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## PREVENTION AND SOLUTION OF HOMELESSNESS IN SLOVAKIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The issue of homelessness is a phenomenon that's very serious for a long time not only in Slovakia, but also in other countries of the world. Homelessness is considered as one of the most extreme consequences of poverty and social exclusion. The article emphasizes activities whose purpose is to help homeless people from physical, psychological, and social harm and enable them to return to society. The main aim of the article is to focus on methods of prevention by which it's possible to eliminate the emergence of homelessness. This article is a partial output of the project VEGA 1/0595/21 – Public administration interventions at the time of COVID-19 and their impact on the quality of life of citizens of selected communities.*

**KEY WORDS:** *homelessness, intervention mechanisms, prevention, resocialization, solution..*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Preventive interventions by society and the state are the best way to prevent homelessness. If the community establishes conditions through which homelessness is prevented, consequently, there's no need to look for ways how to reintegrate people into society. Beňová (2008) also appeals that compared to solving homelessness itself is less expensive, more beneficial and simpler to help a person with retaining his home. We can perceive the consensus in the field of prevention by experts from the social and also in the economic field. They state that if the company was more interested in preventing this undesirable problem, it would be possible prevent it from deepening.

Schavel et al. (2008) refers to the fact that the funds provided for primary prevention make more sense than spending resources on a solution to already existing homelessness. This opinion is also confirmed by the implementers of the research *Na ceste domov* (2013). They mention Malcolm Gladwell's article from *The New Yorker* about the life of a homeless man from the city of Reno in Nevada. The state spent throughout his life more than a million dollars on medical expenses, shelter, police interventions intending to help him. From the financial point of view, it could be more advantageous to provide him with a flat, pay him rent and get him a person to watch over him. This solution could have been cheaper and the homeless man could have lived a better life.

Beňová (2008) clarifies that it's unrealistic to completely prevent some people from becoming homeless, but it's possible to achieve reduce the number of these people through preventive interventions. Prevention needs to be directed between all groups at risk of homelessness, which are mainly foster children of children's homes, former prisoners released to freedom, long-term unemployed persons, abandoned, abused people, people in a bad financial situation, people who are at risk of execution or eviction and many other people. She argues with an example from Vienna, where evinced activities of the organization FAWOS, which worked with threatened defaulters eviction. In Austria is the law, that states that the courts are obliged to inform the city of Vienna regarding the start of the proceedings and the date of eviction, subsequently in cooperation with the city office, Vienna will contact the defaulter and provide him with legal consulting, development of a plan for managing financial resources

and an installment calendar. During the FAWOS was demonstrated that the most endangered people at risk of eviction are single parent with children. (Beňová 2008)

According to Beňová (2008), the prevention of homelessness needs to be solved concretely by services, but also legislative frameworks. The most fundamental steps for reducing the number of people without shelter are:

- housing policy at a high level, which means taking care of all social classes, increasing the number of affordable flats, introduction of housing allowance, regulate the rent,
- complex economic growth of the state, which is related to the elimination of unemployment and rising wages,
- a sufficient amount of available, qualified social services, providing protection against social exclusion of citizens,
- educating society about the issue of homelessness and promoting information about possible help for homeless people.

According to the organization FEANTSA (2004), the prevention of homelessness mainly consists of the following of important activities that create an extensive and comprehensive set of activities:

- identify and contact the target group through recognition dangerous factors that could potentially be a consequence of the loss of housing,
- support the preservation of current stable housing,
- provide of social rental apartments that are owned by the city or municipality,
- providing of support and advisory services during housing, including social and financial advice,
- help in acquiring the basic skills necessary for independent living,
- ensure simple access to social benefits, community services and health care.

Leavell and Clark took over the three categories of prevention from the field of medicine which was characterized by Schavel et al. (2008). These are the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. These levels can also be directly linked to the levels of homelessness prevention. Levická (2003) together with Ondrušová and Fico (2018) also identify with this division of prevention

and point out that Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008) expanded the division of homelessness prevention in the process of its development.

