is all the more visible as we meet more and more damaged women.

Yet this route is long and makes the people who provide support modest.

In 2007, we noted that as economic instability increased, street violence was more prevalent, in particular against women, causing them to withdraw more into themselves, within their couples and/or groups. The more marginalized women tended to come to the "centre" far less often.

It was therefore decided to go where they live, in the street, in the ever mixed places that they went to, such as emergency shelters, and day reception centres.

The aim was to get women who did not come to the "centre" to take notice of us, to become available, listen to them, establish ties of trust and confidence over time, so as to enable them to confide in us about suffering very often gagged by the difficulties of life; but also to listen to what men, their companions in misery, had to say about their relationships with women and to make them aware of difficulties, quite different from theirs, faced by the women they mix with, and the violence that they experience every day in the street.

It comes down to giving them room to speak again, room to exist as women.

Today, we have noted that this action is more than ever necessary: these women are becoming more and more visible in the street; they are also increasingly young and weakened.

The association comes into daily contact with women and provides support, following the rhythm of the world on the street. It questions and finds, with time, appropriate answers by involving them as much as possible, being ever attentive and ever heedful, without ever forgetting those most excluded, those deprived "of a voice."

The existence of these women is accepted today. But this reality is always unsettling. Because it confronts everyone in his or her innermost being.

Their differences and difficulties to live as women remain hard to get recognised. This is the daily struggle that the association *Femmes SDF* wages alongside them.



Homeless Women in Hungary

By **Katalin Szoboszlai**,¹ *Lecturer at the University of Debrecen and Chairwoman of the Periferia Association, Hungary*

INTRODUCTION

This essay helps us to understand the issues of homelessness, particularly women's journey into homelessness.² In Hungary, we hardly have any information based on empirical research about homeless women. Research on this topic usually focuses on the causes of homelessness and the functions of accessible services. The features of men's homelessness and women's homelessness were analysed in the 'Február 3' Research journal, published in 2008, in which some typical differences between homelessness pathways were revealed, although it did not examine the causes and routes leading to women's homelessness. In this essay I would like to give a review of the findings of my research. I present a chart of a woman's homelessness journey, completed with the analysis of life events which affected her accommodation situations and supportive relationships and finally caused her to drift into homelessness.

RESEARCH METHOD

During the research I applied qualitative methods which provided an opportunity to take a closer look at personal walks of life. In investigating women's homelessness my aim was to understand micro-social factors more deeply, recognise the relation of cause and effect, map the process of becoming homeless, analyse the route leading to rooflessness and last but not least to find the risk factors which greatly contribute to the situation in which women find themselves roofless.

Qualitative methods were used to collect data. I decided on interviews when choosing the survey method. In-depth interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to have a closer look at personal ways of life as well as to reveal seemingly unimportant past events. In the first part of the interview I wanted to know life events from early childhood to homelessness, while in the second part they were asked about their roofless experience. These interviews were conducted in Nyíregyháza and in Budapest. Between February and March 2008 I could conduct 10 interviews in Nyíregyháza and 11 in Budapest; that is 21 interviews with women.³

The interviews focused on roofless⁴ women in accordance with the European typology of homeless people. Women of the examined group spend the night either on the street or in shelters while during the day they are either in warming rooms or in public places using low-threshold services.⁵

ANALYSIS OF HOMELESSNESS JOURNEYS

One chart of a homelessness pathway is shown in order to present the route to becoming homeless. The homeless journey drawn on the basis of the woman's story shows that homelessness is not merely due to insufficient housing but it is rather a complex, accumulated problem. From a personal homeless journey we can see the risk factors of family life, housing and relations which can lead to becoming homeless, and we get closer to understanding the correlation between them.

The chart selected shows the typical ways of becoming homeless. A key sentence, best characterising the homeless journey, is attached to the chart together with a fictitious name and the age of the person in question. The causality of personal life experiences, housing situations and interactions with services/persons is indicated with arrows. Besides drawing the chart of homelessness the process of becoming homeless is also described in the analysis, in which the most significant features are highlighted. In addition to factual data such as marriage, divorce, illness, some personal factors, which were realised in choices determining life events and experienced feelings as well as subsequent evaluation of the state, were also taken into account.

ARANKA'S HOMELESSNESS JOURNEY

When Aranka was a child she was wandering between remote counties; Baranya county where her father lived and Szabolcs county where her mother lived. Her parents were alcoholics and always found a reason to hit their child. Her parents got divorced when she was nine years old and she moved with her father to Pécs. She needed to look after her younger siblings and when she could not fulfil the father's expectations she was punished and smacked. After an incident like this she

From a personal homeless journey we can see the risk factors of family life, housing and relations which can lead to becoming homeless, and we get closer to understanding the correlation between them.

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² This is a shorter version of an article submitted to ELTE University Social policy and Social Work Primary Programme for the degree of PhD. Sociology Doctoral School. Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Zsuzsa Ferge.

³ Special thanks to BMSZKI, Menhely Alapítvány (Menhely Foundation), Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat (Hungarian Maltese Charity Service), Oltalom Szeretetszolgálat and Periferia Egyesület (Periferia Association) for their professional help and making the interviews possible. I want to express my gratitude for the social workers who helped me to get to know and interview homeless women.

⁴ The European typology (ETHOS) for homelessness and housing exclusion has been used since 2005. Source: http://bmszki.hu/file/tanulmanyok/ethos/ETHOS_def_hu-gyori.doc (Bakos-Györi, 2005)

⁵ From among the four categories of ETHOS table I am presenting the one typical to roofless people. The sample does not contain three more categories like houselessness, living in insecure housing and living in inadequate housing.



decided to move back to her mother, to the Eastern part of the country and homelessness found her there. At the age of 16 she was living in her mother's house where her stepfather raped her. The court sent the father to prison, the girl decided to go to Budapest. Later on she had no luck with men and was beaten again. She has been alone for a while.

