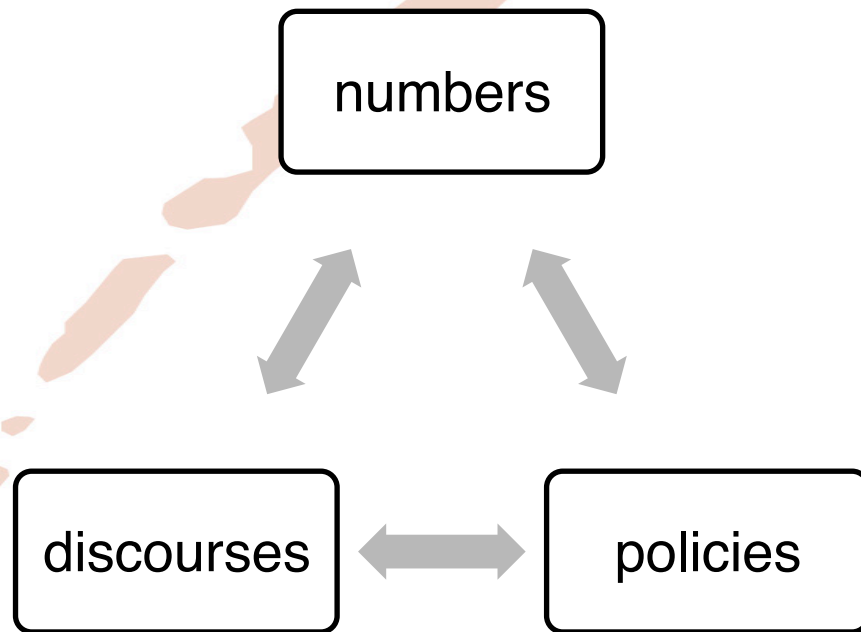

Gendered access to homeless services in Poland

Magdalena Mostowska
University of Warsaw

Plan of the presentation

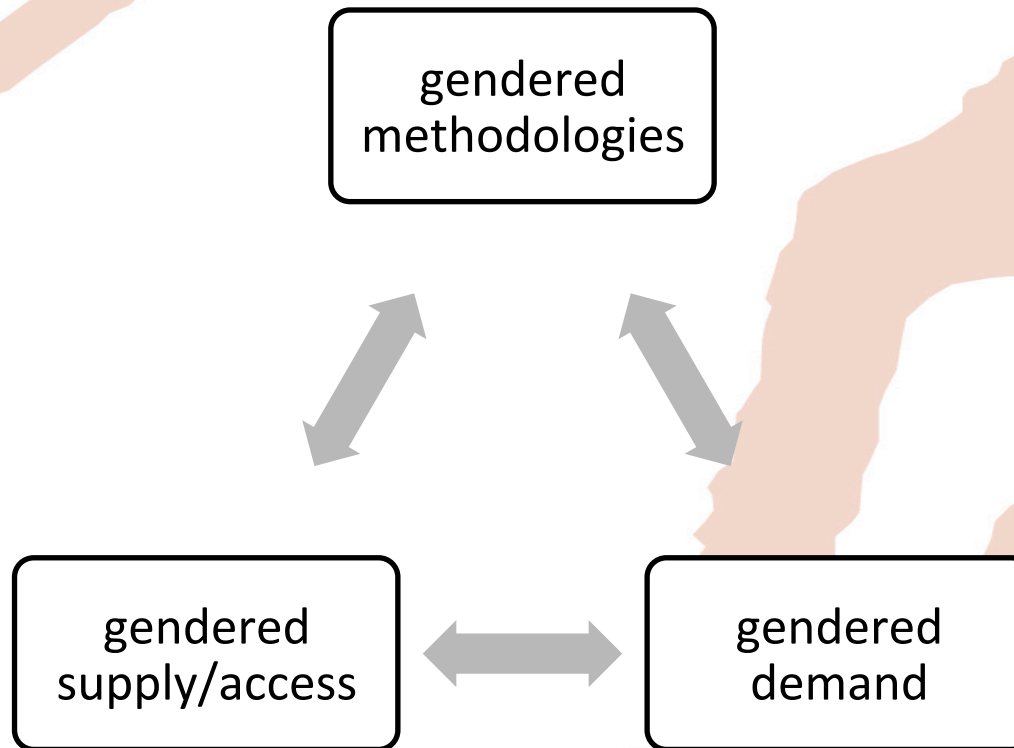
- Numbers, policy and access to services
- What we know about women's homelessness in Poland?
- Current context of homelessness and women's rights in Poland