According to Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008), primary prevention focuses on eliminating the risk of homelessness within the entire population through social policies and housing policies Schavel et al. (2008) at this stage of prevention attributes the importance of influence parents' education and their guidance of the individual, especially in the field of education. These factors reflect the fact of what models and style of education individuals are influenced by and they can also be the reasons for which these persons can be potentially at risk of homelessness.

Secondary prevention of homelessness is aimed at people who are at risk of becoming homeless. This is mainly about people before leaving the children's home or institution for execution of a prison sentence, but also about people who are at risk of eviction or for a different reasons, they found themselves in a risky situation, which could be the result of falling into the street. (Ondrušová and Fico 2018) This level is already focused on homelessness that has arisen in the early phase and the goal is to eliminate homelessness so that it doesn't worsen. In the secondary phase is important the function of social workers and their activities and the existence of quality social services provided to these persons. (Schavel et al. 2008)

Tertiary prevention provides measures to prevent recurrence of homelessness of persons who have already survived homelessness and were able to reintegrate into company. (Ondrušová and Fico 2018) In the framework of preventing and solving the problem of homelessness Tordová and Beňová (2016) they suggest the creation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Solution of Homelessness. This document contains seven basic pillars that are key to prevention and resolution of issues. The most fundamental element of the strategy is the determination of the entity that will be fully responsible for this issue. The authors point to the fact that the problem of homelessness is that the state, self-governing regions and municipalities are fighting each other, which is the cause of the disintegration of responsibilities. It's important to define the methods, tools and areas in which prevention and the solution to homelessness will affect and at the same time determine the extent of financial funds provided for the issue (Tordová and Beňová 2016).

According to Tordová and Beňová (2016), the intention of the strategy is not to create additional facilities and services for homeless people, but through a comprehensive strategy to create a functional system that will allow the homeless to get a decent home and the number of these people on the streets will be eliminated. In connection with the development of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Solution of Homelessness. The authors emphasize, according to them, a dysfunctional financial system, due to which the activity organization and workers with homeless people are threatened for financial means provided for their operation. The Act on Social Services transfers responsibility for homelessness to local governments, but municipal politicians don't allocate enough funds for this issue. According to research by the Institute of Work and Family (2015), up to 42% of organizations working with homeless people stated that their budget isn't sufficient to ensure their activities.

The significant indicator of a dysfunctional financial system is the fact that the financing of dormitories due to the unfavorable situation was necessary to transfer from the municipalities to the state. Define a package of funds to address prevention and homelessness at the state level, through which cities and self-governing regions will draw funds for related services is the most effective way of solving this phenomenon. (Beňová and Tordová 2016)

An important pillar that can eliminate the problem through strategy homelessness is the creation of optimal conditions to facilitate the employment of people without home. (Beňová and Tordová 2016) In connection with this pillar, we want to point out the project Kristof, which was implemented by Beňová et al. (2008). The intention of the project was to create a large-scale resocialization program for homeless people in order to maximize their opportunity to apply and remain on the labor market. The aim of all the activities in the project was to create for participants conditions, which could acquire work habits. The project brought them practical experience, clients were responsible for managing their working time and performance.

As a follow-up to the above proposed measures for solving and preventing homelessness, we consider to pay attention to the method of solving homelessness - Housing First. Housing first originated in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s, and in 2002 the concept was approved at the national level. (Chen 2019) According to the OECD (2015), is the housing first approach that is effective in solving homelessness, especially chronic homelessness. The essence

of the housing first method is that while the standard system of social services allows access to higher-level services, where we include housing, only after meeting several conditions, the housing first approach turned this mechanism upside down. Homeless persons are first provided with adequate accommodation, which significantly simplifies the subsequent return to a normal way of life for these individuals. The housing first system is the most significant modernization in planning solutions to homelessness over the last three decades. Very soon after the application of this model, its success in the fight against homelessness began to show, especially for people who needed a high level of support. (Vachnová 2022)

