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# Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Policymaking: Managing Homelessness in Istanbul

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➤ **Abstract\_** *The increasing phenomenon of homelessness in Istanbul has become a political concern. Yet the socio-political response to the issue does not go beyond providing limited-term shelter service. Therefore, this research aims to understand the reasons for the lack of social policy in the field of homelessness and the indifferent attitude of public institutions toward people experiencing homelessness in Istanbul by drawing on the intersecting concepts of stereotypes and prejudices that have come to the fore in the discrimination literature in recent years. This approach will enable inclusive social policies and services and advocacy activities in the field of homelessness. The research is based on 27 expert-leader semi-structured interviews and informed by phenomenological-interpretative and discourse analysis. Based on stereotypes and prejudices about the homeless, the interviewers define people experiencing homelessness as 'free, refusing the system and taking responsibility, choosing the street' and characterising only chronic-long term homelessness as 'real homeless'. These are the leading causes for the lack of social policy in the field of homelessness in İstanbul.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Homeless, Social Policies, Stereotypes/Prejudice, Istanbul*

## Introduction

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There is a consensus that homelessness is increasing in metropolitan areas from internal and external migration (Fitzpatrick et al., 2019; FEANTSA, 2017; Serme-Morin, 2017), which raises an academic and political interest in the topic. Contrary to the general trend observed worldwide, being homeless does not draw sufficient interest in Turkey neither in policy-making nor in intellectual academic discussions. For instance, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, the public body responsible for social assistance and family services in Turkey, does not have a social policy for the homeless or offer a general definition of homelessness. People experiencing homelessness are often excluded from eligibility for social assistance and the services offered by local governments, charity, and civil society activities. The services that are offered are generally limited to shelters provided by metropolitan municipalities in winter.

The research on being homeless is still limited despite the official records revealing that the number of people experiencing homelessness has been increasing in Turkey's globalizing city, İstanbul. For example, according to the shelter services provided to the homeless by İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM), only 500-600 people benefited from this service in 2005-2006; whereas this number increased to 4592 in 2016-2017 (IMM, 2018). The number of people experiencing homelessness benefitting from this shelter has increased by approximately ninefold in 11 years. Another service provided by IMM that gives an estimation of the number of people experiencing homelessness in İstanbul involves the studies of The Poor Referral and Reverse Migration Office.

The Reverse Migration Office provides funds for transportation and relocation to families who are in İstanbul and cannot return to their hometowns due to financial difficulties. The Poor Referral Service helps citizens who came to İstanbul for military service to study or to find employment. As part of the scheme, these citizens are entitled to short term, free accommodation and financial help to return to their hometown. The Reverse Migration Office served 558 families in 2007, and this number increased to 5256 in 2016. Accordingly, the number of people benefitting from The Poor Referral Service increased from 3828 in 2007 to 8188 in 2017. The number of families that were at risk of homelessness and left İstanbul increased by nine times within 10 years, while the number of people who became homeless and wanted to return to their hometown doubled (IMM, 2018). Even though the NGOs that were contacted during the research, who provide services to people experiencing homelessness, provided different figures regarding the number of people experiencing homelessness, they also highlighted the increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. One NGO officer noted that there may be around 10000 people experiencing homelessness in İstanbul.

Despite these indicators, the city administration of Istanbul has not given a social political response, except for limited-term shelter service, nor does it accept the homeless as one of the vulnerable groups that 'deserve' regular assistance and support. The inadequacy in social policies in the field of homelessness, or 'lack of social policy', is one of the structural factors that directly determine the daily experiences of the homeless (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Stephanz et al., 2010; Stephens and Fitzpatrick, 2007).