Numbers and policy



- Statistics and policies as socio-political constructions
- Data legitimize policies
- Target-groups are defined by numbers

“Hidden nature” of women’s homelessness



National counts

	Total	Women	Children	Men
2011 NSP	24 100	16%	n.a.	84%
2012 MPiPS	43 083* 43 049	5 673 13%	2 055 5%	35 321 82%
2013 MPiPS	30 712* 30 421	4 361 14%	1 538 5%	24 522 81%
2015 MPiPS	36 161	5 351 15%	1 892 5%	28 918 80%

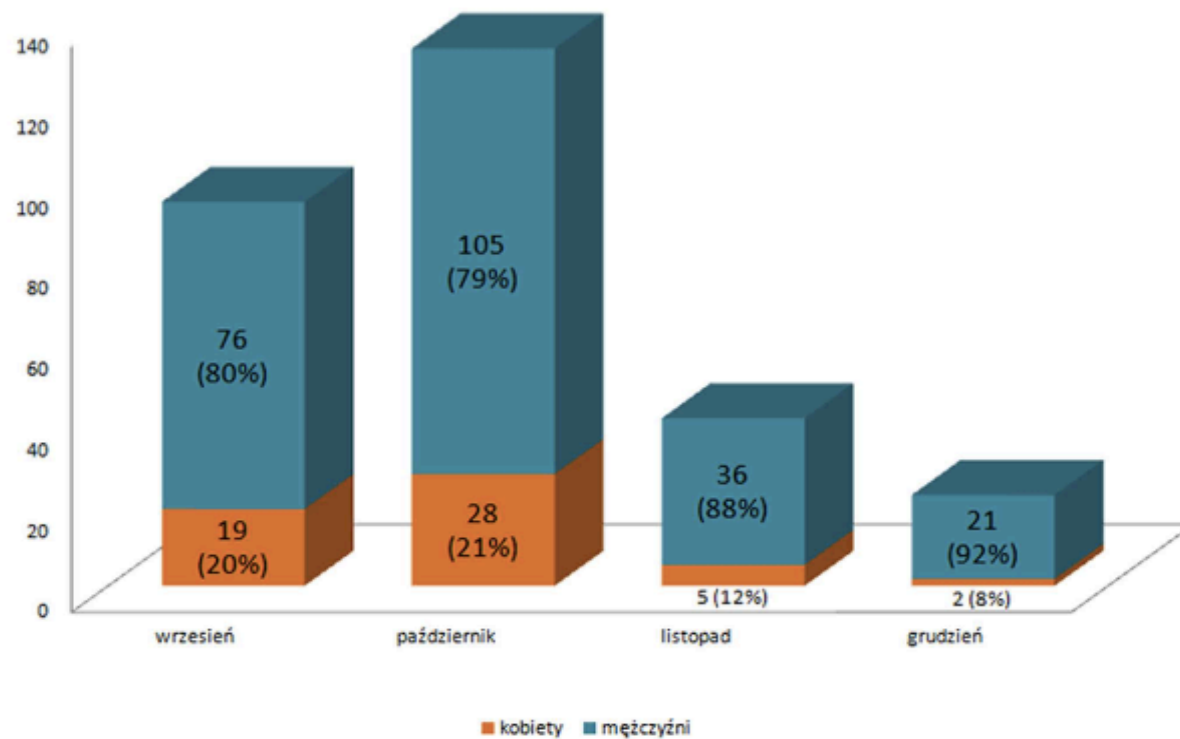
Women's homelessness in Poland

- 15% - 20% women in almost all studies in Poland
- Warsaw 5% of interventions due to homelessness given to women
