First systematic study of the living conditions of homeless people

Susanne Gerull | ASH Berlin | 20.09.2019| FEANTSA Research Conference

Structure

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What and how

- First systematic study of the living conditions of homeless people in Germany *(Gerull 2018)*

- Nationwide carried out in 70 representatively selected institutions of diaconal homeless and delinquent welfare assistance

- Statistical evaluation of 1,135 questionnaires

- Cooperation project between EBET (diaconal umbrella organisation) and ASH Berlin

- Participatively developed and accompanied by professionals and homeless people

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Life situation (index)

■ Theoretical basis: The life situation concept

⇨ View of the multidimensionality of different areas of life in their interaction
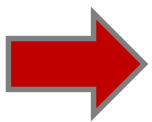
⇨ Holistic view of the life situation

⇨ Six areas of life

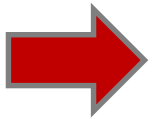⇨ One objective and one subjective question each

The developed *index* links the different indicators for the life situation of the interviewees with each other and thus enabled their classification into five life situations between 'very good' and 'very bad'.

Results: Life situation in total

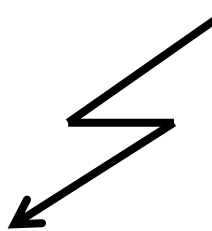|	In total	Obj.	Subj.
Very bad life situation	2.9%	2.4%	10.9%
Bad life situation	25.1%	22.7%	30.0%
Average life situation	52.2%	51.4%	38.7%
Good life situation	18.9%	22.6%	17.2%
Very good life situation	0.8%	0.9%	3.2%
In total	100%	100%	100%

➡ 28% of the interviewees are in an under-average (bad/very bad) and 19.7% in an above-average (very good/good) life situation

➡ Many interviewees subjectively consider themselves to be more burdened than the objectifiable data can provide

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Differences in the three life situation indices

- 28.0% of all respondents are in a bad or very bad situation in life
  - Only objectifiable questions: 25.1%
  - Only subjective questions: 40.9%
- No linear discrepancy (i.e. all feel somewhat worse), but different according to gender, nationality, age, duration of homelessness and area of life situation
- The reasons for these deviations are correspondingly different

Influencing factors
(via principal component analysis)

factor 1	Existential/ontological safety
factor 2	Material and employment situation
factor 3	Social networks
factor 4	(Future) risks

The most influential factor on the overall result is the aspect of existential/ontological safety.
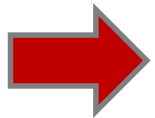
- Housing situation | Housing satisfaction | Feeling of security | Access to medical care
- Existential aspects that cannot be compensated with other things
- Lasting effect on the feeling of whether one's own life is safe, predictable and protected

Existential/ontological safety: Results of further calculations

- The most precarious is the life situation of people who live on the streets, in tents or similar
  - 65% are in a situation below average (very bad/bad)
  - 68.1% of them are very dissatisfied with their living/accomodation situation compared to 31.3% of all respondents
  - Nearly a quarter (23.7% vs. 11.4% on average) think that their life situation will have worsened in one year
- People in accomodations with intense social worker support (§§ 67 et seq. SGB XII) achieve the best results with several life situation questions
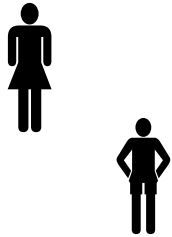
Excursus: The meaning of "housing"

1. The place of staying overnight cannot be the "home" if it is experienced as unsafe
   (cf. Meuth 2018: 69)

2. "Housing" is more than physical protection

   A "normal" life can be resumed only with one's own apartment secured by a tenancy agreement *(cf. Pleace 2016: 53)*

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Life situations by sociodemographic characteristics (1)

Women live somewhat more often than men in better circumstances, often assess their life situation worse and look a little more optimistically into the future *(Attention: hidden homeless women are underrepresented in the study!).*

Objectively, younger respondents often live in a worse life situation than older people, but are more satisfied than could be expected. The middle age groups are particularly vulnerable.