The aim of this research is to understand the reasons for the lack of social policy in the field of homelessness and the indifferent attitude of public institutions towards people experiencing homelessness in a metropolitan area, like Istanbul. To realise this aim, the intersecting concepts of stereotype and prejudice in the literature of discrimination are used instead of macro structural analysis that are influential in homelessness policies. This perspective, which puts emphasis on the role of agency rather than structure, will enable more inclusive social policies and services and advocacy activities in the field of homelessness. Therefore, the aim is to analyse the intersection of the participants' definitions of homelessness and their thoughts about people experiencing homelessness with stereotypes and/or prejudices and their effect on social policy making processes. Attitudes toward homelessness and political responses to homelessness are directly related to how people experiencing homelessness and homelessness in general are understood and evaluated (Willse, 2015; McNaughton, 2008). Additionally, definitions and regulations designated through administrative structures and social policies are one of the main determinants of the experience of being homeless.

The study is based on qualitative methods and aims to reveal the micro dimensions of the reasons for the lack of social policy in the field of homelessness in Istanbul, in the Beyoğlu district. Qualitative methods have an epistemologically semantic/subjectivism and ontologically interpretive approach. Therefore, they aim to comprehend the perspectives of research subjects and their worlds of meaning (Kus, 2003). In this study, the experts and leaders of the public institutions/NGOs serving, or those expected to provide services, in the field of homelessness in the Beyoğlu Region were first interviewed to explore their conceptions of homelessness. In this way, a more realistic and comprehensive social policy and service proposal was developed, and further areas related to research were discovered.

Twenty seven expert-leader interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews aimed to identify whether there were any services provided to people experiencing homelessness in Istanbul, other than homeless services and aids known by the public, and to elicit the perspective of institutions and individuals on homelessness/homeless/homeless social policies.

The framework of the semi-structured interviews was determined by the following questions:

- Who is a homeless person, what is homelessness, what are the causes of homelessness? What are the views on the number of homeless and their qualifications?
- What are the services provided to the homeless in Istanbul and the strategic goals of these services? Are there any new service models targeted by institutions? What should be the role of central government, local governments, and non-governmental organisations in developing social policies about homelessness?
- Is homelessness a social problem for Istanbul? If so, what should be done to solve this problem?

Two sets of interview were conducted. The first set of interviews were with the institutions of central and local administrative bodies: the Manager of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation of İstanbul, the Deputy Secretary General of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the Head of İstanbul Public Security Services, the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Head of European Side Public Security Services for Beggar Rehabilitation, the Darülaceze Hospice Manager, the Governor of Beyoğlu District, the Beyoğlu Social Service Centre Manager, the Head of Beyoğlu Community Health Centre, the Manager of Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation of Beyoğlu District, the Chief of Police of Beyoğlu District, the Beyoğlu Municipality Social Affairs Manager and Chief, the Head of Mukhtars in Beyoğlu District, and the Head of Taksim Tuberculosis Dispensary.

The second interviews were conducted with NGOs: founder and volunteers of the Soup Kitchen Association, the Responsibles of the Şefkat-Der Foundation, the founder and volunteers of the Children of Hope Association, the President of the Çorbada Tuzun Olsun Association, the founder of the Dervish Baba Association, the President of the Erdemliler Solidarity Association, and the Hasan Pasha Mosque Imam. In addition, semi-structured interviews were held with three experts working as field workers in different institutions pertaining to people experiencing homelessness.

The findings of the field research conducted between April 2016 and April 2017 were evaluated using qualitative analysis methods, namely phenomenological-interpretive analysis and discourse analysis.

## Homelessness in Istanbul

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As stated previously, there are only a limited number of academic studies conducted on homelessness in Turkey. Therefore, it is very difficult to study factual history of homelessness in Turkey and the ability to make a comparative analysis of the structural dynamics of Istanbul and homelessness, on the basis of data available from the past to present, is not feasible.

There are only 18 studies conducted across Turkey over the last 20 years. Some of these studies are based on field research while others are systematic reviews of literature. Quite a number of them are quantitative and focus on the sectional, momentary situation. These studies, in general, explore socio-demographic characteristics of the homeless, which include prevalence of problematic alcohol use, illegal drug use, psychiatric hospitalisation, mental disorder, crime rate, and the frequency of data related to the health of people experiencing homelessness. There is a dearth of studies conceptualising the process of homelessness, and those that do employ a critical perspective towards excessively generic research that discriminates against the homeless and confines them to being out of the norm. These studies also approach homelessness through concepts such as globalization, urban poverty, migration, underclass, and deep poverty, and consider homelessness as an interaction of structural, individual, and institutional reasons.