- Qualitative and small-scale studies
 - Women are younger
 - Women are in better health
 - Women have been in homelessness for shorter periods (av. 6y)
 - Women more often have a job
 - Women more often have medical insurance
 - Women are more often in contact with family

than men

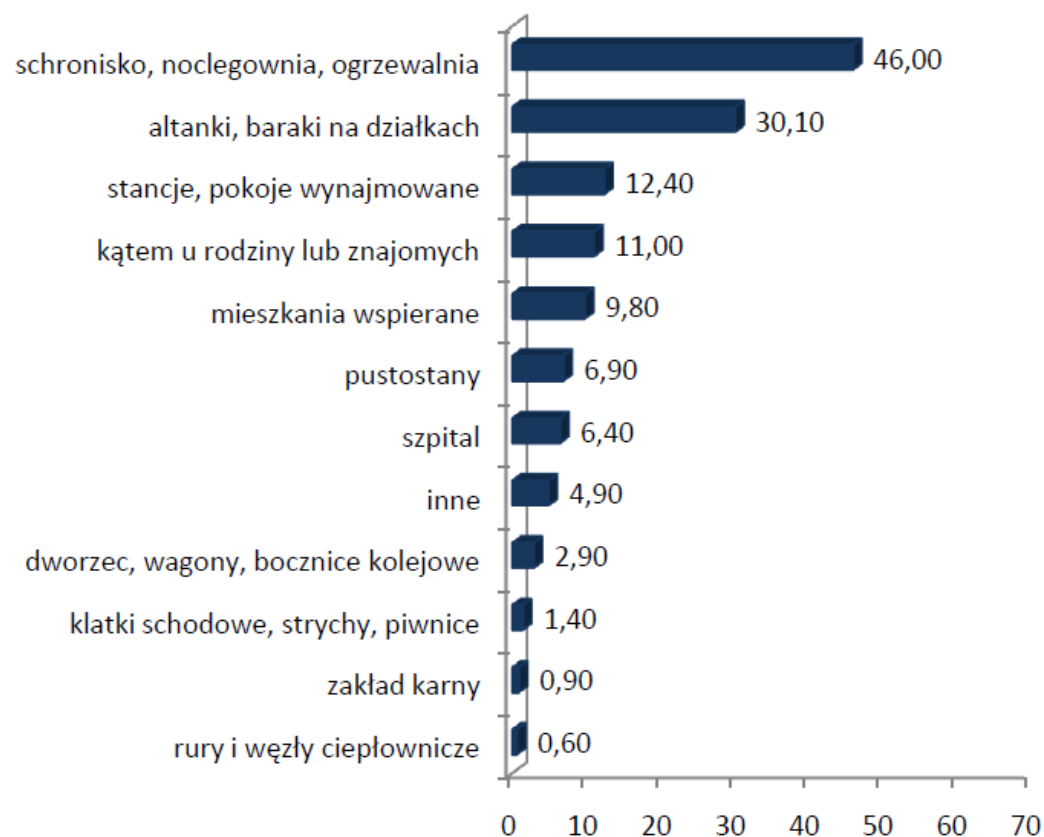
“Hiddenness” of women’s homelessness

Decreasing proportion of women at railway stations in winter months



Living arrangements

Most women experiencing homelessness live in shelters (46%), garden allotments, summer houses (30%), rented rooms and at family