18-20 years

27-29 years

60-69 years

Life situations by sociodemographic characteristics (2)

Other EU citizens are particularly affected by bad and very bad life situations. Almost 1/3 of them live on the streets or under similar precarious conditions. Nearly 2/5 of them live below average (index).

The life situations of the people are the most precarious, who are homeless 6 to < 12 months. Short-term homeless people (< 1 month) usually find themselves in the best life situations according to objectifiable questions, but are more dissatisfied with their situation.
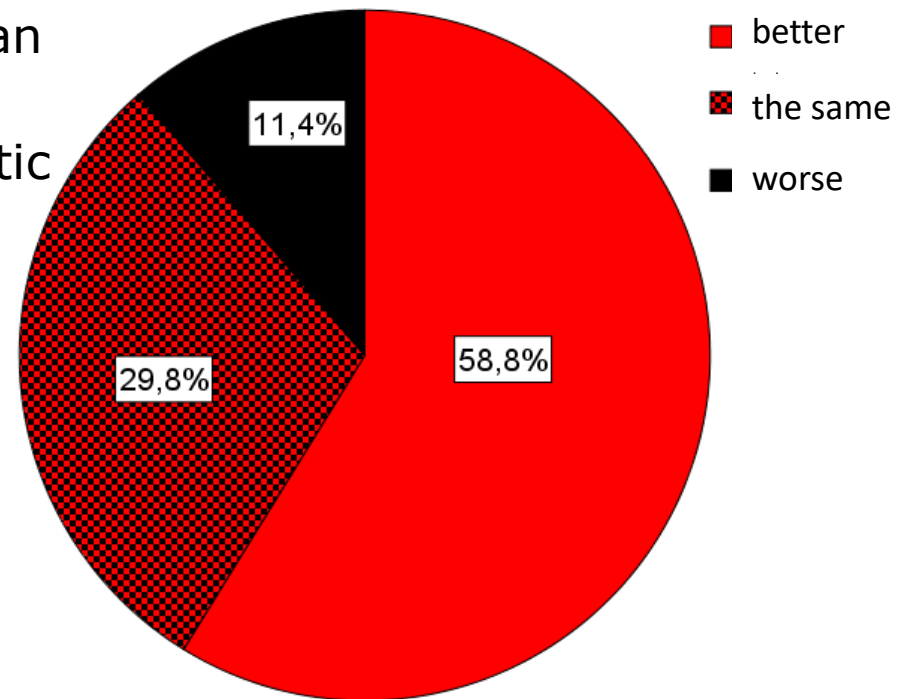
< 1 month

1 bis < 6 months

1 month and more

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Future expectations by sociodemographic characteristics

Last question:
What will your life situation be like in one year?

- Women are more optimistic than men (66.9% vs. 56.1%).
- The younger, the more optimistic
- The most optimistic are nationals of other countries (74% vs. 56.6%/ 56.8%).
- People who are homeless for 1 to < 6 months are the most optimistic about the future.

Legend:
- ■ better
- ▨ the same
- ■ worse

Chart values: 11,4% · 29,8% · 58,8%

Conclusions (1)

1. The most important help for homeless people is a safe and dignified accommodation
   ⇨ Plea for the right to housing and rejection of the concept of the 'ability to live independently' !

2. Homelessness must be ended as soon as possible in order to prevent a consolidation of homelessness (with all known consequences)

Conclusions (2)

3. The accommodation obligation must also be enforced for EU citizens without entitlement to social benefits.
More outreach assistance and advice is needed to implement these rights!

4. In homeless assistance, the resources of those affected must be used to a greater extent: e. g. the adaptability of long-term homeless people, the optimistic outlook of younger people on the future and, where appropriate, good objectifiable living conditions in individual areas of life.

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University of Applied Sciences

Thank you for your attention!

<u>Contact</u>
mail@susannegerull.de

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