The basic principle of housing first is that it perceives housing as a starting point, not as a goal. The approach focuses primarily on improving the health status of the individual, social assistance for homeless people, and their satisfaction in life. This attitude significantly distinguishes housing first from the traditional system, which requires abstinence from the client, an effort to heal, and adaptation to train housing. Housing first also deviates from the traditional approach by providing its clients with a wide range of housing choices and control, but also by giving clients freedom in terms of their life goals. (Vachnová 2022)

Two conditions that clients should agree to are that they will accept a visit by a project worker in the provided apartment once a week. The second condition is that they will contribute 30 percent of their salary to pay the rent, the share of the rent is closely related to their tenancy rights. The aim of the weekly visit of the project worker is to discuss how the client is doing, what are his visions for the near future, what needs he considers unfulfilled. The discussion also includes the client's statement regarding the environment in which he lives.

The content of housing first are 8 basic principles, the task of which is to improve the health of clients, improve their quality of life and provide them with new life chances. These include:

1. Housing as a basic human right - housing is an essential need for every individual and every family, affordable and adequate housing provides families and individuals with the chance to form a home, it is a prerequisite for safety, security, development or the possibility of establishing long-term relationships with their surroundings and community.

2. Choice and control on the client's side - the ability to listen to the client and his needs, respect his opinion, the beginning of recovery itself is self-determination, allowing the client to have the option of choice and control over what services he uses.
3. Segregation of housing and support - the housing first method understands housing and support separately, the acquisition of an apartment and its maintenance is not conditional on completing treatment or abstinence.
4. Emphasis on recovery - the aim is maximum recovery of the client at all levels of his personality, his relationships and participation in the community, the wider society. Recovery support from the staff always takes place on the basis of a detailed plan that meets the individual needs of the client. During the entire recovery process, the client has the option of choice and control. The plan always reflects the client's ideas of what they need, not someone else's.
5. Harm Reduction - offers clients support, help, care, but does not expect abstinence from drugs and alcohol, it is an approach that does not aim at the absolute elimination of drugs and alcohol, but at reducing the harm caused by these substances.
6. Active participation without coercion.
7. Individual planning.
8. Flexible support for the period of time that is needed. (Vachnová 2022)

Thanks to the initial projects of civic associations and other organizations, the planning and implementation of Housing First-style projects in Slovakia is on the rise, which is also confirmed by the published call of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic to submit applications for financial contributions to these projects, which can be a key strategy to end the long-term homelessness of people with complex needs, who are the most vulnerable group of people suffering from homelessness in Slovakia.

A rather controversial form of prevention in connection with the issue of homelessness and drug addiction is a type of outreach social work named Harm reduction. Considering there are positive and also negative opinions in society about the activities carried out in the framework of Harm reduction. This method targets drug addicts and homeless people who aren't interested in treatment for their drug addiction. The aim of this form of field social work is to apply

measures that would significantly eliminate health and social risks resulting from drug use and eliminate the harm that these persons can cause not only themselves, but also to the majority of society.

O.z. Prima (2021) clarifies that one of the biggest health risks drug addicts face on the street is threatened by the infectious disease HIV, hepatitis, but also other infectious diseases. That's the reason, why Streetworkers give out sterile injectables, syringes, condoms, information brochures and leaflets containing information about drugs and about the risks of their use to these people. The association organizes information and educational program about the education of clients in the area of safer drug use and safer sex. The program tries to motivate clients to reduce the risks associated with the transmission of infectious diseases and prevent as well as the occurrence of other diseases and disabilities that arise due to use of these substances.

## **METHODS**

We were also interested in the issue of homelessness in empirical research. The research was carried out in the period from March 15, 2021 to April 12, 2021. The main goal of research was to determine the impact of homelessness on society and determine the basic elements of prevention and the most essential procedures for solving of homelessness, thanks to which it's possible to resocialize and help the homeless to return to the intact population and integrate into society. To conduct empirical research, we applied research and interview. The research sample of our empirical research was 6 social workers, 4 women and 2 men who are currently employed in one of the facilities for homeless people and work with them.