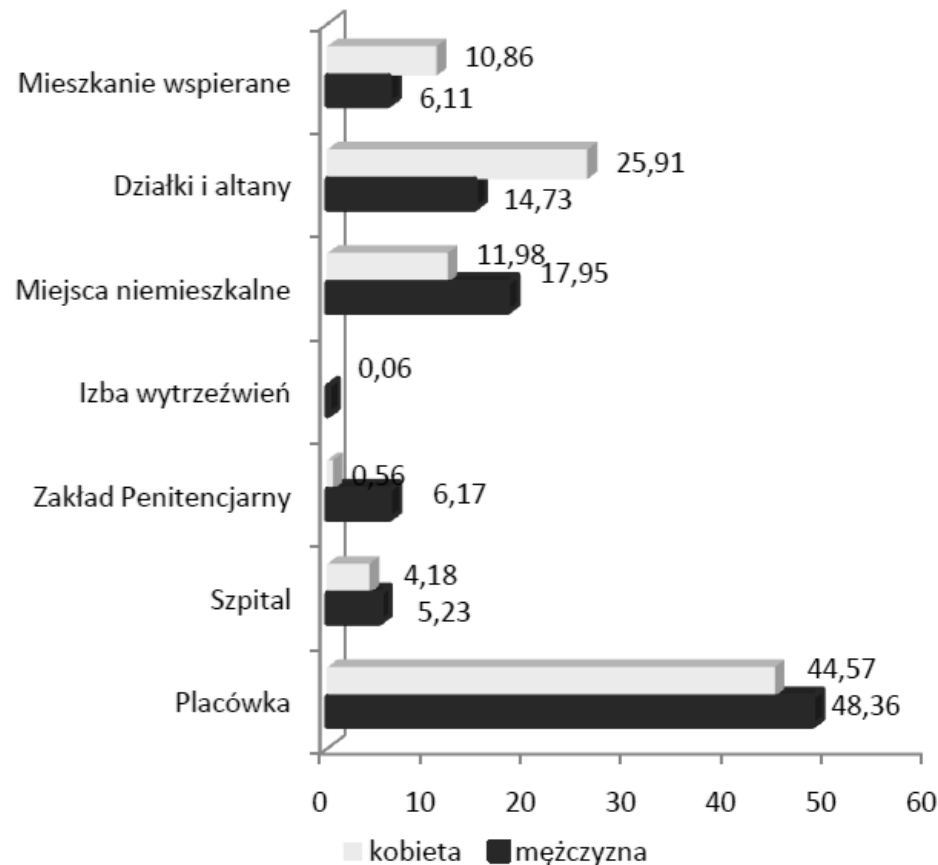
“Hiddenness” of women’s homelessness

At least two large scale studies show:

