Social Safety Net for Homelessness

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Original Article

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Abstract:

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyse the social safety net in relation to the problem of homelessness. We also point out the factors that influence the potential emergence of such a problem, which affect both homeless persons and their immediate environment. The study addresses the basic objectives of the social safety net and the attitude of local residents towards homeless people. The safety net is often the last chance, while the goal of homeless people is to avoid falling into deep misery and poverty. The most effective help for the homeless individuals can be granted by social services and in facilities especially designed for this particular group.

Methods. The current study has a dual, theoretical and empirical, dimension. From an empirical-quantitative standpoint, the research was conducted with the help of 332 respondents living in the city of Prešov, Slovakia. Theoretically, we investigate the relationship between the issue of homelessness in the aforementioned city, the attitudes of local residents, and the financial aspect of the social services involved. We analysed the connection between the respondents' gender and their opinion on the usefulness of services provided for the homeless. In the final part, we check our working hypotheses using the the social safety net provided by Prešov's Archdiocesan Charity.
Conclusions and discussion. We conclude the study by raising the awareness concerning the topic at hand. Second, we claim that there is no statistically significant connection between the gender of the respondent and their opinion regarding the usefulness of social services. Neither is there a statistically significant connection between the respondent's place of residence and the financing of social services from the city budget.

Introduction

Průdková and Novotný (2008) define homelessness as a social phenomenon preceded by various processes and behaviours which lead to the loss of life security, background and social exclusion. At the same time, however, they point out that this situation is influenced by individually different factors, either objective or subjective. Further, homelessness affects all areas of human life: social, psychological, financial, physical, etc. From a societal perspective, it is primarily a way of life characterized by insufficient or no shelter (Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2023).

Beňová and Matiaško (2018) present a three-dimensional approach to the definition of homelessness. This approach was first introduced by Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing. The first dimension focuses on the absence of a home. Home is understood from a material and social viewpoint. It means a minimally adequate housing facility, wherein conditions are created for the creation or maintenance of family relationships and participation in community life (Kondrla et al., Slobodova Novakova, 2024). The second dimension refers to the stereotype in the perception of homelessness. This results in the systematic discrimination and social exclusion of the homeless. This dimension recognizes that not having a home creates a social identity which in turn leads to the discrimination and stigmatization of the homeless. As to the third dimension, it connotes the fact that homeless people strive for survival and dignity. These individuals are holders of basic human rights and freedoms. In addition, there exist other definitions of homelessness in the professional literature, which analyse this phenomenon from several different angles. In its turn, this fact encouraged the European Union to look for a more unified understanding (Beňová, 2008). Specifically, *"the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH), which was established by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), has produced the ETHOS European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion after several years of research."* (Matoušek, 2013, 56).

Social safety net

The guarantor of the social safety net in Slovakia is the state itself. The state can provide financial and material assistance (Hamarová, 2024; Králik, 2024), guarantee income, or provide other forms of assistance if they are more advantageous to the citizen in question. Moreover, the social safety net treats many adverse social situations in which citizens may find themselves. It has a humanitarian and formal character. Traditionally, it is formed by dedicated organizations and its main target group are citizens

who have found themselves in material need (Budayová, 2024, Vaľko et al., 2024). In solving the social pathology of homelessness, the social safety net has an irreplaceable position. Radičová argues that without a permanent source of income, which can be provided through benefits from the social safety net, we cannot change the position of the homeless in society (Matoušek, 2013). Matoušek (2005) defines a social safety net as a system of state-guaranteed social security which integrates social insurance, social support and social assistance. Thanks to it, citizens should not fall into a state of destitution even in times of social transformation or economic crisis. However, Radičová (2024) and Fila (2024) hold that social safety nets do not take into account that some citizens may fall into poverty at a higher rate than others, and so, such networks work only if they cover citizens who have no other option for solving their dire material situation.

