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NARODOWE CENTRUM NAUKI

The Blind Overlap. Women's homelessness and family violence in Poland

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Introduction. Gendered view on homelessness

- Despite growing body of research, there are still gaps in understanding of women's homelessness
- Women have different paths through their homelessness, they make different choices and they navigate their homeless situations differently (Baptista 2010; Bretherton 2017)
- Women's homelessness has distinct features, especially as to:
 - Hiddenness
 - Domestic violence
 - Informal support and safety nets
 - Different services and different patterns of use of services
- Very few studies on women's homelessness in Poland

Introduction. About our project

2016-2019 National Science Centre

- Survey data, policy documents, reports, expert interviews (government, local government, voluntary organizations, services)
- Individual interviews – women with experiences of homelessness
- Broad definition of homelessness: women in all types of accommodation (rough sleeping, shelters, mother homes, crisis centres, supported housing, insecure housing, eviction orders) and all types of experiences (young, mothers, old, migrant, sex workers etc.)

Introduction. Women's homelessness and domestic violence

According to administrative data:

- 66 930 women experienced domestic violence in 2016 (police data)
- 73 531 new Blue Cards issued in 2016 (police data)
- 11 935 convictions due to domestic violence in 2015 (Ministry of Justice)

Survey data:

- 36% women experienced domestic violence (TNS OBOP 2007)
- 87% women reported some sort of sexual abuse (STER 2016)

Homelessness studies data:

- 51% women experienced physical violence at home (Pomorze 2007)
- 20% women name DV as a principal cause, 26% name “removal from housing by family member due to conflict” (Pomorze 2007)
- 36% point to family conflict and 2% to DV as a principal cause of homelessness (MRPiPS 2017)

Introduction. Women's homelessness in Poland

National survey in 2017 – 33 410 people counted, 16% women

- 4 891 women
- 1 200 children

- 1 109 people in mother homes and crisis centers
- 1 462 men and women named DV as the principle cause of their homelessness

National survey in 2013 (individual questionnaire)

- 29,5% adult women point to family conflict and 3,2% to DV as a principal cause of homelessness
- 42,9% adult women said family conflict and 13,6% - domestic violence was one of the three main causes of their homelessness

Introduction. Women's homelessness in Poland

Homelessness services

- 2-3% of beds in “women only” shelters
- 18% of beds in institutions for women with children
- In most areas there are no “homeless shelters for women only”
- Most “men only” and “women and men” beds are in large night shelters in bigger cities

	# of beds
Women	546
Women and children	4 348
Men	8 681
Women+Men	6 135
Women+Men+Children	3 589
Total # of beds	23 299
Total # of institutions	597

Women's homelessness remains invisible

- Homeless women remain invisible to most experts
- Women's rough sleeping is "inconceivable"

"it is much harder [for a woman] to be homeless [...] to remain in a proper state of – so to speak – health [...] because a man can go for seven weeks unshaved [...] a woman – I reckon – has more acute needs in that respect"

(Ombudsman's office)

Services' opinions on women's homelessness

- Women have much more severe psychological and mental health problems
- Women are more often under trauma having experienced rape, violence, abuse
- It's much harder for women to live in a shelter (to share rooms, kitchens, bathrooms)
- “Homeless women's degradation goes deeper”, they are more aggressive, violent
- Increased costs (as opposed to men's services)

Services' opinions on women's homelessness

- Women have more social capital to deal with difficult situations
- It's easier for a woman to admit that there's a problem
- Women feel more responsible for children and the whole family
- Women who take care of children have more time to take care of things
- Older women are in better health than their partners

Separation of homelessness and “women’s issues” in services and financing

“So we’re talking about homeless persons, those who do not have flats and persons, where there’s violence. Violence against older people, women, children, so we’re talking domestic violence. Here [at Regional Social Work Centre] this is separated, because of financing, and we channel the means through voluntary organizations in these [two separate] areas”.

(Podkarpacie Regional Social Work Centre)

Women's sector perspective

- Narrow understanding of family violence (intimate relationships, heterosexual, with children)
- Women's homelessness is most frequently a result of a decision about escaping from family violence
- Legal institutions (e.g. the Blue Card or restraining order for a perpetrator) aimed at protecting family members from perpetrators fail to achieve their objective because of lengthy procedures
- Analyses of women's situation in Poland do not include the problem of homelessness
- Some female organizations run shelters for women and children experiencing DV (e.g. Women's Right Centre, CPK)

Conclusions. The overlap between homelessness and family violence

- Shortage of homelessness services "for women"
- Inadequate survey methods for "causes of homelessness"
- Women's homelessness as "unthinkable"
- Homelessness sector not gender-sensitive (no screening for DV in homelessness sector)
- Women's organizations offer legal and psychological advice, rarely run shelters
- Homelessness and DV – separate financing and policy streams – poor diagnosis of overlap and little cooperation

Thank you