- Smaller proportion of women than men in public spaces

BUT

- Larger proportion of women than men living in garden allotments



Individualization of homelessness

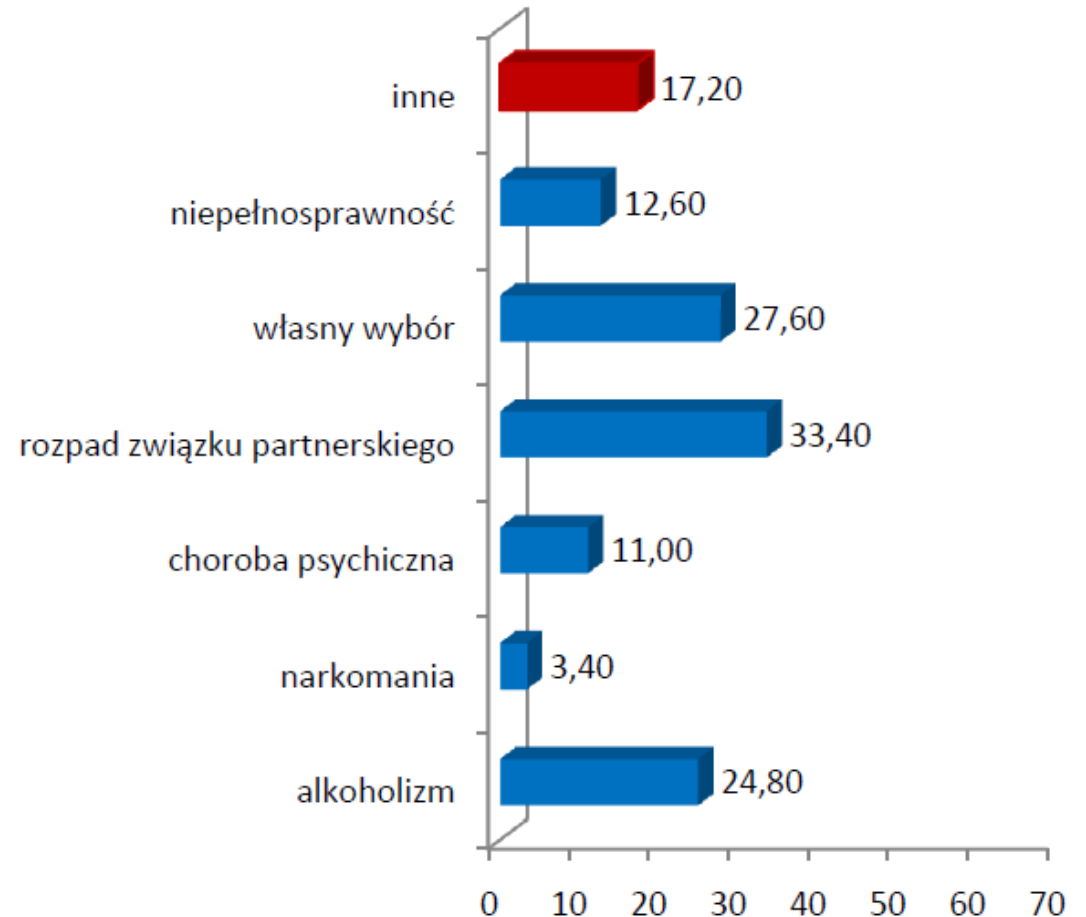
Households/homeless – by definition homeless people are single

Many studies use very similar survey questionnaires, that use “psychological” approach to homelessness:

- ❑ “Causes” of homelessness
- ❑ “Responsibility” for homelessness – who’s to blame?
- ❑ “Homelessness by choice” as a category

Individualization of homelessness

- Own perception of 'individual' causes of homelessness: break up of relation, own choice, alcohol problems
- Homeless women less often than men blame themselves for becoming homeless (still 28%)



