The issue of homeless young people

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Abstract:

This paper is devoted to the issue of homeless young people.
At present, homelessness is a global problem with an increasing number of young people, who got on the street for various reasons. Homelessness itself can be understood as a complex generalized social failure of an individual. It is a social category of people who are clearly poor, living on the margins of society and characterized by their specific way of life, which puts them on the margins of society on the basis of their inability to participate in the quality of life and disrespect for the requirements of the majority society. The aim of the article is to

present issues related to the phenomenon of homeless young people and understand the reasons and causes of their social degradation which led to their unfavorable social situation. Only appropriately applied social work can stop or reduce the number of young people living on the streets, and help them successfully reintegrate into the majority society.

Introduction

After 1989, when there were many revolutionary changes in the political and economic establishment in Czechoslovakia, the transition from a paternalistic state to a predatory capitalist system affected almost every citizen. Like any change, this transition required some adaptation. However, not every individual was able to cope with the situation. In Eastern Europe, begging as a phenomenon became fully apparent after the fall of the communist regime in the early 1990s. Even in the Czechoslovak Republic, we began to meet beggars and homeless people on the streets of larger cities. We know from historical sources that this phenomenon has occurred in our territory before, but under the rule of the communist establishment it was covered up or completely taboo. Unfortunately, the growing number of homeless people is currently on the rise and has recently affected more and more young people (Pavelkova 2014).

Homeless People

Homelessness is a complex phenomenon where it is not just a missing of shelter (Vagnerova *et al*. 2014). In general, it is a social category of people who are clearly poor, living on the margins of the majority society and characterized by their specific way of life, when behaviours and habits stand outside the majority society and do not fulfil its principles and customs. As stated by Hradecky et al. (2007), homelessness is conditioned by three basic factors. He ranks among them the fact that an individual has a place to live that is suitable for living, whether he has any legal certainty to this place with space for his private life. With the loss of his home and his social exclusion, he gets to the margins of society; there is a change in its value and normative system and its lifestyle. According to Prudkova and Novotny (2008), these changes are reflected in all areas of life:

- Loss of professional position and associated legal access to finance and the resulting economic self-sufficiency
- Exclusion from the family community, disruption of relationships with close people and the disintegration of the social network
- Reduced lifestyle and increased dependence on the support of charities, begging and garbage searching or criminal activity

Based on life on the street, an individual goes through a process of de-socialization (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014). Their marginalization combined with homelessness also brings social stigmatization because the majority society considers life on the streets to be a clearly negative deviation from the norm. For most people, it is evidence of social pathology and they take a negative and condemning attitude (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012). Causes of homelessness (Hradecky*et al*. 2007) can be divided according to the factors that lead to this phenomenon into objective and subjective. The first of them are affected, for example, by the social policy of the state and social legislation, and are reflected, for example: in respect for human rights; in respect for the law; equal opportunities for all citizens; in the education of citizens; the possibility of employment; in social protection; in security in old age and disease; employment of young people; xenophobia; ethnic problems; emigration; etc. Subjective factors are influenced: by individuals themselves; their families; different social groups or communities their dispositions and abilities; the temperament of a homeless person; his age; education; etc.

They can be viewed from a material point of view (housing, employment, tragic events in the family, property conditions, unexpected events in society, floods, etc.); in terms of the collapse of relationships in the family or community with its subsequent failure; or with regard to the problems in the personality itself (mental retardation, mental or physical disease, independence, loneliness, disability, alcohol or drug addiction, social immaturity, ethnic differences). Situations arising after release from hospitals, institutions, prisons or after reaching adulthood from ethopedic(criminal be-

havior) facilities often also contribute to subjective factors. According to Hradecka and Hradecky (1996, 34), homelessness is not a question of individual choice, as it would be easy to state.