There are three important studies in the field of medicine. The research by Altun (1997) on the deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Istanbul between the years 1991-1995 is the first academic study conducted on the subject. A large number (95%) of the cases in Altun's (1997) research included men, while 3% were women, and 2% were transsexuals. In most cases (75%), the bodies were found in open spaces like streets and parks, while in 25% of the cases, the bodies were found in confined spaces like abandoned buildings and construction sites. Deaths in 82% of the cases took place between October-April from 1991 to 1995. According to predicted ages determined during external examination of the cases, 87% of whom were not found to have an identity card on them, the age of death was most common in the age group of 41-50 years, while 61% of the cases were between the ages of 31-50 years. Further, 78% of deaths were recorded to be natural deaths and 22% of them were recorded as violent deaths. Yagan (2009) examined the cases of 127 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Ankara and found similar results in parallel with Altun's (1997) work.

Isikhan (2002) is the first study from the field of social sciences that sets forth socio-demographic characteristics of people experiencing homelessness living in Ankara. The research was carried out with 58 people experiencing homelessness between the ages of 9-65, with an average age of 21. The research found a problematic drug, cigarette, and alcohol use rate of 33% among the adults experiencing homelessness

with a low educational status. Further, it revealed a problematic drug use depending on solvent and glue at a rate of 92% among the children experiencing homelessness. According to the research, the people experiencing homelessness who have different health problems do recycling work from time to time such as collecting papers and plastics. Participants stated that since they did not have a permanent place of residence, they used bus terminals, entrances of buildings, and cash points to spend night as they found them to be relatively less dangerous.

Menevis' (2006) research looked at the socio-demographic characteristics of the homeless in Ankara; their study included 206 people experiencing homelessness, consisting of 147 men and 59 women. According to the study, 25.7% of the people experiencing homelessness were over 46 years old; 26.2% of them had been experiencing homelessness for less than a week; 29.6% were primary school graduates; 32.5% were single, 33% had divorced; and 54.4% did not have a social security identification. Menevis (2006) also mentioned that 36.4% of the people experiencing homelessness interviewed had criminal records, 66% of them did not have any physical or mental disease, and 66% did not have any regular income.

Results of the study carried out by Erbay (2013), including 79 people experiencing homelessness staying in two shelters in Ankara and in the Ankara Bus Terminal, show similar results with the research of Isikhan (2002) and Menevis (2006). Educational levels, income status, marital status, employment status, social insurance status, health status, and drug use frequencies did not differ significantly among the studies. However, Erbay (2013) addressed causality perceptions of people experiencing homelessness according to their self-reports and found that 57.7% of the participants indicated unemployment and poorness as the fundamental causes, while 49.3% of them noted family and domestic crises.

It is observed that all three studies in general prioritised treatment/rehabilitation and focused temporary housing/shelter regulations in the centre when considering which services could be provided to the homeless (Erbay, 2013; Isikhan, 2002).

The study carried out by Bektas (2014) consisting of 101 convicted people experiencing homelessness using quantitative methods is different from the bodies of work discussed above. Even though Bektas, like his antecedents, used the data related to the current state of the participants regarding problematic substance use, crimes, etc. and their socio-demographic characteristics, emphasis on structural reasons like migration and poorness is much more salient and prioritised in the data analysis. Bektas (2014) argues that the people experiencing homelessness are exposed to social exclusion and left outside formal and informal support mechanisms. Migration history is a common experience in the life history of the homeless and the reason for migration is generally the economic condition. Poorness is a common experience before one becomes homeless. The