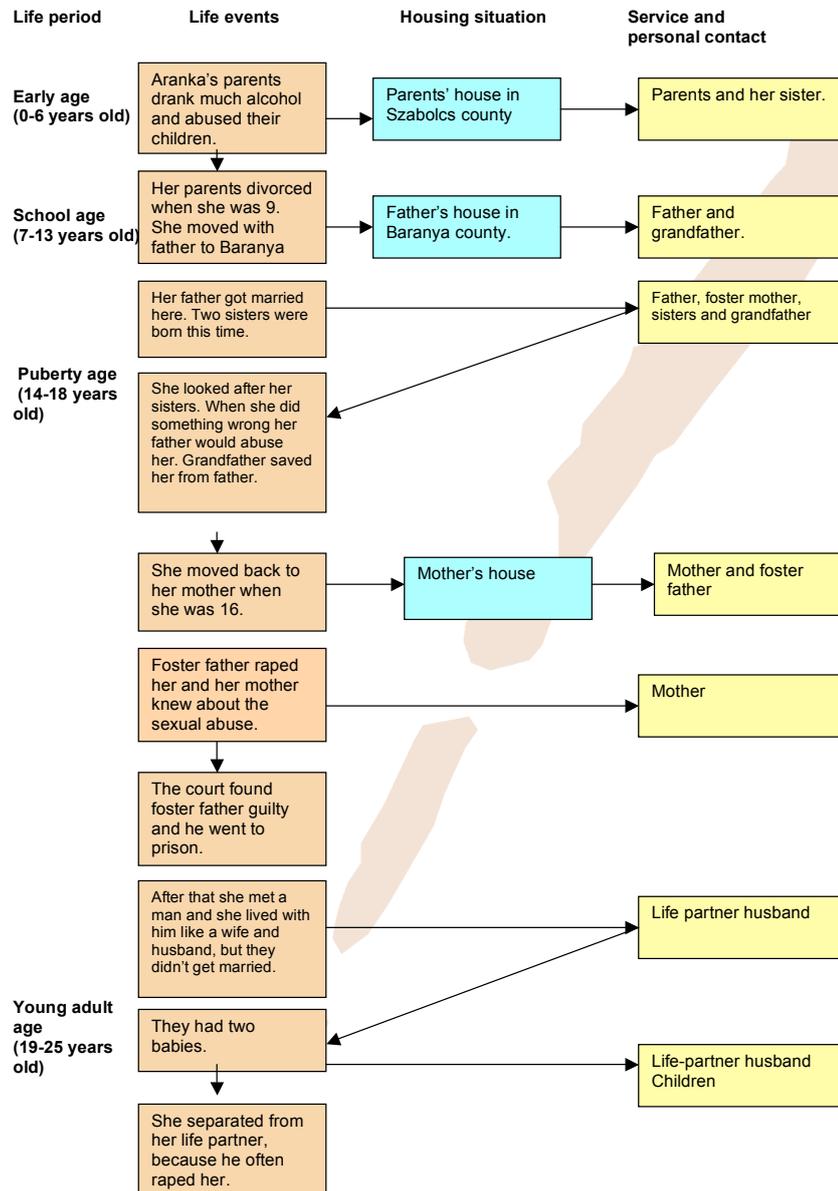
her parents' divorce; she went on living first with her father then with her mother as an unloved child. Parents and step parents alike at both places of living used her vulnerability and abused her. In her teens she was sexually assaulted by her step father and was compelled to bear his aggression. The way towards homelessness opened for her. Neither her father nor her mother's family provided her with physical or emotional security. Her partner also abused her and her children were brought up in a children's home. As a young adult she became entirely homeless. As a homeless woman she got married, but her husband abused her so she got divorced. She is living alone at the moment.

As it can be seen in the chart of homelessness career Aranka became homeless in her teens. She said at the beginning of the interview that she had been homeless for 25 years. Her life was determined by her parents' divorce, her wandering between remote places, and her lacking in emotional relations while exposed to abuse. While the parents were married she suffered their alcoholism, rude and abusive behaviour. Her life situation did not change for the better after

HOMELESSNESS JOURNEY

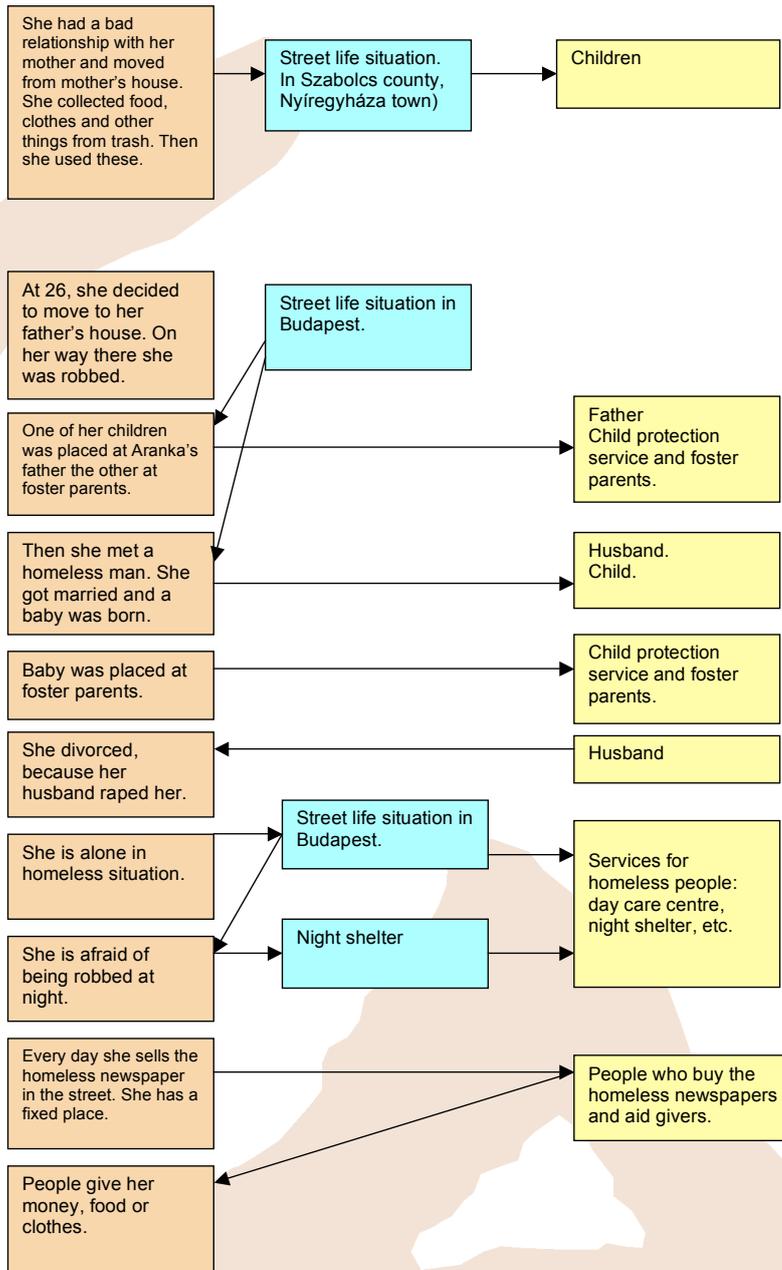
"I've said that I don't need a man for housing."