Sociologists claim that the "homeless" phenomenon is part of a social process, a consequence of continuous social and economic forces leading to social structures (labor market, housing market, social security as a state measure, education, family structures); it therefore relates to the general standards and conditions of the company as such. Nowadays, as we know some examples from the literature on socially disadvantaged families, where the position in society has been passed on to the next generation, most people are not born as homeless but become them during their lives. What can happen in a person's life to get from a relatively well-off family to the bottom of society? According to Janebova (1999), two things must happen: 1) A certain event leads a person from a well-established track (e.g. loss of employment, death of a loved one, nervous breakdown, severe divorce, domestic violence, sexual abuse by relatives or just a banality such as a broken leg). These and similar situations occur in the lives of many people, but of course, according to the author, not everyone becomes homeless on their basis. Another factors must work together to do this, and that is the absence of a helping hand from someone close to you. If a person receives help, support, facilities or temporary housing at such a difficult time, he can clearly move away from the way of life of the homeless. Otherwise, if he is rejected by all and is left alone with his problems without a helping hand, she or he is more likely to eventually become homeless. According to Janebova (1999) before becoming homeless, he suffers three stages of loss:

- Loss of family support - Family members provide resources and advice in solving problems (material and spiritual support). If family support is missing or weakened, the individual turns to friends.
- Loss of friend support - is as critical as loss of family support. The most strongly felt is the loss of psychological support and the gradual decline of contacts, which further slowly leads to the isolation of the individual.
- Loss of community support - National communities are made up of public institutions and so-

cial services organizations. However, the resources provided by the community are not always adequate to prevent the loss of home. Help is also often inappropriate for people with a volatile address. Those who will not be helped by the rescue social network, that is the product of the community become homeless.

As Janebova (1999) further points out, this third stage is the starting point for the path to chronic homelessness. From the point of view of presentation to the public, Hradecka and Hradecky (1996, 36) divide homeless people into 3 categories. The group, which is most visible in public, is described as homeless by the obvious. It includes people living on the streets, railway stations, looking for accommodation in dormitories or asylums. They make up only a part of people without permanent residence (according to the Nadeje survey, only 3 people without permanent residence out of 11 usually sleep in dormitories; 2 in inadequate flats; 5 in public places, 1 in a squat). As early as 1991, a photo with text from the Budapest railway station was documented in National Geographic Magazine in an article on life in post-communist states by author Szulc (1991), where the miserable way of refugees from Romania and the former USSR to sleep can be seen.

Janebova (1999) places a group of people who are not seeking the help of public or charitable services among the hidden homeless. They thus escape the attention of these organizations and are not subsequently included in any homeless censuses as well as people seeking help and accommodation from friends even if only for a shorter stay. This group often travels and changes their temporary refuges, but with the arrival of winter, even these individuals take refuge in various dormitories. In our opinion, the most represented group of homeless people, which I. Hradecky (1996) calls as potential homeless people, belongs to people living in uncertain housing conditions (family or personal problems, risk of not keeping or losing an apartment) and also people waiting to be released from various institutions, prisons or to leave an ethopedic facility (from ethopedic facilities it is about 350 young individuals per year). The number of homeless people is increasing from year to year and recently as already mentioned, there are more and more young people among them.