triggers of homelessness are domestic violence, death in family, stepparents, physical and mental health problems, and drug use. According to the results of the study, the people experiencing homelessness are of low educational status and there is a significant relationship between family relationships and literal homelessness. A large number (75%) of the interviewed people experiencing homelessness have a profession; however, chronic unemployment is a common occurrence in their life histories. Drug use was common among the sample (76%). Among the sample, 33% had been experiencing homelessness for more than seven years, 25% of them reported a homelessness period of 1-3 years, and 21% reported a period of six months or less. Among the sample, the ratio of those involved in crime is high compared to mainstream society; accordingly, the high ratio of being exposed to crime is also high. For instance, 66% of the interviewees stated that they were exposed to injury, 52% were exposed to extortion, and 9% were exposed to sexual abuse.

The research of Kucuk (2014) looks into the framework of new homeless<sup>1</sup>, poverty and underclass conceptualisations, socio-economic dimensions, and structural determinants of homelessness. Kucuk (2014) worked with 80 people experiencing homelessness using a qualitative method and considered the homeless as one of the disadvantaged groups that communed with deep poverty and social exclusion, namely a reflection of urban poverty. Kucuk (2014) found that the people experiencing homelessness experience poorness that makes the state of being homeless permanent and leads them to a worse and more complicated situation. This causes the homeless to get marginalised in the social space and unable to hold on to the system. Arguing that the number of people experiencing homelessness in such a situation is gradually increasing, Kucuk (2014) mentions that lack of policies and practices push this group of people who already live on the margins of life further to their fate.

Gumus (2016), who made biographical interviews with 11 people experiencing homelessness in the area of Istanbul/Tarlabasi, which is under urban transformation, tried to understand the homeless and thresholds of the process of becoming homeless in her study. Gumus (2016, p.51; 77; 93-94) defined homelessness as “an urban poverty experience that emerges when the poor bodies placed in the boundaries lose their family and market protection for various reasons and when their basic needs are not met by the public”, “a lifestyle that occurs in the metropolis.” She highlighted the determinative role of safety in daily experiences of the homeless.

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<sup>1</sup> “The new homeless were much younger, more likely to be minority group members, suffering from greater poverty, and with access to poorer sleeping quarters. In addition, homeless women and families appeared in significant numbers. However, there were also points of similarity, especially high levels of mental illness and substance abuse.” (Rossi, 1990, p.954)

Safety, on the other hand, is a determinative factor for positioning of the homeless within the city. For stigmatised homeless bodies, areas that are used as public places during the day such as parks, hospital yards, under the counters, water fountains become a place for accommodation at nights. In this context, homelessness creates a new topography in the city... (Gümüş, 2016, p.94)

Bekaroglu Dogan (2018), analysed the relationship of individual and structural dimensions of homelessness in the context of causality. According to Bekaroglu Dogan (2018, p.276,277), there are certain structural similarities encountered in the biographies of the homeless, these include: low financial and social capital of the family; lack of education and widespread domestic violence; poverty and deprivation patterns experienced in certain rural areas of Turkey; negative social capital acquired in the region migrated to; failing to continue education due to poorness and necessity of working at a very early age; unsafe and improper housing homelessness experienced starting from the young ages before occurrence of literal homelessness; working in informal sectors without social security for years and in return being deprived of social security in case of inability to work; and a lack of institutional protection mechanisms to protect children and youth against domestic violence. She also discovered the presence of common patterns shared by almost all of the participants as they entered into the period of homelessness. According to Bekaroglu Dogan, there are more similarities between the homelessness that is visible as a part of the process starting with rural poverty and continuing with migration and urban poverty and the homelessness that emerges as a result of urban poverty. The process of stepping into homelessness for the participants from families of small business owners and government officers is partly different.

According to Bekaroglu Dogan (2018, p.182), apart from being in a low income group, which is considered a universal risk factor for homelessness and being structurally excluded from a habitable/low cost housing system, especially in societies in which public social protection is poor and mostly built through the family, non-existence of family and protective relationships leads to failure in managing informed or uninformed risks. Another important finding of Bekaroglu Dogan (2018, p.215) is that the people experiencing homelessness are involved in unsafe and improper housing for years before the literal homelessness process begins.