Aranka's homelessness journey, she is 42 years old
(The arrows show the causality relationships.)





Adult age
(from 26
years old)



The process of exclusion from family life since early childhood can be traced in the homeless career chart.

The process of exclusion from family life since early childhood can be traced in the homeless career chart. The unstable family structure, the parent-child relation without positive emotions can be derived from the parents' deviant behaviour, her 'wanderings' hoping for a better future and the physical, emotional, sexual assaults against her as a young girl. According to her report, her life had been so hard that she would not want anyone to have a life like hers. Examining the route to homelessness, abuse was attributed to every phase of the women's life. Men abused and humiliated

her in every personal relationship. Homelessness gave a chance to get rid of the dependent relationships so she chose to live by herself. Her grandfather was her only natural supportive relation but their connection was cut in her childhood. Deviant behaviour of the family members caused her to become alienated and start her life as a roofless young woman. Homeless services provided her with supportive help, although she rarely took advantage of shelters and public showers.



SUMMARY

This study aimed to highlight the complex issue of women's homelessness. The analysis has shown that on the long way to homelessness women experienced crises within family structures and outside alike. The profile was supported with the charts of homelessness career which were used in analysing a homeless woman's walk of life. Finally the complicated process of becoming homeless was outlined. This chart has shown the turning points of a homeless woman's life when the events resulted in the change of housing and, in line with it, we can see the existing and non-existing relations and services.

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The gendered nature of homelessness service interventions: An Australian study

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HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

Homelessness is a serious worldwide issue. In Australia, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), which had been in operation since 1985, was replaced in 2009 by the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA).² The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994, Section 4* defines homelessness as: 'a person is considered homeless if they have inadequate access to safe and secure housing, which includes being at risk of homelessness'. In 2006-7, 1,539 non-government, community and local government organisations funded under SAAP (now NAHA) supported an estimated 161,200 people, of whom 106,500 were adults or unaccompanied children and 54,700 were accompanying children.³ Consistently, more women than men access homeless services with 60% being female clients and 40% male clients, and 22% of the SAAP clients are women escaping domestic violence.⁴ However, gender is often neglected in homelessness research. When gender is addressed, it often looks at the gendered experiences and identities of homeless people themselves. This article examines the gendered nature of interventions by social workers employed in services that respond to homelessness.

EXAMINING GENDER IN HOMELESSNESS INTERVENTIONS

This article describes social workers' accounts of their practices using data from a qualitative study that focused on 39 social workers' responses to homelessness in three Australian cities.⁵ While conducting this research I became increasingly aware of how homelessness service providers' interactions and identities are gendered. Gender and power relations constitute the gendered identities of service providers and service users. Social work knowledge, language, and understanding are constituted through contradictory historically- and culturally-embedded individual and structural discourses and exist within gendered, class-based and racialized relations of power and knowledge.

The process of reflective practice is an important aspect of service delivery in homelessness services. Examining gender and power relations in social workers' interventions and perspectives encourages reflexivity in social work practice, thereby improving the services provided to homeless people. This study found that dominant gendered constructions and influences on social and professional interactions can be experienced as 'invisible' forms of oppression by service providers and service users. Service providers also argued that critical and feminist approaches towards homelessness interventions can function to uphold social justice and human rights and to resist unequal power and gender relations. Female social work participants discussed their experiences of this invisible gender oppression and advocated for a feminist approach to homeless to make these oppressions visible. This study also found that service providers tend to have essentialist notions of gender and work and heterosexual assumptions were evident in their interactions with clients.

ESSENTIALIST NOTIONS OF GENDER AND WORK

This study illustrated how work is conceptualized and embodied differently by men and women. An experienced male social worker who was employed in a nongovernmental organization explained how gender and class influenced his definition of work:

I have got such a high work ethic that I think what I do isn't work. I have a real hard time taking my pay home because I've talked to people on the phone... Work means that you are developing a whole pilot of muscle ...sweating ...digging a hole in the ground. I still have to actually say "this is work," sitting in a room where someone is bawling [crying] their eyes out.... [It] is still work—different work. I have to keep telling myself that.

Examining gender and power relations in social workers' interventions and perspectives encourages reflexivity in social work practice, thereby improving the services provided to homeless people.

1 This analysis was a component of a larger doctoral study conducted at the University of South Australia, titled: *Homelessness, Social Work, Social Policy and the Print Media in Australian Cities* (Zufferey, 2007). My email is Carole.Zufferey@unisa.edu.au

2 Commonwealth of Australia (2008) White Paper *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Canberra ACT: Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, p.40.

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2008. *Demand for SAAP accommodation by homeless people 2006-07: a report from the SAAP National Data Collection*. SAAP NDCA report Series 12. Cat. no. HOU 186. Canberra: AIHW, p.2.

4 As above.

5 For further discussion of study methods and findings see Zufferey, C. (2009) Making Gender Visible Social Work Responses to Homelessness, *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 24(4), 382-393, where sections of this article have been previously published.



However, the female participants did not speak of such dilemmas related to social work not being 'real' work. They tended to describe how social work with the homeless, particularly homeless women, was more of a 'calling'.

Furthermore, the participants who were employed in direct service delivery in nongovernment church-based services stated they were poorly paid, as with other 'caring' work, which is often seen as 'women's work.' They said they would not work if it was 'only for the money', illustrating the altruistic nature of social work practice in the field of homelessness. This view was typified by a comment from a female social worker who was a volunteer before she began paid work in a nongovernment church-based service:

The rate of pay... is just ridiculous... My son who works selling phones earns more money than I do... It is very depressing when you have been to university for four years and you wonder why... I am not working for the money. I don't need the money, but it is an absolutely appalling pay rate.

Emotional relations are central to social work responses to homelessness and assume heterosexuality, which is evident in social workers' accounts of their relationships with people who are experiencing homelessness. As one female worker in a nongovernmental agency whose primary client group were men said:

I am conscious ...like you have to be careful with guys; ...you kind of get this feeling... They are quite often your same age group.... This guy that I go and see; I am sure he is in love with me; ...nothing inappropriate has ever happened but you have to be aware of that being a factor.... He was drunk and came to see me ...and said, "If only I had a woman like you, I'd worship her every day".