Men/women services

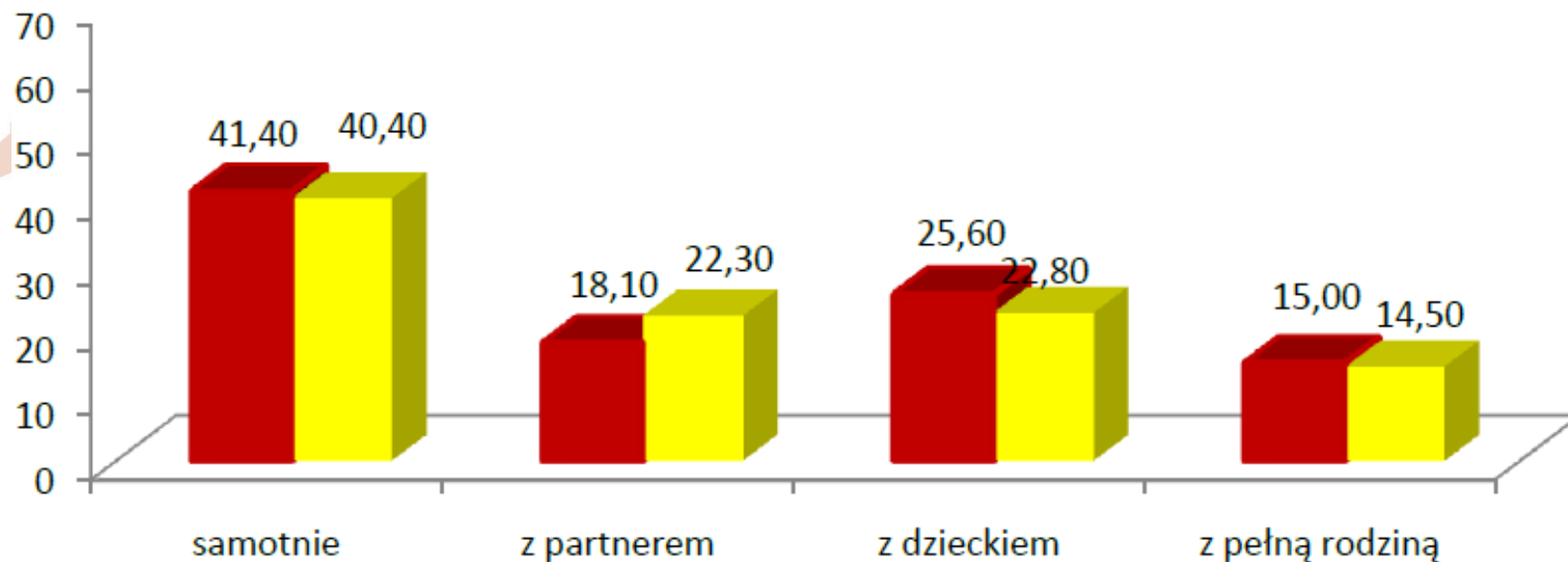
Data compiled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

- Very few beds in shelters for “women (with no children) only” - 2%
- Most “men only” and “women and men” beds are in large night shelters

WOMEN	546
WOMEN and CHILDREN	4348
MEN	8681
MEN and WOMEN	6135
MEN/WOMEN and CH	3589
TOTAL #beds	23299
TOTAL #shelters	597

Women's family situation

Most women live alone 40%, ca. 22% with a partner, 22% with a child



Central government funding

- 5 million złoty (1.2 million euro) per year by the central government for homelessness programmes
- no acknowledgment of women's homelessness
- in 2015 42 initiatives, only one of them was explicitly aimed at women (single mothers), in 2014 – one out of 39

Concluding on available data

- Poor quality of data in quantitative, nation-wide studies
- Gender not presented as an important variable (i.e. shelter vs non-shelter more important variable)
- Many institutional settings not included (prisons, nursing homes)
- Individualization and psychologization of homelessness
- Some data suggest that the “hiddenness” of women’s homelessness might be caused by limited access to services

Current political context in Poland

- 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections won by the populist Law and Justice party
- 2016 European Commission procedure against Poland's jeopardising "the rule of law"
- 2016 Report by Nils Muiznieks, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe
- Anti-immigration and anti-EU rhetoric
- Anti-constitutional reforms
- Suspicious of local government, civic society and voluntary organizations

Context of women's rights in Poland

- Traditional conservative view of women's position in society - influence of the catholic church
- Social and family policy
 - (Almost) universal child benefit
- Reproductive health
 - Even more restrictive access to abortion, contraceptives and women's health care
- Domestic violence
 - Cut funding for women's crisis centres and other NGO's
 - Not enforcing Convention – no helpline, no separation of perpetrator

Context of homelessness in Poland

- No long-term housing policy (promoting home-ownership), dwindling social housing stock
- No national homelessness strategy
- Municipalities responsible for provision of basic services
- Voluntary sector (faith-based organizations) provides shelters, soup kitchens, substance-abuse rehabilitation
- No poverty on the “public” media
- No appointment of a governmental “homelessness coordinator”

Conclusions

In the new political context:

- Political importance of numbers
- Awareness of data gathering and processing methodologies



Thank you

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