According to the results of the field research by Akyildiz (2020), new homelessness is becoming widespread in Istanbul. The research emphasised that domestic problems and financial incapacities underly the transition to homelessness. According to the results of the research, the circumstances that challenge the homeless most are financial incapability, security concern, exclusion, rooflessness,



health problems, and unemployment issues. For Akyildiz, insufficiency of the services provided and cultural viewpoint towards homelessness are determinants in highly difficult daily living experiences of the homeless.

As also mentioned in the limited literature on homelessness in Turkey (Akyildiz, 2020; Bekaroglu Dogan, 2017; Gumus 2016; Kucuk, 2014), the Ministry of Family and Social Services responsible for social aids and services in Turkey does not have any services aimed directly at the homeless or any regulations at the constitutional and legal level regarding homelessness. In the circular letter regarding social services issued in 2003 by the Minister of Interior, the intention regarding “ensuring cooperation of civil and local administrations and non-governmental organisations for the purpose of establishing shelters or shelter centers for citizens who do not have a place to stay overnight or for a certain period” (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Office of Press and Public Relations, 2003) was noted. In 2003 and 2007, two more circular letters from the Ministry were released to the public that were aimed directly at the homeless and included an instruction for providing the homeless with temporary sheltering at places like hotels and guesthouses during the course of “heavy winter conditions” (Anadolu Agency, 2013; 2017).

The circular letter published in 2003 focused on the establishment of shelter services providing service throughout the year by means of cooperation of different institutions; however, subsequent circular letters highlighted a service understanding focused on providing these services only during the winter months and only meeting basic needs. These circular letters show that the Ministry does not handle the issue of homelessness as a problem that falls under the scope of its responsibility but acts with a minimum service understanding by preventing freezing to death in winter and ensuring basic survival of people experiencing homelessness. However, there are women’s shelters, nursing homes, child support centres, and caring centres for the disabled that are affiliated with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies for women experiencing homelessness, children who have to live on the street, helpless elderly people, and the disabled citizens in Turkey. Considering the services in other EU countries, Turkey takes into consideration people who are doubly vulnerable, and the elderly, disabled, women, and children experiencing homelessness are prioritised.

These services and the circular letters of the Ministry show that especially males between the ages of 18-60 experiencing homelessness in Turkey are neither regarded as a welfare nor a housing problem, but only left to the responsibility of the individual and civil society. As for the services provided to the homeless in the city of Istanbul, only one service is encountered that involves the concept of ‘homelessness’; the sheltering service provided by IMM in winter that starts upon the alarm given by AKOM for cold weather and ends in spring when the weather

gets warmer. Local administrations in different metropolitans other than Istanbul also provide limited-period sheltering provision to the homeless, particularly in winter (Akyildiz, 2020).

When looking at the official websites of the most widely known NGOs in Turkey, there is no information indicating that they operate in the field of homelessness. There are seven small and local NGOs operating in the field of homelessness in Istanbul (Erdemliler Dayanışması, Şefkat-der, Çorbada Tuzun Olsun Derneği, Aşhane, Hayata Sarıl Lokantası, Umut Çocukları Derneği, Derviş Baba). Only three of them provide temporary sheltering facilities and social support to the homeless with their limited capacity, while the remaining four provide street-based services that will support the homeless to cope with difficulties of daily life, such as provision of food or distribution of blankets.

The people experiencing homelessness are not the target audience for social aids and services and are deprived of any regulations and applications aimed at provision of the constitutional right to housing. Even though housing is accepted as a constitutional right in Turkey, according to the Constitution of 1982, there are no legal regulations for the homeless to benefit from the right to housing. The right to housing in Turkey is secured in the Constitution of 1961 with the provision which reads as “the state shall take necessary measures to meet the housing needs of the poor or low income families in accordance with health conditions” and with the provision in the Constitution of 1982 which reads as, “the state, within the framework of a planning that considers the characteristics of cities and environmental conditions, shall take measures to meet housing needs and also support housing initiatives.” Despite the fact that the Constitution of 1982 removed the emphasis on meeting the housing needs of the poor and low-income communities as a priority, the right to housing is still a constitutional right.