The influence of heterosexual dominance on service provision is often invisible but is instrumental in supporting patriarchy, reproducing gender inequality and hegemonic masculinity and functions to minimising relationship violence and abuse.⁶

GENDER AS AN INVISIBLE FORM OF OPPRESSION

Service providers interviewed noted that gender and power relations were present but often not spoken about in their interactions with clients and colleagues. For example, one female worker said:

Gender is an issue.... The subtleties of oppression ...are not really quite obvious; they are subtle and not quite overt.... Sometimes when things happen to you, you don't have an explanation for what that is; you internalize that, and then subsequently you start to see that you have been oppressed, but you did not know it at the time.

The symbolism of gender in the appearance of being a woman or a man was linked to themes of professional credibility, personal worth, and vulnerability to being victims of violence. Physical appearance, such as being a blonde woman and being a woman in general, is culturally associated with decreased professional credibility, as one female social worker mentioned:

If I was a man, I would have fared a lot better... There is a lot of credibility that you get, opposed to being a blonde woman; regardless of the things you say, it is the perception.

Thus, feminist approaches to homelessness and domestic violence were advocated for by 12 of the 39 participants (30%), to contradict these dominant relations of power and gender.

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO WORKING WITH WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the past 30 years, domestic and gendered violence has been increasingly recognized as a social problem with significant personal, social, and economic effects.⁷ Despite feminist agitation and achievements in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a 'feminist backlash' in the past 10 years with the influence of conservative governments in Australia. This is evident in policy and practice responses to domestic violence

6 Chung, D (2005) Violence, control, romance and gender equality: Young women and heterosexual relationships, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28, 445-455

7 Chung, D., Kennedy, R., O'Brien, B., & Wendt, S. (2000). *Home safe home: The link between domestic and family violence and women's homelessness*. Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services and Women's Emergency Services Network, Commonwealth of Australia.

8 Phillips, R. (2006). Undoing an activist response: Feminism and the Australian government's domestic violence policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 26, 192-219.



and homelessness that refer to the equal treatment of gender (assuming gender neutrality) instead of considering gendered power relations.⁸ Violence in the home is a major reason for women's homelessness and social workers wanted to make this visible and to incorporate domestic violence in the 'at risk' definitions of homelessness:

I would define homelessness in a number of ways. Primarily it relates to people not having a place to call their own home—either because they have no physical home or because the place that they live in is not safe or not secure or not “homelike”. As a feminist, I was very keen to work to assist women in difficulty. Domestic violence is a huge issue for women and children, including being the primary cause of women's homelessness.

Feminist approaches were particularly advocated for by female service providers working in domestic violence and women's services. Feminism also informed the personal and professional value base for female workers who were not employed in gender-specific homelessness areas. The female participants who were employed in women-specific services strongly identified gender compatibility as an issue that influenced their work choices, with comments such as:

- 'I've really only ever wanted to work with homeless women'
- 'I'm female and understand from what perspective a lot of these women come; you know, male social workers in our area, it doesn't seem to work, working with females'

These work choices made by female service providers relate to gender and power relations and their empathy for the disadvantages experienced by homeless women. As one male participant said: "Gender is an issue, whether you like it or not". A feminist approach to homelessness considers the impact of gender on the causes, experiences and outcomes of homelessness for women and this is particularly important for women's services. However, a pro-feminist approach to working with men,⁹ which enables a critical reflection on dominant constructions of masculinity, can also provide a framework for working with men.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

This analysis of gender and power relations has implications for homelessness organisations and how they provide their services. Gender and power relations are implicit in our relationships with clients and colleagues and the culture of service delivery. However, there is little public discussion on this issue. Homelessness organisations can take into account gender and power relations in planning for service delivery by firstly acknowledging that these gender relations exist. Using a gender and diversity lens,¹⁰ to ensure effective services and improved outcomes for women and men, organisations can:

- undertake a gender analysis of their programs;
- examine the potential impact of their services and practices on cultural and gender inequality; and
- implement the needed adjustments in components of their organisation to make the service culturally relevant and meet gender equity objectives.

CONCLUSION

The complexities of gender and power relations in homelessness service provision and the practice of service providers is a neglected area of analysis and research. Professional interventions in the field of homelessness are shaped by multiple aspects of individual workers' personal, professional and political identities. However, social constructions of gender inform the choices that are made and that are available for men and women employed in the field of homelessness. This study challenges social work practitioners to reflect on and pay particular attention to questions of power, gender, and social justice in their daily practice. An intersectional feminist approach to homelessness allows for a deeper self-reflective and anti-oppressive stance that incorporates broader issues of social inequality that are embedded in social categories of gender, race, and class and this could be further explored in future homelessness research.

[S]ocial constructions of gender inform the choices that are made and that are available for men and women employed in the field of homelessness.

9 Pease, B (1999) 'Deconstructing masculinity-Reconstructing men', in Pease, B. and Fook, J. (eds) *Transforming Social Work Practice*, Australia: Allen & Unwin, p.97-112

10 Department of Human Services (2008) *Gender and diversity lens for health and human services*, Victorian Women's Health and Safety Strategy, Stage 2: 2006-2010, Victorian Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy Diversity Unit: Victorian Government.



The gender of housing deprivation in Belgium

By Nicolas Bernard,¹ Lecturer, Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, Belgium

[H]ousing deprivation is a profoundly gendered – and mainly women’s – issue, essentially because women are more at risk of material hardship than men.

A first glance at Belgium’s current housing problems might suggest that they have little to do with gender or sex. And yet housing deprivation is a profoundly gendered – and mainly women’s – issue, essentially because women are more at risk of material hardship than men. Sweeping and self-evident though it may be, this explanation does not give the whole picture, because there is rampant discrimination on the housing market against women precisely *because* they are women.

Underlying this is that – for a variety of reasons – men on average always earn more than equally qualified women – the widest pay gap being 30% for private sector non-manual employees, for example (against 21% for manual workers and 5% for civil servants). Unsurprisingly, therefore, women have an “at risk of poverty” rate 15% above their male counterparts, rising even to 36% in the 50-64 age bracket. One new trend in insecurity seen in recent years is beyond all doubt the rise in lone parent households (and, more generally, the soaring numbers of one-person households).² Nationwide, there are a reported 9.5% lone mothers and 3.6% lone fathers. This means that nearly one in five households with children is lone-parent-headed.³ In the vast majority of cases, however (72.5%), that parent is female. And the fact that nearly four in ten lone mothers have two or more dependent children leads to an acute need for larger homes – a need that tends to be overlooked where lone-parent households are concerned.