Numbers of homeless people in the Czech Republic

In 2019, in the Czech Republic under the auspices of the Research Institute for Labor and Social Affairs in Prague and under the leadership of Nesporova the team conducted a census of homeless people. Based on this census, the estimated total number of homeless people in the Czech Republic was 23,830, of which 2,600 were under 18 years of age. Persons living outside and in dormitories were included in the census (ETHOS category - without roof), and also people in asylum, halfway houses, municipal hostels, prisons and medical facilities, in accommodation facilities for women and municipal hostels (category ETHOS - without a flat). People sleeping outside or in dormitories accounted for the largest share (54.0%). Men have a significant predominance among homeless people. They make up 80% of the number of people who sleep outside or in a dormitory. The gender ratio changes in shelter, where 30% of women, 38% of men and 32% of children live. Most homeless people were counted in the Moravian-Silesian Region, a total of 3,541 people. The capital city of Prague had almost the same number of people. Large cities are an opportunity for anonymity, so they are a frequent refuge for the homeless. On the other hand, the fewest homeless people were counted in the South Bohemian Region - 774 homeless people here. The total number of adults in the Zlín Region was 1,032; the total number of children was 105. As for the average age, the oldest population was the Zlín Region together with the Olomouc Region; here the average age was about 50 years. The youngest average age, 45 years, was formed by the population of homeless people in the Ustinad Labem Region. The largest part of people without a roof in the Czech Republic therefore consists of a middle-aged category, aged 40 to 65 years. Homeless people, aged 18-29, accounted for 10%, 1,114 people. However, based on its experience, Nadej estimates the number of homeless people at up to 20%, of which a third are women (an increase compared to the older generation). The average age of these people is 22.7 years and the average time spent on the street is 2.4 years (Marek 2018). However, as the census of such persons is difficult, the numbers and estimates are really different. According to a survey by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (Evaluation of the survey of homelessness solutions in municipalities with extended powers in 2015) the estimate of homeless people was more than double compared to the most recent census. The number of homeless people at that time was estimated at 65.8 thousand and up to 119,000 people were at risk of losing their homes. As not all homeless people use social services, or belong to the group of so-called hidden homeless people, estimating the number of such people can be problematic and skewed by these factors.

Young People without Home

A significant part of the homeless community is made up of young people under the age of 26 (Vagnerova*et al*. 2014). According to a study by Darbyshire and colleagues (2006), about half of the homeless fall into this age group. Thus, homelessness affects a large number of young people. This is a widespread social problem that has a rising trend (Feantsa 2013). In most European countries, young people aged 18-29 represent between 20% and 30% of the total homeless population. Feantsa defines homelessness of young people as: "*Youth homelessness occurs where an individual between the ages of 13 and 26 is homeless, or lives in an uncertain or inadequate environment without a parent, family member or other legal guardian*". However, the age limit determining this period varies in different organizations or countries (Feantsa 2020).

Young adulthood can be referred to in psychological terms by various names and also defined in different age periods. Langmeier,Krejcirova (2006) define the period of young adulthood as early adulthood, ranging in age from 20 to 25-30 years. Its main characteristic is the consolidation of the adult's identity, identification with his role, specification of personal goals. It is also an effort to gain independence from parents, find a partner, or start your own family. At the same time, during this period, there is a preliminary choice of profession and

a gradual acquisition of responsibility in the profession. It is considered important in the period of young adulthood to set long-term specific goals and start living your own independent life. Equally important in this period of life is the acquisition of economic independence.

Vagnerova (2000) defines the period of young adulthood at the age of 20-35 years. She considers independence: relative freedom of one's own decisions and behaviors; associated with responsibility in relation to other people; responsibility for one's actions and decisions to be the most important features of adulthood. An adult is expected to have some responsibility, acceptance of responsibilities, adherence to standards. Of course, this development is different for all people and has various priorities. In the case of homeless young people, who have problems providing basic needs at all, it is, of course, difficult to consider a career or starting their own family. On the other hand, there is the very transition to adulthood and personal maturity where we see: homelessness as an alternative to life; when there is a deliberate refusal to accept responsibility;adhere to standards. It can be a period of so-called psycho-social moratorium, i.e. the period in which an individual postpones entry into adulthood; avoids commitment. Young homeless people are unable or are refusing to enter adulthood. Life on the streets can then be a manifestation of freedom, a rebellion, it can be a search for one's own identity (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012).