Regarding the functions of the social safety net, they are, according to Dudová et al. (2018, 72), as follows:

- provision of a certain level of protection to socially dependent citizens;
- ensuring a minimum income for the economically active population through the guarantee of a minimum wage;
- ensuring a minimum income for socially dependent families or citizens by determining the minimum level of subsistence and the minimum level of old-age pension;
- implementation of employment policy through active and passive systems;
- provision of institutional social care;
- implementation of the so-called valorization, i.e., the adjustment of wage and social income according to the increasing costs of living.

That said, the social safety net can be understood as consisting of three separate pillars: social insurance, state social support, and social assistance. These pillars give rise to a distinct assistance network meant for citizens who find themselves in emergency situations. Their goal is to prevent these citizens from falling into poverty by guaranteeing them an income at the minimum subsistence level (Ondrušová, 2009; Kondrla, Repar 2017).

Factors of homelessness

Homelessness has a multifaceted nature. Like other socio-pathological phenomena, its cause can be a risky behaviour or such phenomena as poverty, unemployment, addiction, prostitution, domestic violence, crime, delinquency, etc. The professional community, therefore, tends to examine the causes of homelessness from a bio-psycho-social perspective. In this regard, one can divide the causes into endogenous and exogenous (Matoušek. 2005). Endogenous factors include innate (or biological) factors that are genetically determined. Likewise, psychological factors are directly related to personality development. Exogenous factors mean a long-term stay in a toxic environment, which can be a family or peer groups. Here we can also include negative influences that occur in prisons, re-education centres, orphanages (Matoušek, 2007, Árpová, Árpová, 2024).

In practice, one can divide the causes of homelessness into subjective and objective. Objective causes are those that an individual cannot influence through their own behaviour, be that positive or negative. Included here are primarily the social policies of the state, for instance, employment, housing, or family policies. Another possible cause is the overall perception of homeless people and the attitudes of others towards them (Králik, 2023).

Concerning the subjective causes, they can issue from individuals' abilities, traits, temperament, character, or age, but also from families and other social groups (Mátel, Schavel, 2011, 38). Hroncová and Kraus (2006) divide these causes into four groups:

- Material: personal debt or the loss of property, housing, employment, or financial security;
- Relational: the breakdown of the family through divorce or other disruptions, the cause of which may be, among others, social pathologies such as alcoholism, sexual abuse.
- Personal: physical illness or disabilities. To this list, Vágnerová (2008) and Máhrik (2024) add various mental illnesses, personality disorders, or psychic impairment due to drug abuse. Homeless people often become mentally ill and after being released from hospitals, they are not always capable of acquiring an

independent life. Hence, the increased risk of social failure due to tendencies towards illegal behaviour, addiction to psychoactive substances, and non-compliance with prescribed treatments.

- Institutional: prison inmates, people released from rehabilitation homes or orphans (Hroncová, Kraus, 2006).

Árpová (2023) and Tomová, Árpová (2023) argue that these objective and subjective causes or factors should not separated from each other. They also highlight the social skills of the individual, deemed essential for the effective resolution of crisis situations. Social skills are conditioned by the high demands and expectations of society, they comprise socio-economic factors, as well as the individual shortcomings of the homeless. The absence of such skills leads to the inability to meet the demands of our current, complex society or to resolve situations such as unemployment, losing one's house, divorce (Budayová, 2024b, Ludvigh Cintulová, 2019), and even global pandemics (Khalid, Pavlikova, et al., 2024). This inability usually leads to the loss of material and relational resources, doubled by the rejection across the entire society (Matoušek, 2008).

Draganová (2006) states that the most common cause of homelessness is the loss of employment, which accounts for 23%; followed by divorce - 20%; leaving the family - 11%; release from prison - 11%; poor life management - 3%; and, leaving other institutional facilities - 2%. Only 7% of homeless people freely and deliberately decided to become homeless, but in their case, we must take into account personality factors such as psychological disorders.

From the viewpoint of society, the perception of homelessness has been theorized in two different ways. One set of theories finds fault with the homeless person, claiming that the victim is also the culprit. Here, the person who finds oneself on the street is considered fully responsible for one's situation, being blamed for being an alcoholic, deviant, vagrant, etc. Since the perception of a homeless person in this case is not at all favourable, the supporters of this view are not inclined to help in the form of alternative permanent housing and the like (Ludvigh Cintulová, Budayová, 2024).