Women’s financial and social insecurity logically and inevitably has an impact on their housing conditions. The 2001 national census revealed that lone-parent families make singularly little effort – amongst other things, for financial reasons – at home improvements (less so than unmarried couples with or without children, and married couples with children, for example). Looking also at the size of homes, the general increase seen in the number of properties *under* 55m² in area is most marked among childless households and lone parent families. Were it not for the one-person household category, indeed, lone parents would be least well-off in terms of amenities (bathroom, toilet, central heating, etc.). Finally, with respect to the conditions of housing proper (safe, sanitary), lone-parent households bring up the rear,

with conditions described as “very poor”. Similarly, another study finds that for every mother living with a partner and “not at all satisfied” with her housing, there are five one-person households who hold the same opinion.⁴

In a country with a tradition of homeownership like Belgium, lone-parent households come off badly. While an average 78% of Belgians own their own home, this proportion drops to 55% among lone parents. Conversely, more than three times as many lone parents as married couples with children live in rented properties.⁵ Yet another study finds nearly 60% more owners among partnered mothers than lone mothers⁶ – a group in which owners (53%) barely outnumber tenants (47%), whereas over five times more partnered mothers are homeowners than are not.⁷

This is a declining trend, moreover, as the last 25 years have seen the share of lone parent family homeowners decrease by a quarter. And the fact that housing costs account for twice the share of the household budget of lone women tenants compared to homeowners shows how much their living conditions have deteriorated in the space of two decades.⁸

Turning specifically to the (private) rented market, twice as many lone mothers as partnered mothers describe their housing costs as “high”.⁹ And while nearly a third of partnered mothers do not find them a burden, only one in fourteen lone mothers take the same view.¹⁰

Where social housing is concerned, client groups are growing distinctly poorer. Today, only one in five social tenants is in paid work.¹¹ There is a clear connection between this rise in poverty and the accompanying rise in the number of lone parent households, which also explains the predominantly female make-up of social tenants (61%).¹² More precisely, over three quarters of social tenants in Wallonia are one-person households – with children or childless (76.48%).¹³ And within this category of unpartnered persons, women outnumber men by more than two to one, making them overall the largest single statistical group in those terms in the Walloon social housing sector.¹⁴ Furthermore, lone parent households make up nearly a third of all

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2 In Brussels, for example, one in two households is now a one-person household

3 18%

4 0.99% against 5.31%

5 45% against 14%.

6 84% against 53%.

7 84% against 16%.

8 60% versus 29% of their respective incomes

9 56.36% against 28.69%.

10 31.97% against 7.27%

11 21%.

12 At 31 December 2006 - 52.66% lone women versus 23.82% lone men and 23.52% couples

13 Peaking at over 85% in Namur for example (86.14%).

14 52.66% of women against 23.82% male and 23.52% of couples

15 29.29%.



social tenants¹⁵ - a group that again contains close to four times more women than men.¹⁶ There may be various explanations for this over-representation of women. Women – who were mostly *in a relationship* at the time when they became social tenants – tend to outlive their partners in the social housing stock as elsewhere. Being by nature intended for disadvantaged groups, the social housing stock necessarily has a greater proportion of women, partly because they tend to be even more affected by poverty than men, and partly because the social housing allocation criteria are more weighted (i.e., assign significantly more priority points) towards typically female precarious situations (lone-parent households, domestic violence - as recently introduced¹⁷ -, etc.).

If poverty and particularly poor housing conditions, are more prevalent among women than men, why then should it be that homelessness is predominantly *male*? Absolute homelessness – street living - in a way is only the visible part of housing insecurity. Transience is *differently* experienced by women. Specifically, they spare no efforts to avoid ending up street homeless. Their greater physical vulnerability combined with the frequent presence of children makes them consider this “solution” only when all other options have run out. They know full well that even if their health holds up living on the street, their child will soon be taken from them and put into care by the authorities. Let alone that street homeless women marked by domestic abuse, for example, are at risk of being found (and forced to go back) by their abusive husbands, who may be prompted to even more aggression by the departure of their spouse. In plain terms, a woman who has suffered relationship breakdown and self-exclusion has everything to gain by becoming invisible. Women alienated from society therefore tend to use coping strategies to put however short-lived a roof over their heads, including, for example, asking family and acquaintances for even a single night’s shelter, even sleeping on floors, often in overcrowded places ...

The Order (of the 6th September 2007) enacted by the Walloon Government awarding points for the allocation of social housing to people who specifically “make themselves homeless because of domestic violence”¹⁸ is a wholly welcome development therefore. Eight priority points will now be awarded to such situations - the maximum under current rules. Generally, it is worth pointing out that lone-parent households already get some priority in accessing the social housing stock. “Persons with one or more dependent children who are divorced or in divorce proceedings” and “pregnant unmarried women or lone parents with one or more dependent children” are awarded six priority points - the second highest rate on the housing crisis scale.¹⁹

What, then, is to be done about women’s housing deprivation? The paradox is that solutions are not

always to be found in the sphere of housing as such. Obviously, there would be much to be said, for example, for increasing the supply of multi-bedroom homes, as well as move-on housing, for example, to increase provision for lone-parent households. But to the extent that the housing problems faced mainly by women often themselves only reflect more general financial and social (itself profoundly gendered) vulnerability, the main focus of action needs to be at an earlier stage on women’s poverty in general and on eliminating gender inequalities.

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Femmes et hommes en Belgique : statistiques et indicateurs de genre. Edition 2006, - gender statistics and indicators, 2006 edition, Brussels, Institute for Gender Equality, Brussels, 2006.

16 Public housing stock tenants: 22.51% lone mothers, 6.78% lone fathers, 30.15% childless women, 17.04% childless men, 12.9% couples with children and 10.62% childless couples.

17 See below

18 Article 17, para. 2.

19 Article 17, para. 2.



'On the Streets': Sex Workers and Homelessness

By **Elaine Batty**, *Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University*,¹ **Rionach Casey**, *Lecturer in Housing Management at Sheffield Hallam University*,² and **Kesia Reeve**, *Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University*,³ England

INTRODUCTION

Female street sex workers constitute one of the most excluded and marginalised groups within the homelessness population in the UK. Yet, despite an extensive literature about sex workers across the fields of urban studies, geography, public health, sociology, and criminality there is surprisingly little attention paid to the relationship between homelessness and street prostitution. Based on research conducted with street female sex workers in England, this article argues that there is a dearth of analysis regarding sex workers' housing situations but contends that a clear and reciprocal link between sex work and homelessness is evident. In particular, our findings point to the increased risk of homelessness for women in the sex industry.