In Turkey, during the 1950s-70s, the state could not find a solution to the housing problem of those coming to major cities, including Istanbul, by internal migration; the social policy vacuum was filled by condoning the slums, with an implicit agreement between the state and the voters (Bugra, 2011). In the 2000s, shanty towns and wrecked parts of the city that provided suitable shelter opportunities, eliminated sheltering costs, and were a source of informal social support were no longer an opportunity for the low-income citizens of the city due to ‘urban transformation projects’. This is indeed similar to the fate of the shanties all over the world (Davis, 2010). The ‘shanty’ in Istanbul, which is sometimes in tune with and sometimes differentiating from the examples from around the world, has been effective during different periods in coping with poorness, which is one of the fundamental structural reasons of homelessness and in preventing of widespread homelessness.

The state developed TOKI (Housing Development Administration) to address the social housing need in the 2000s when informal housing support facility for the poor was annulled. The current activity report of TOKI reported that 18.9% of the houses produced so far were for the lower income group and the poor, while 44.73% of them were built for the low- and middle-income group (TOKI, 2017). TOKI also has projects aimed at providing housing for the high income group based on a cooperation under the name of 'Income and Resource Development Projects' described as income generating by TOKI. The number of houses produced within the framework of both social housing and income and resource development projects for Istanbul is as follows: 766 houses from two projects for the lower income group and the poor, 15815 houses from 24 projects for the low and middle income group, and 19195 houses from 31 projects for the high income group within the scope of income and resource development (TOKI, 2017).

It is observed that the number of projects produced by TOKI for the new middle and middle-upper class of Istanbul is considerably higher compared to others. In total, 35776 houses were built. The ratio of houses allocated for the poor and lower income group is found to be 2.14%, 44.21% for the low and middle income group, and 53.66% for the high income group.

This indicated that TOKI deviated from its purpose and became a means of production of luxury houses and an entity operating for setting up the infrastructure required by neo-liberal economic policy of the global city. In global cities where it is required to set up the infrastructure to attract global capital, more clearly, where it is required to meet the demands of the new elite professionals to reside in the city for luxury housing, shopping, education of their children, entertainment, and recreation, TOKI is criticised as being the mechanism that fulfils this task. TOKI also leads to settlement of the upper- upper middle classes in the city centres, which pushes the lower classes to the outskirts of the city. It is asserted that TOKI, in its current position, protects the property right while impairing the right to shelter and reshapes the space to the detriment of the lower income group and the poor to comply with the requirements of a global city (Keles, 2012; IMO, 2011; Yilmaz, 2014; 2016; Karasu, 2009).

***Power of identification: defining the state of being homeless within the framework of stereotypes and prejudices***

Defining the state of being homeless and determining its causes is an important topic of discussion and, indeed, struggle among charities and advocacy groups as well as academic and administrative structures. In fact, the definition of being homeless is often an extension of certain theoretical or political perspectives. In other words, it

encompasses the reflections of public, political, and epistemological benefits and interests. On the other hand, definitions have the potential to affect public and political practices and discourses (Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016; Neale, 1997).

Identifying social problems is critical in many ways. Identification primarily determines the population that academic research is targeting, the homeless. Politically, it determines the target population of social policies and who can benefit from the services offered (Jacobs et al., 1999; Rossi, 1989).

When defining the state of being homeless from this perspective, we see that the simplest, but essentially the most common, expressions in all different definitions of being homeless include the absence of a shelter, sleeping in public places, and the absence of a regular home of the person (through rent or property) Although the common expressions included in the definitions typically take this form, there are different, and almost always negative, meanings attributed to the phenomenon of 'being homeless' in mainstream society. People experiencing homelessness are likewise associated with pathological 'deviation', such as begging, crime, addiction, or some vulnerability, almost as though they form some new lower class or poverty that threatens mainstream society (Cronley, 2010; McNaughton, 2008; Pleace, 2000; Bauman, 1999; Fooks and Pantazis, 1999; Neale, 1997), so homelessness and being homeless are defined on the basis of its various stereotypes and prejudices.