## **RESULTS**

In addition to other research questions, we confronted the respondents with a question regarding the intervention mechanisms of tertiary prevention. For the purposes of this article, we focused on sub-goals and research questions related to solving and preventing of homelessness. The specific wording of the question was: "What intervention mechanisms should be applied within the tertiary prevention?" The result of the answers of our respondents is the statement that the solution of tertiary prevention through intervention



mechanisms is ours relatively neglected conditions. According to the respondents, to tertiary prevention is dedicated negligible attention and the proof of this fact is their opinions about perceived shortcomings. The main one and the key deficit on which all respondents agreed, is the conditions on the labor market, which in many cases aren't acceptable for these people and this fact very significantly affects the life of an individual who tries to stay in society and not fall into recurrences. The respondents place emphasis on adapting the conditions on the labor market for these persons, the provision of protected employment and the addressability of job offers that will suit the given group of people. Following the first shortcoming, it's also necessary to underline the issue of unaffordable housing for socially weaker persons and families.

Respondents accentuate the need for the state to ensure construction and the provision of affordable apartments with regard to the financial capacity of people, so that they were not afraid of losing their housing again. The respondent's opinions strongly point to the need for increased intervention by the state and state institutions. The company expected more scrupulous and better support of tertiary prevention from these institutes. According to our respondents, social benefits, increasing the amount of the living wage, supportive social benefits provided until the person creates such social and economic conditions that she was able to independently finance her standard of living are the best tools, which could be helpful in the field of intervention in tertiary prevention.

The second question regarding the prevention of homelessness was: „How can emergence of homelessness be prevented as effectively as possible?“ As with the issue of tertiary prevention, also with the issue of emergence of homelessness the respondent's answers were very similar.

Each of the respondents commented on this issue from his own experience, noted the shortcomings that he considers to be the most fundamental. We can conclude that the answers are complementary in agreement and create a constructive set of measures and steps that can be effectively applied with a goal to go through the emergence of homelessness.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of the study was to find out, in what ways the problem of homelessness is solved in Slovakia and also to identify the quality of prevention of homelessness. The study pointed to an insufficient level of homelessness prevention. The study showed that prevention in Slovakia fails at every level. We have come to the conclusion that almost no attention is paid to primary prevention and other levels of prevention are neglected even more. Slovak Republic doesn't solve the problem of homelessness on a comprehensive level. Non-profit organizations and volunteers are trying to correct the bad state of homelessness in society, but these activities are demanding from financial and personal side without the help of the state.

The absence of capture of endangered population groups is the fundamental reason that causes homelessness. Despite the fact that the state has a number of indicators about the financial situation of individuals, it doesn't use this information to contacting and monitoring people in a crisis situation. Based on this fact, respondents point to the need to search for these people and provide assistance even at a time when homelessness can be prevented thanks to social interventions support in the form of social benefits, assistance in finding, maintaining employment or provision of social housing. Affordable social housing is a basic prerequisite for stopping the spread of poverty (Lisnik, 2013). From the mentioned statements of the respondents, is important to emphasize that the intervention tools of housing and social policy play a key role, as well as the need for cooperation on all state levels. Through an active approach on the part of these two key policies, is possible to prevent the emergence of homelessness, to help people who are homeless threatens to effectively solve their living situation and prevent the loss of their shelter.

## **CONCLUSION**

We perceive a lot of space for streamlining the solution to the problem of homelessness, it's prevention and intervention, especially from the state, which should increase activity within the given issue and support crisis intervention not only from a financial point of view, but also from an institutional and start

actively cooperating with organizations that have many years of experience and admirable results in providing these services.

To improve the problem of homelessness, we recommend above all:

- to ensure the objective collection of data and factors that will enable a better evaluation of the scope of the given issue,
- implement an active social policy,
- actively approach and adequately finance activities related to the prevention and solution of homelessness on the part of the state,
- to ensure housing security - protecting people from losing their housing, affordable housing,
- search for and determine risk groups of the population,
- to optimize conditions on the labor market.

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