The research on which this article is based was commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and conducted between July 2008 and June 2009. It involved a questionnaire survey of 30 women involved in street sex work in an English city who were homeless or at risk of homelessness, and in-depth, biographical interviews with 18 female street sex workers.

THE PLACE (AND ABSENCE) OF HOUSING IN CURRENT ANALYSIS OF STREET PROSTITUTION

It has long been recognised that prostitution and homelessness are entangled issues⁴ but comparatively little, with some notable exceptions⁵ has been written on the subject. The focus of analysis has shifted from individual behaviour change to addressing the structural determinants of sex workers' vulnerability,⁶ for example investigating how the environment, methods of regulation and power relations within the sex industry impact on sex workers.⁷ But attention to the way in which structural constraints implicit in housing, homelessness, and related 'services' impact on the lives of sex workers is absent. Comment on the relationship between homelessness and sex work

rarely extends beyond noting that homelessness is common amongst street sex workers, pointing to the consensus view that stable appropriate housing is a pre-requisite for escaping street sex work, and (to a lesser extent) that a need for temporary accommodation can drive homeless women into forms of prostitution.⁸ And the coverage, brief and scant as it is, is found predominantly in policy documents, research reports and local project evaluations. The complex interrelation between sex work and homelessness has not engaged the interest of academics who, instead appear to have been preoccupied with issues relating to criminal justice, policing and the regulation of sex workers in urban spaces.⁹

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STREET SEX WORK AND HOMELESSNESS

The findings from our research suggest that structural forces such as the housing system (as well as poverty; the benefits and criminal justice system), institutional processes (housing allocations, housing and crime legislation, organisational rules); and interactions with key welfare institutions (social landlords, support services) combine to inform and constrain the housing choices and opportunities of street sex workers. The relevance and centrality of the housing system to the lives of street sex workers was very clear, insofar as they are mostly excluded from it and marginalised within it. The research also revealed a direct and reciprocal relationship between housing and street sex work: it found that vulnerable housing situations expose women to sex work or increase the likelihood they will remain in the industry, just as involvement in street sex work can result in homelessness. Female sex workers are exposed to far greater risks and punishments if they are also homeless; while homeless women are exposed to greater hardship and housing insecurity if they also work on the streets. The research concluded firmly that as long as a woman works as a street prostitute she is effectively at risk of becoming or remaining homeless and is very likely to do so.

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4 See, for example, John May, Paul Cloke, P and Sarah Johnsen, Alternative cartographies of homelessness: rendering visible British women's experience of 'visible' homelessness'. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 14, pp.121 - 140 (Routledge, Abingdon, 2007)

5 such as Carol McNaughton and Teela Sanders, Housing and Transitional Phases Out of 'Disordered' Lives: The Case of Leaving Homelessness and Street Sex Work, *Housing Studies*, Vol, 22, No. 6 (Routledge, Abingdon, England, 1997)

6 Jackie West, 'Prostitution: Collectives and the Politics of Regulation', *Gender, Work and Organization* 7:2 (Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Inc., Maldon, USA, 2000): 106; Rosie Campbell "Un-Managed" Street Prostitution in the UK", paper presented at, Working Conference: The Future of Street Prostitution in the Netherlands, Parliament Building, The Hague, Netherlands, 29th September 2003.

7 Teela Saunders, 'Sexuality & Risk' in Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate (eds) *Beyond the Risk Society: Critical Reflections on Risk and Human Security*. (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2006)

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9 Jane Pitcher, Rosie Campbell, Phil Hubbard, Maggie O'Neill and Jane Scoular, *Living and Working in Areas of Street Sex Work*. (York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006); Maggie O'Neill, Rosie Campbell, Phil Hubbard, Jane Pitcher and Jane Scoular, 'Living with the Other: Street Sex Work, Contingent Communities and Degrees of Tolerance'. *Crime Media Culture* 4: 73, pp.74-93 (Sage Publications Ltd, London, 2008)



All the street sex workers participating in the study had housing careers characterised by insecurity, repeat and prolific homelessness, and reliance on the most informal and unsafe temporary housing situations. Homelessness was a persistent feature of their lives, constituting the first experience of independent living for most. For example, 57 per cent of those surveyed had experienced homelessness by the age of 16 and some of those interviewed reported leaving home to a situation of homelessness as young as ten years old.

Many subsequently went on to spend much of their adult life homeless. Thus, repeat homelessness was extremely common with 85 per cent of those surveyed having experienced more than one episode of homelessness and 30 per cent having been homeless ten times or more. The extent of repeat homelessness suggests, then, that once homeless it proves extremely difficult for street sex workers to permanently resolve their housing problems and escape homelessness. Many had lived in ostensibly 'secure' accommodation (i.e. renting a house or flat) but on closer inspection such stable housing was typically precarious, rarely long lasting, and represented little more than brief respite during a long homelessness career. Difficulties accessing social rented housing¹⁰ (as a result of exclusionary allocations policies and informal practices, outstanding rent arrears, close scrutiny of those with criminal records, and perceptions about ineligibility) push street sex workers into a particularly poor quality and insecure segment of the private rented sector where no questions are asked, no judgements are made, and access is easy. But in this section of the housing market women are also told to vacate properties at short notice, tenancy agreements are a rarity, and other unscrupulous landlord practices common. And even those who do manage to access accommodation in the social rented sector remain vulnerable: the financial burden of court fines for loitering and soliciting leave women struggling to maintain rent payments.¹¹ Non-payment of fines can lead to a custodial sentence in the UK and so the women interviewed tended to prioritise fines over all other financial commitments, accruing rent arrears and threats of eviction in the process. Social housing providers can be unwilling to consider allocating another tenancy until former rent arrears have been substantially re-repaid, a goal that was out of the reach of the women we interviewed.