Specifics of homelessness of young people

Homeless young people are a separate group that requires a different approach (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014). Some young homeless people e.g. they refuse to use social services for the homeless, as they are also visited by older homeless people (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012; Cerna 2019). According to Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova (2012) the thinking and behavior of younger homeless people varies, and meeting the older generation can sometimes cause tension. Research in 2009 conducted by Tompset, Fowler,Torro, which task was to find the differences between homeless adolescents (13-17 years), younger homeless people (19-34 years) and older homeless people (35-78 years) showed several differences. Although street time spent by homeless young people tends to be shorter than that of older adults, they have experienced a higher rate of recent stress events. This suggests that although this period is shorter, they may experience more chaos in this episode of life. In early adulthood, younger adults have to deal with a number of challenges: gaining independence:

studying at university; gaining employment; establishing important partnerships. It turns out that this age group also experiences higher levels of stressors in the homeless population. In terms of mental health, younger adults showed higher levels of hostility and paranoid symptoms than other age groups (Tompset, Fowler, Torro 2009; Skodova 2021).

The difference is also in the feeling of loss in the family background. Unlike older homeless people, they do not lose the built background, but only the background in which they were brought up, and they did not choose this background. Thus, homeless young people may not perceive the feeling of loss as strongly as older homeless people. The same is true of the loss of existing roles and social status which older homeless people can endure worse (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012).

Alcohol and drug abuse rates were the same compared to the elderly. Alcohol abuse affected 50.6% of younger and 56.5% of older homeless people. Drug abuse accounted for 47.4% of younger adults and 56.3% of older adults (Tompset, Fowler,Torro 2019).

Causes of homelessness of young people

Breakdown or dysfunction of the family is often the cause of young people's homelessness.We could divide young homeless people into so-called throwaway, i.e. people who were thrown out by their own family runaway, i.e. people who left the family themselves (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012). Compared to the older homeless, younger adults report almost twice as much experience with family abuse and neglect (Burt 2007). Young homeless people also run away from their homes, often before they finally take to the streets - almost a quarter say so (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014).

The risk group are people brought up outside the family, leaving the children's home or other institutional facility. Young adults leave home unprepared and without additional social support, have no one to turn to which increases the risk of failure (Marek, Strnad,Hotovcova 2012).

Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek (2014) divided the reasons for leaving the street into several categories some of which may overlap. These are certain life trajectories that require a different approach in the reintegration process but also pre-

vention. The categories include: excessive drug or alcohol use; inability or unwillingness to work systematically; a combination of behavioral disorders and unwillingness to work; mental illness. Excessive drug or alcohol use is clearly a possible trigger or accelerator how they end up on the street. The result is an inability to manage work, the high cost of procuring drugs leads to an inability to pay bills or to accumulate debt.

Such a person then easily loses his job and is fired from the rent or hostel, or from home. The inability or unwillingness to work systematically usually manifests itself in childhood and in relation to school. People are described as reckless, irresponsible and lazy. They tend to take advantage of the family and end up on the streets if they run out of patience. With an irresponsible approach to fulfilling obligations, also related to the relationship with the school, also includes e.g. lower educational attainment which makes it difficult to applications in life.

According to Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek (2014), people with a combination of behavioral disorders and unwillingness to work are often burdened with debt problems as well as misdemeanors and criminal activity. There are thefts and fraud. They obtain their money illegally. This type of behavior can be supported by the negative influence of the family and later the community of such people. As the above authors state, mental illness can be the cause of homelessness. Depressed and anxiety disorders; suicidal behaviors; post-traumatic stress disorder; schizophrenia; other psychotic disorders occur in homeless young people. A person suffering from a mental illness may then have a problem maintaining a long-term job or permanent social contacts.

Other causes of homelessness can include sexual minority membership and a different sexual orientation (Skodova 2021). According to various studies, identification with the sexual minority ranged from 6 to 35% of young homeless people (Burt 2007). A different sexual orientation can cause a conflict with a family that is not willing to accept such a thing. Sucha person may then feel unaccepted by their own family and stigmatized, which of course increases the risk of going in the street to live.