The second theory states that a person becomes homeless because of some failure or incapacity, however, we cannot assign any personal responsibility for this condition. Moreover, scholars argue that providing minimal assistance to the homeless is insufficient in solving the problem (Bursová et al., 2024; Leskova, Haburajová, 2023).

We should also mention that solutions can occur through the use of new technologies and especially media (Tkácová et al., 2023a), which offer constant presence and participation (Pavlikova et al., 2023), huge amounts of information (Leka et al. 2024; Tkácová, 2022), although often with deceptive content containing elements of manipulation (Králik, 2024; Tkácová et al., 2024), which can lead to overload and a decline in the ability to effectively address everyday challenges (Tkácová et al., 2023b), and ultimately also to exacerbating socio-pathological phenomena.

Empirical findings

Concerning the findings of our empirical research, we should start by saying that we analysed the attitude and behaviour of the outside population towards the homeless, as well as this population's view of social service networks for the homeless, their financing plans from the city budget, and the willingness to increase either the quality of these services or their allocated sums.

Our explicit objectives have been:

- To determine the residents' attitude in the city of Prešov towards the issue of homelessness within the limits of the city.
- To examine residents' views about the financing of social services in the city of Prešov.

Our working hypotheses have been: Hypothesis No. 1

H0: There is no statistically significant connection between the gender of the respondent and their opinion on the usefulness of services provided by the Archdiocesan Charity for the homeless.

H1: There is a statistically significant connection between the gender of the respondent and their opinion on the usefulness of services provided by the Archdiocesan Charity for the homeless.

Hypothesis No. 2

H0: There is no statistically significant connection between the respondent's residence and their consent to the financing of social services from the city budget.

H1: There is a statistically significant connection between the respondent's residence and their attitude to the financing of social services from the city budget.

Out of a total of 339 questionnaires, we excluded invalidly completed questionnaires and included 332 validly completed questionnaires. The questionnaire return rate is 97.9%.

Table 1 Respondent's gender

	n	%
Man	80	24,1
Woman	252	75,9
Together	**332**	**100,0**

Source: own processing

The table shows that 332 (100.0%) respondents participated in the online survey in the city of Prešov. Out of these, 252 (75.9%) were women and 80 (24.1%) were men. Based on the numbers above, it can be concluded that women were more interested in completing the questionnaire than men.

Table 2 Respondent's dwelling type

	n	%
Apartment building	304	91,6
Family house	28	8,4
Total	**332**	**100,0**

Source: own processing

Out of a total number of 332 (100.0%) respondents, the majority lived in apartment buildings, more exactly, 304 (91.6%) respondents; 28 (8.4%) respondents lived in family houses.

Question In your opinion, is the network of social services for the homeless provided by the Archdiocesan Charity beneficial?

Table 3 Social services of the Archdiocesan Charity

	Men	Woman	Together
Beneficial	44	124	168
Somewhat beneficial	27	105	132
Somewhat unbeneficial	5	11	16
Unbeneficial	4	12	16
Total	80	252	332

Source: own processing

To verify hypothesis no. 1, we divided the respondents into men and women. The table shows that 252 women answered the question. Out of these, 124 deemed beneficial the network of social services for the homeless provided by the Archdiocesan Charity of Prešov, whereas 105 women considered it rather beneficial. 12 respondents described the network as unbeneficial, while 11 respondents as rather unbeneficial. Of the 80 men who answered this question, 44 described the network of social services for the homeless provided by the Archdiocesan Charity of Prešov as beneficial, and 27 as rather beneficial. The opposite opinion was expressed by 9 men. A total of 332 respondents answered this question, of which 168 respondents described the network of social services for the homeless provided by the Archdiocesan Charity of Prešov as beneficial and 132 respondents as rather beneficial. The opposite opinion was expressed by 16 respondents, who described the network in question as rather unbeneficial and unbeneficial.