Frequent spells in prison further compound the cycle of repeat homelessness. Street sex workers, particularly those who work to fund a drug dependency (virtually all of those participating in our research) are very likely to serve a prison sentence and the majority (70 per cent) of the women surveyed and interviewed for this study had done so. Sustaining a tenancy while in custody is problematic not least because, in England, rent payments are only covered by welfare benefits for 13 weeks and the quality and availability of housing advice within prisons is very variable and often absent. Amongst those interviewed, entry to prison either sustained their homelessness (they were homeless on entry and remained so on release) or precipitated homelessness (they were housed on entry and homeless on release). Homelessness, then, is disproportionately visited on those groups who have regular contact with the prison system, such as street sex workers.

Our research suggests that during episodes of homelessness, street sex workers suffer some of the most insecure, marginalised and dangerous temporary housing. For example the women surveyed were more likely to have slept rough than to have lived in any (temporary or secure) accommodation situation. In total, 77 per cent had slept rough, and 46 per cent had slept rough in the month prior to being surveyed. Often 'out of sight', the street sex workers participating in this study commonly relied on friends, family, clients and squats for a roof over their head. And the squats in which women lived (56 per cent had squatted) tended to be partially derelict buildings, with no running water or heating, which they shared with numerous other people with whom they were often not previously acquainted. Such reliance on 'hidden' or informal temporary accommodation partly reflects that the rules of mainstream temporary housing (which typically impose night-time curfews, demand that you are and are not present at certain times, participate in certain activities, and do not engage in other activities such as drug use) are incongruent with the non traditional working and lifestyle practices of many street sex workers.

Women's position as sex workers, then, can increase their housing risks, partly via their unique relationship and interactions with the criminal justice and housing systems. But homelessness can make women vulner-

Difficulties accessing social rented housing [...] push street sex workers into a particularly poor quality and insecure segment of the private rented sector.

¹⁰ Social rented housing in the UK is affordable, secure and subject to quality standards. It is owned, managed and provided by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (government-funded not-for-profit organisations).

¹¹ Prostitution is legal in England but many of the activities associated with the exchange of sex for money or goods are criminal offences. These activities include soliciting, kerb crawling, disorderly behaviour and sex in a public toilet. Penalties range from a fine to six months in prison.



able to entering sex work in the first place, bringing them into contact with people working in the sex industry, or intent on grooming that they are otherwise unlikely to have encountered. Nearly all of the women interviewed for this study had experienced homelessness before they entered street sex work and their biographies illustrated the ways in which homelessness, sexual exploitation and routes into sex work were inextricably linked. Several, for example, 'learnt the ropes' or first had contact with the sex industry through women they met in hostels and other homelessness services. Others, homeless before the age of 16, with nowhere to go, 'hanging around' with older acquaintances were groomed for sex work by older men. The relative youth of many of the women participating in the study when they first experienced homelessness is of relevance here. Unable to access most homelessness services and temporary accommodation, and naive with youth, they are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Particular and additional risks are present when women are both homeless and working as a street prostitute. For example, there is a direct link between women's housing situations and the penalties they incur for working as a prostitute. Street sex workers without a permanent address are in a difficult position when

it comes to avoiding arrest, getting bail and applying for (electronic) tagging. With no permanent address women cannot qualify for tagging and getting bail can be problematic too. Curfews are used as an alternative to additional fines, but these are only imposed when women have an address they can be at every night for the length of the curfew. If not, they are in danger of receiving a harsher punishment (a prison sentence for example). The comments of one rough sleeper highlighted the difficulties women face, in particular the increased risk of arrest, when they do not have immediate access to accommodation to which they can retreat after an encounter with the police. She reported that *"I've been warned by the police to go home and if they see me out again that night then obviously they'd arrest me and charge me."*

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we surmise that women's involvement in the sex industry exposes them to additional and particular risks which make them particularly vulnerable to homelessness. It is clear that a more in-depth analysis of the lives, motivations and experiences of sex workers, which brings together both structural and individual factors, is essential to a more nuanced understanding of sex workers and homelessness.



Addressing the Problem of Women and Homelessness

By Jonathan P. Schwartz,¹ Stephanie Chapman,² Laura Cote González,³ Lori D. Lindley,⁴ USA

Although the issue of homelessness has traditionally been viewed from male-centered perspectives, the relationship between women and homelessness is gaining attention as recognition grows that single women and women with children make up two of the most quickly growing subgroups of the homeless population.⁵ Just as the answer to the question “who is homeless?” is changing, so too are the explanations for homelessness. No longer are lack of affordable housing and poverty viewed as the sole root causes; sexism, and the multifaceted oppression of women that result, are beginning to be recognized as a significant contributing factor towards women’s risk level for both temporary and chronic homelessness.

When defining the role that sexism plays in women’s experience of homelessness, it is important to consider both individual acts of discrimination against women, as well as larger institutional factors which sustain male privilege and contribute towards maintaining inequities between the sexes.⁶ Acts of interpersonal and institutional sexism contribute to women’s homelessness in multiple ways. For example, being a single parent has been identified as a major factor placing a woman at risk of homelessness, as her ability to work in paid labor can be severely limited by childrearing responsibilities. A woman’s role as single parent is closely tied to cultural norms that dictate child care as “women’s work” and place little responsibility on fathers for the care of children.⁷ Relatedly, sexist labor practices contribute towards women’s homelessness, as women are forced to cluster in subsistence-only occupational sectors such as service-related jobs and denied the adequate wages necessary to secure their own housing.⁸ Domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape are also forms of sexist oppression that put women at risk of homelessness; indeed homeless women are much more likely than housed women to have survived prior and frequent victimization experiences of gender-based violence.⁹ Finally, the experience of being discriminated against because of one’s gender can also contribute to an individual’s overall stress level. Women at risk of homelessness often report high levels of life stress which can negatively impact their coping abilities and overall mental health.¹⁰

SOCIAL JUSTICE PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS

As the experience of sexism significantly contributes to women’s experiences of homelessness, it is imperative that sexism be addressed directly through social justice initiatives in order to reduce women’s risk of becoming homeless in the first place. For women who are already homeless – whether they are currently living on the streets, in shelters or “doubling up” with friends or family – preventive interventions that are mindful of the harmful impact of sexism can serve to disrupt the pathways to chronic homelessness. Social justice approaches to prevention of homelessness adopt a wide lens that focuses on promoting equal access to resources and opportunities and the empowerment of all individuals threatened by housing instability. Social justice prevention initiatives target goals on two fronts: 1) Personal-centered prevention, which focuses on meeting the individual client’s emotional and physical needs related to maintaining housing, and 2) Environment-centered approaches, which critically analyze and attempt to change the institutional structures and practices (such as governmental policies and social norms) that perpetuate the status quo.¹¹