Feantsa (2013) also talks about barriers to housing affordability. According to Eurostat data for 2012 (in Feantsa 2013), about 50% of young people aged 18 to 29 who suffer from poverty (income below 60% of the median) passes on more than 40% to pay for housing. Some of the factors that contribute to their increasing vulnerability in the housing market are: low income; rising unemployment; limited access to benefits; inaccessible mortgage financing; an inaccessible rental market. It can be concluded that going to the streets is caused by various factors, whether unsuitable family background, as well as the personality characteristics of the individual, which contribute to this social decline. It can be an accumulation of several factors at the same time (Feantsa 2013; Skodova 2021).

Alternative to street life

Young homeless people like to say that they have chosen life on the streets voluntarily and that they enjoy such a life. The street is a place of freedom where they do not have to follow the rules, e.g. own parents. The impulse can be not finishing school, conflicts with a parent's new partner, or different ideas about their future. Young adults sometimes feel that the contradictions are too great and leave the family background. Street life can also be a manifestation of belonging to various subcultures such as punk or hip hop. Such a life then represents a rebellion against the system. They do not want to identify with the role of the homeless so consider it their choice. They may be referred to as "street children" or "squatters" (Marek, Strnad, Hotovcova 2012).

Life in squat is mainly associated with the punk and hard-core subculture. This form of housing is understood as a form of political protest, a meeting place for activists or members of the counterculture(Piotrowski 2011). It can be an attempt to define an autonomous space in which individuals decide for themselves and also to define themselves against functioning in a capitalist society (Klinika 2021).

According to Reeve (2011) a squat is an abandoned building or land that individuals are occupying without the owner's consent. The buildings are usually in poor condition having no water, electricity or heating. Problematic roommates who pose a risk of theft and the like can also be uncomfortable. However, a squat still represents a roof over your head and a relatively stable place (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014). Some squats

function as communities where even small concerts, workshops and similar events are organized. Living on the streets, especially in squats, can also be a response to the lack of affordable housing for young people.

Young adults who want to become independent can also choose this way (Skodova 2021).

Of course, it is necessary to distinguish when life on the street in a squat is a personal choice and in the form of a certain protest and when it comes to necessity in response to home loss (Reeve 2011). However, young homeless people have to deal with the fact that they can be expelled from the squat at any time, as this is not a legal form of housing in our territory, Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek add (2014).

Social services

Social services, according to Act no. 108/2006 Coll., include social counseling, social care services and social prevention services. Homeless people are most affected by social prevention services. These help to prevent: the social exclusion of people at risk of social crisis; living habits; way of life leading to a conflict with society; a socially disadvantaged environment; the threat to their rights; legitimate interests of the crime of another natural person. The aim of social prevention services is to help people overcome their unfavorable social situation and to protect society from the emergence and spread of undesirable social phenomena (§54). Social prevention services for the homeless include: shelters; low-threshold day centers; dormitories; field programs; halfway houses; social rehabilitation services.

The main goal in social work with homeless people is their return to society, taking into account the specificities of this minority and maintaining an individual approach. These are the client's natural environment; his mentality; subjective causes of homelessness; public attitudes; impacts on the family and others (Pavelkova 2014).

The providing of social services for the homeless is handled by the state administration, self-government, as well as non-profit organizations and churches. As Pavelkova (2014) points out, the non-profit organizations are mainly the Salvation Army, Nadeje, Czech Catholic Charity, the New Space, Emauzy of the Czech Republic, Diakonie, Samaritan and several others, to a lesser extent.

Outreach and low-threshold social services

Outreach and low-threshold social services are most accessible to homeless people. These are services that they can usually use anonymously and where they are not bound by anything. Under outreach services, according to Act no. 108/2006 Coll., On social services, we mean services that are provided in the client's natural environment. This means that the social worker contacts the client on the street, in the squat, or in other places where the homeless person lives. It can also be a pre-arranged meeting at the place of residence if the person is still at risk of losing their home. Within the outreach social services, help is provided in the exercise of rights; corrective interests; procurement of personal affairs (§ 61, 2c). The advantage of outreach social services is that they have a chance to contact people who would otherwise be outside the system of such social services, for example, they would not visit a daily low-threshold center. Outreach services can also catch people who are unable to contact other social services through their health, such as disability and consequent inability to move (Act no.108/2006 Coll., On social services 2020).