Administrative structures and social policies become the main determinants of the experience of being homeless through the definitions and regulations they designate, which then become the common stereotypes and prejudices shared by the majority of society about the state of being homeless. Here, the act of becoming homeless may result in being categorised as undeserving and being excluded from social assistance and services, or as the state of being homeless within the framework of individual preference. Thus, the concept is excluded from social policies altogether.

As a result, people experiencing homelessness do not only struggle with the problems, difficulties, and risks in everyday life inherent to the state of being homeless, they also have to deal with all the disadvantages of being homeless, the meanings socially imposed on being homeless, and the negativities created by stereotypes and prejudices. These can be material/physical as well as psychological/emotional (the sense of 'deviation' from main society, the negative emotions created by stigmatisation, and othering). These discourses and definitions often consider being homeless as the absence of a roof in its narrow sense, but deal with individual pathologies or vulnerabilities within the context of causality.

## Findings and Interpretation

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When analysing the interviews, the stereotypes were mostly focused on the definition of being homeless, the features of the homelessness, evaluating the services provided for the homeless, and the use of the public spaces by the homeless. Building the concept of being homeless as defined by the leaders of public institutions and experts began with an emphasis on the characteristics of being homeless and homelessness and continued by interpreting existing services and combining them with stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness. Ultimately, it was found that this process was the reason for the absence of social policies addressing the needs of the homeless and even the lack of a permanent shelter service. This section of the analysis was discussed under the headings of (1) Defining the state of being homeless: 'people experiencing homelessness are already...', (2) Services (not) provided to the homeless in Istanbul within the framework of definitions, and (3) Pollution displacement and the use of public spaces, respectively, in order to reveal the logical fiction of this construction process.

### *Defining the state of being homeless: 'people experiencing homelessness are already...'*

The interviewees have defined people experiencing homelessness as 'free', 'refusing the system', 'emotional', 'avoiding staying in institutions and closed spaces', 'not satisfied with the opportunities offered', 'preferring the streets', 'avoiding taking responsibility', and 'preferring to live daily'. As in the case of Mu.K, an NGO leader, NGO leaders and experts have not attributed a negative meaning to 'free, people experiencing homelessness'.

The homeless are very romantic people. They are emotional people; they live from the heart. But they place much emphasis to feelings in their life cycle, there [is a] lack [of] such a balance between feelings and reason. Then they lose their temper, and look, you're on the streets.... (Soup Kitchen Association, Mu.K.)

On the other hand, the leaders of the public institutions have defined the state of being homeless by referring to a preference and lifestyle such as 'avoiding living indoors and obeying certain rules' and subsequently that has characteristics that are considered socially negative.

I observe that it is a preference. Actually, as I said before, it is not because they have no place; it's a matter of preference. Maybe because of the desire to get away from a familial problem; maybe because of the desire to get away from liabilities... Once I tried to place a homeless person in an institution. He said, 'I cannot stay there, I should be free' and 'I can't survive there, I have to go in and out when I want; nobody can interfere with me'. So, we see that this is a little bit

about people's expectations of life. 'I think it is not only a necessity, rather a lifestyle created in their own minds and imaginations....' (Beyoğlu Municipality Social Affairs Manager)

With this definition, some leaders consider the homeless themselves to be responsible for the state of being homeless, as it is considered that they do not want to receive public service-based alternatives such as winter shelters or sheltered housing/nursing homes. As a result, this perception and definition of the state of being homeless provides a basis for the viewpoint that there is no public responsibility to shelter the homeless on the grounds that the housing opportunities offered will be declined. However, rejection of sheltering alternatives, such as a temporary shelter or nursing homes, as might be offered by local governments to the homeless or to those at risk of being homeless should not be interpreted as refusing to have a 'home'. What is being rejected is, in fact, a concrete 'shelter' or 'nursing home', with their physical, hardware, and security-related reality.