Question In your opinion, should the Archdiocesan Charity increase the number of clients and services?

Table 4 Increasing the number of social services and clients of the Archdiocesan Charity

	Men	Woman	Together
Yes	29	102	131
Probably yes	38	113	151
Probably no	6	25	31
no	7	12	19
Together	80	252	332

Source: own processing

In order to verify hypothesis no. 1, we divided the respondents into men and women according to their gender. The table shows that 252 women and 80 men answered the question. Of the total number of women, 113 chose the option rather yes and 102 the option yes. The opposite opinion was voiced by 25 women who chose the option rather no and 12 women opted for the answer no. Of the total number of men, 38 marked the option yes and 29 marked the option rather yes. On the contrary, 7 men marked the option no and 6 men marked the option rather no, thereby expressing disagreement with the increase in the number of clients and services. A total of 332 respondents answered this question. Of the total number of respondents, 151 answered rather yes and 131 answered yes. Disagreement with the increase in the number of clients and services was expressed by 31 respondents who marked the option rather no and 19 respondents who marked the option no.

Question Do you agree that part of the social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov be financed from the city budget?

Table 5 Financing of social services by the city of Prešov

	Apartment building	Family house	Total
Agree	109	14	123
Try to agree	116	7	123
Try to disagree	46	5	51
Disagree	33	2	35
Together	304	28	332

Source: own processing

To test hypothesis no. 2, we divided the respondents into two groups, namely: respondents living in apartment buildings and respondents living in family houses. The table shows that the questionnaire was submitted by 304 respondents who stated that they live in an apartment building. Out of these, 116 respondents stated that they tend to agree that part of the social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov should be financed from the city budget. 109 respondents living in an apartment building marked the option I agree. On the contrary, the option, I tend to disagree, was marked by 46 respondents and 33 respondents disagreed. The question was also answered by 28 respondents living in family houses. Out of this number, 14 respondents agreed that part of the social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov should be financed from the city budget, while 7 of them tended to agree. The opposite opinion was voiced by 5 respondents who tended to disagree, while 2 respondents disagreed completely. A total of 332 respondents answered this question. Out of them, 123 agreed or rather agreed that part of social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov should be financed from the city budget. The opposite opinion was expressed by 51 respondents who rather disagreed, and 35 who completely disagreed with the financing in question.

Question Should the city of Prešov stop financing social services provided for the homeless?

Table 6 Cancellation of financing of social services by the city of Prešov

	Apartment building	Family house	Total
Yes	30	2	32
Probably yes	34	2	36
Probably no	114	10	124
No	126	14	140
Together	304	28	332

Source: own processing

In order to verify hypothesis no. 2, we divided the respondents into two groups, namely: respondents living in an apartment building and respondents living in a family house. The table shows that the questionnaire was submitted by 304 respondents who stated that they live in an apartment building. Of this number, 126 respondents disagreed and 114 rather disagreed with the statement that the city of Prešov should stop financing social services for the homeless. The opposite opinion was held by 34 respondents who rather agreed and 30 respondents who agreed with the statement that the city of Prešov should stop financing social services provided for the homeless. The question was also answered by 28 respondents who live in a family house. Of this number, 14 respondents disagreed and 10 rather disagreed with the idea of stopping the financing of the social services in question. On the contrary, 2 respondents rather agreed and 2 agreed with stopping the financing of social services for the homeless. A total of 332 respondents answered this question, of which 140 disagreed and 124 rather disagreed with the idea of stopping the financing of social services provided for the homeless. On the contrary, there were 36 respondents who rather agreed and 32 who agreed.

Results

Regarding hypothesis No. 1, we claim that there is no connection between the gender of the respondent and their opinion on the usefulness of services provided for the homeless by the Archdiocesan Charity. To gather information, we deliberately selected a church institution from all possible providers of social services for the homeless. The residents of Prešov did not discriminate against such an institution and rather recognized its benefits in solving the social pathology of homelessness. Thus, we recommend that the Archdiocesan Charity increase its communication with the residents of Prešov to obtain new sponsors and volunteers for the provision of said social services.