Low-threshold social services for the homeless include day centers and dormitories. Day center, according to Act no.108/2006 Sb., On social services, contains the following basic activities: help with personal hygiene or providing of conditions for personal hygiene; providing of food or help in security of food; assistance in exercising rights; legitimate interests and procurement of personal affairs.

In the day center, clients can usually use a sanitary facility such as a shower, or have their clothes washed and dried. This option is becoming a great help for people who, despite living on the street, for example, are employed and can take care of their appearance. The providing of food is usually ensured thanks to food collections and food banks which further distribute food among specific social service organizations. Someday Centers have a dedicated kitchen for clients, where they can bring their own food and prepare meals. In addition to providing for basic needs, social counseling is important in the day center. Clients can find about their entitlement to

social contributions, pension or other financial benefits.

Help in processing documents and escorts to the office are often used (here there is a connection between the day center and outreach work). The day center also usually mediates contacts to offices, hostels, shelters or potential employers in the area. While staying at the center, clients must follow the internal rules of the facility, such as not drinking alcohol which some clients may have a problem with (Act no.108/2006 Coll., On social services 2020). Dormitories, according to Act no.108/2006 Coll., On social services provides help in personal hygiene or the secure of conditions for personal hygiene and the providing of overnight stays. Overnight stays are usually charged a small amount. Clients use the dormitory only at night leaving this facility during the day. The exception occurred during a state of emergency during the corona pandemic crisis, when clients were allowed to use the dormitory during the day, on the basis of a resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic on the providing and organization of the providing of social services for the duration of the emergency (Act. no.108/2006 Coll., On social services 2020).

Residential services

In the reintegration of homeless people, residential social services should provide a sufficient basis for independence, respectively the transition to a higher level facility (from the asylum home to the halfway house, to the social apartment, etc.), in cooperation with a social worker. An individual plan is usually created with the client and active cooperation is expected from him. The stay in the facility is limited by a certain period (usually around one year), after which the client should leave the facility. However, it often happens that clients remain at the same level of reintegration and do not move further after leaving the facility (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014). We can thus meet, for example, clients who have only repeatedly used their stay in an asylum for several years.

Halfway houses usually provide residential services for people under the age of 26 who, after reaching the age of majority, leave school facilities for institutional or protective education, possibly for persons from other child and youth care facilities, and for persons who are released from imprisonment or protective treatment. The way of providing social services in these facilities is adapted to the specific needs of these people.

According to §58, Act no.108/2006 Coll., the service includes activities such as the provision of accommodation, mediation of contact with the social environment, social therapeutic activities and assistance in exercising rights, legitimate interests and procurement of personal affairs.

In asylum house, the level of living comfort is lower; clients share a room with several people.

In halfway houses, the level increases. Clients usually have a separate room. However, based on increasing the comfort of accommodation, the requirements for the client and his cooperation also increase (Vagnerova, Csemy, Marek 2014). Of course, homeless people often use commercial hostels as well.

Conclusion

This article provides information about homeless young people. Having a home, background and a stable roof over your head is one of the basic needs of a person. Its absence is a problem that affects all aspects of an individual's life and affects the area, both personal and professional, economic or health. In the Czech Republic, the issue of homeless young people is not given much attention. Based on this fact, we have tried to expand our knowledge about this phenomenon which has a growing tendency and represents a serious social problem. Only a detailed analysis of the problems of young homeless people can detect the extent and causes of the social decline of homeless young people. Only properly applied social work with this social subculture can stop or reduce the number of young people living on the streets and help with their successful reintegration back into the majority society.

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