Person-centered social justice prevention focuses on helping reduce individual women’s risk factors for homelessness by promoting education and the cultivation of awareness at the personal level.¹² A comprehensive approach to person-centered social justice prevention could be used to address a range of issues in the lives of homeless women. Such services could emerge as programs that inform the individual of her legal rights, provide occupational support that addresses challenges specific to homeless women, foster previously developed strengths and coping mechanisms such as spirituality and sources of cultural support, and offer physical, mental and reproductive healthcare services sensitive to the multifaceted needs of a homeless population.¹³ While person-centered prevention is an important area of focus, there is danger in focusing solely on individual homeless women and ignoring the systemic issues involved in homelessness. When this happens, this approach can actually increase the stigmatization homeless women

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5 Zugazaga, 2004

6 Schwartz & Lindley, 2009

7 Schwartz & Scott, 2009

8 Rollins et al., 2001

9 Wenzel et al., 2001

10 Rollins et al., 2001; Zugazaga, 2004

11 Kenny et al., 2009

12 Schwartz & Lindley, 2009

13 VanLeit, Starrett, & Crowe, 2006; Douglas et al, 2008; Buckner, Bassuk, & Zima, 1993; Bharel, Casey, & Wittenberg; 2009



may experience by ignoring systemic barriers that lead to and sustain homelessness.

An environment-centered social justice prevention approach recognizes many of the sociopolitical forces that exist within an individual's existence that significantly impact upon her life. While person-centered approaches to social justice prevention provide integral services geared towards the development and support of the individual, systemic sources of oppression are frequently overlooked.¹⁴ A truly comprehensive environment-centered approach to homelessness and women would be broad in scope due to the degree to which homeless women and their families interact with various social services and systems.

There has been research and resulting implications for environmentally-centered prevention of homelessness. For example, a group of homeless women described their primary occupational concerns as firmly based in systemic issues and barriers: finances, employment, education, transportation, and housing. Occupational therapists are encouraged to utilize a participatory occupational justice framework that analyzes occupational injustices, and provides guidance on the negotiation of systemic obstacles and barriers, the coordination of resources, and the implementation and analysis of the effectiveness of services.¹⁵ Further, examining the link between domestic violence and homelessness in women, suggests improving criminal justice response to be a crucial component of environment-centered social justice and support. A system of coordinated community response is recommended in which law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, and victim advocates engage in comprehensive domestic violence training and the implementation of protocol that seeks to empower and give agency to the victim.¹⁶ Other approaches in the promotion of environment-centered social justice include collaboration with schools, in which school policies are made sensitive to the unique needs of homeless families, and faculty and staff receive training on the complexities of homelessness and its implications for children.¹⁷ In regards to the provision of socially just healthcare that assumes an environment-centered perspective, Holleman et al.¹⁸ proposed an integrative model in which family physicians, therapists, and psychologists collaborate in the provision of services. The authors described the success of a healthcare model located within a transitional living center for homeless families, which made for greater ease in referral, better continuity of care in provision of physical and mental health services, and increased tendency for clients to actively participate in psychotherapy.

A primary component of environmentally-centered social justice prevention should include communication

with community organizations and service providers in order to challenge societal stigma pertaining to homelessness. Crucial in the exploration of such biases and stigma is public education surrounding the relationships between homelessness, mental illness, and trauma. Societal misinformation tends to lead to misperceptions regarding the perceived control that homeless individuals have over their situations. As a result, the relationships among environmental, psychological, and biological factors that contribute to homelessness are frequently overlooked.¹⁹ Perhaps a more integrated understanding of the complexity of homelessness would aid in changing perceptions, attitudes, and policies from both a person-centered and environment-centered social justice prevention approach.

As stated earlier, sexism and the resulting multiple negative outcomes for women cause stress and mental health issues. A recent study comparing the mental health needs of women in homeless shelters and women in domestic violence shelters indicated that residents of both types of shelters had similar rates of mental health and substance abuse issues, childhood and lifetime trauma exposure and levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms. At the same time, this study found that the mental health services provided by domestic violence shelters far outpaced those provided by homeless shelters.²⁰ Any approach that effectively addresses homelessness for women must also address mental health issues related to sexism and trauma exposure. Currently a tremendous gap exists between the need for and availability of mental health treatment services. The disparity between need and available services is greatest among the poor who cannot afford costly treatments, who experience mental health treatment as stigmatizing, and who find it difficult to negotiate a fragmented social services system.²¹ Thus increasing access, quality and affordability of mental health services is an important environmentally-centered approach to reduce homelessness among women.

The evidence presented suggests that the problem of homelessness among women is multifaceted and systemic. Thus the solutions need to take into account and address the multiple systems that impact upon women. Addressing homelessness as a systemic issue suggests the most impactful approach is a grassroots, integrated community response. Interventions that do not address the attitudes within the community regarding women and homelessness will not be as effective. In addition, long term solutions require community buy-in. For example, creating a program that provides support for victims of domestic violence but not addressing the stigma and sexist attitudes within a community that collude to keep domestic violence hidden will not have long-term success.

14 Schwartz & Lindley, 2009

15 VanLeit et al., 2006

16 Bufkin, & Bray, 1998

17 Mule et al., 2009

18 2004

19 Buckner, Bassuk, & Zima, 1993

20 Stainbrook & Hornik, 2006

21 Conyne, 2004, U.S. Surgeon General, 1999, 20011



Finally, it is important to not only empower communities to directly prevent situations that lead to homelessness in women but also to coordinate community response that provides services to homeless women. An important component to addressing homelessness among women is to directly work to eradicate attitudes, prejudices, and policies that oppress women. For example, we need to recognize that the broader social programs directed at preventing domestic violence and sexism against women are also working to prevent women's homelessness; programs focused on pay equity and occupational opportunities for women also serve to prevent women's homelessness. Such connections reinforce the degree to which systemic, societal efforts and solutions are required to fully address the issue of homelessness among women. It is vital that those working in providing services to homeless women recognize that they have an integral role to play in projects that focus on prevention at this broader level. Additionally, it is important that homeless women themselves are empowered to become involved in these efforts, and the creation of community advocates that work to empower women is an essential component. For example, a community advocate can lead educational efforts to destigmatize issues that contribute towards homelessness in women. She can also develop support groups or provide educational workshops for women struggling with homelessness through which connection with services and emotional support are simultaneously provided.

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