In order to verify hypothesis no. 1, we subjected the values in the tables to X_2 with the following result:

Table 7 Verification of hypothesis no. 1

	Table 3	Table 4
Chi square	1,815	2,438
P- value	0,986	0,965
Significance level	0,10	0,10
Level 8 with 95% probability		

Source: own processing

Based on the results of the X_2 test shown in Table No. 7, we confirm the null hypothesis. We can state that at the significance level of 0.10, there is no statistically significant connection between the respondent's gender and his opinion on the usefulness of the network of services provided for the homeless. Based on the p value p=0.965, we found out with what probability the null hypothesis was confirmed. Level 8 probability 95%.

Based on the confirmation of the null hypothesis No. 2, we claim that there is no connection between the respondent's residence and their consent to the financing of social services from the city budget, despite the differences in the opinions of these two groups on the causes of homelessness. As a result, we suggest that all city districts participate in the financing of providers of social services for the homeless in

the city of Prešov, regardless of the number of homeless people in any given district.

Verification of hypothesis No. 2

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the respondent's residence and his/her consent to financing social services from the city budget.

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the respondent's residence and his/her attitude to financing social services from the city budget.

To verify hypothesis no. 2, we subjected the values in tables 5 and 6 to X_2 with the following result:

Table 8 Verification of hypothesis no. 2

	Table 5	Table 6
Chi square	3,042	1,050
P- value	0,932	0,998
Significance level	0,10	0,10
Level 8 with 95% probability.		

Source: own processing

Based on the results of the X_2 test shown in Table No. 8, we confirm the null hypothesis. We can state that at the significance level of 0.10, there is no statistically significant relationship between the respondent's place of residence and his/her consent to financing social services from the city budget. Based on the p value p=0.998, we found out with what probability the null hypothesis was confirmed. Level 8 probability 95%.

Our second objective was to examine the attitudes of the residents of Prešov towards the network of social services for the homeless within the city of Prešov. Our conclusion is that the vast majority of Prešov residents agree with the expansion of the network of social services in all city districts. The results provided by the questions reveal that the majority of the residents of Prešov disagree with the statements that the network of social services services for the homeless provided by the city of Prešov is sufficient. Rather, the respondents considered the entire network of social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov to be insufficient.

Our last objective was to examine the attitudes of the residents of Prešov towards the financing of social services in the city of Prešov. Here, we found that the majority of the residents of Prešov agree with the financing of social services for the homeless from the city budget. At the same time, the residents of Prešov agreed with the increase in the financing of social services for the population group in question. At the same time, we found that the majority of the residents of Prešov do not agree with the cessation of financing of social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov. Rather, they do not consider the current financing of the social services in question to be sufficient.

Based on the present findings, here are our practical recommendations to the city of Prešov:

- improve public information about homelessness in the city of Prešov;
- inform the public about available social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov and the results of individual providers' activities with respect to the relevant services;
- regularly inform the public about current social service projects for the homeless, including their evaluation;
- create an up-to-date map of social services for the homeless in the city of Košice;
- increase the number of beds in individual service facilities for the homeless;
- ensure social services for the homeless in all city districts;
- inform the public about specific financing of social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov;
- the city of Prešov should review the financing of social services for the homeless in the city of Prešov and consider increasing it.

Conclusion

The social safety net is often the last resort against absolute poverty, ensuring the receipt of funds in times of threat or financial incapacity due to various life situations (Janáčková, 2024). The financial loss which threatens the standard of living, is associated with various life situations, be they deliberate – e.g., retirement, birth

of a child – or unplanned. These can cause a sudden loss of income or an increase in expenses.

Social services provided by public or private providers have proven to be effective in combating homelessness. This is confirmed by both directors and social workers who provide assistance to the homeless in Košice. Our facilities are fully staffed - year-round. Social services for the homeless are often the last resort before living on the street. Providing accommodation, personal hygiene facilities, or hot meals are invaluable in trying to deal with this social predicament.

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