'Home' and an 'indoor shelter that can be used for accommodation' have entirely different meanings. Such a distinction was also noted in the responses of the leaders and experts interviewed to questions like 'what is the meaning of 'home' to you?' Only three of the 27 interviewees defined 'home' as a 'shelter' by emphasising its physical meaning and facilities. The remaining 24 participants defined 'home' with expressions such as home, family, privacy, peace, happiness, warmth, freedom, trust, stability, and order, based on meanings associated with physiological, emotional, and belonging aspects.

A significant proportion of the interviewees also referred to different categories while defining the state of being homeless, therefore emphasising that the question of 'who is homeless?' does not have a single answer, as there is no homogeneous 'homeless' population. The classification of the heterogeneous population of homeless by the interviewees is similar to the classification in the literature, namely 'the long term homeless', 'the episodically homeless', and 'the first-time homeless' (May, 2010, p.622-633). According to all expert interviewers who are actively communicating with the homeless in the field, the proportion of 'temporary homeless' who come to İstanbul for employment or treatment purposes, and who are waiting in line for institutional inpatient care services, is much higher than those of the 'long term homeless' who have been staying on the streets for a long time. This view overlaps with the information provided by İstanbul's Darülaceze Hospice Manager, who stated that "there are an average of 300 people benefiting from the winter service regularly every year among a chronic homeless population consisting of 3000 homeless." Provincial Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation field staff also emphasised that the number of 'guest homeless' (those who came to

Istanbul for work or other reasons and became homeless for the first time or temporarily) who applied to them for temporary or one-time assistance was higher than the homeless population (long term homeless) who received regular help.

Another remarkable result is that although the rate of long term people experiencing homelessness on the streets is emphasised as being relatively low among the entire homeless population, more than half of the interviewees noted the problems of being homeless over individual problems, which are claimed to be common among long term people experiencing homelessness in general. In this context, new categories of having 'psychiatric/mental illness', 'mental retardation', 'alcohol and substance addiction', and 'severe trauma' come to the fore. This generalisation dims the notion that more people are in danger of being homeless due to structural problems such as unemployment, poverty, and absence of social services. In general, it leads to the individualisation and pathology of the problem of being homeless.

As a result, none of the interviewees answered the question 'Who is a homeless person?' as being 'one without home'; rather they preferred to identify the concept by referring to the causality of being homeless and the negative characteristics of the homeless person.

### ***Services (not) provided to the homeless within the framework of definitions***

For services provided for the homeless in Turkey, as in other European countries, multiple vulnerabilities are taken into account; old people, disabled, women, and children experiencing homelessness benefit from public social services as those most deserving of assistance (Dwyer et al., 2014; Pleace et al., 2011; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010; Pleace, 1998; Burrows et al., 1997). Institutions affiliated to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, as well as many private establishments for the disabled and the elderly, offer temporary and permanent housing services for the women and children experiencing homelessness who have to live on the streets, as well as orphans and people who are disabled and need help in Istanbul.

However, even the most basic sheltering services for the homeless are not provided sustainably and regularly, particularly for men experiencing homelessness between 18–60 years old and who have experienced the state of being homeless temporarily or chronically. Shelters, day care centres offering facilities similar to shelters, and bed and breakfasts and/or hostels for the homeless have been heavily criticised recently in the literature studying the state of being homeless for their lack of hygiene, being non-secure, depressive, dangerous (McNaughton, 2008), and exclusionary places (Evans, 2011) where individual and real needs are ignored, medical rehabilitation programmes are executed (Gowan, 2010), and as places where there

is no sense of trust (Arnold, 2004). Nevertheless, shelters still have their place in services provided for the homeless, especially when considered in terms of coping and survival strategies.

The need for service centres and shelters that can serve men who have long term experience of the state of being homeless, particularly between the ages of 18-60, was expressed by all experts and leaders in the interviews. However, the need for shelter services for those who are temporarily experiencing the state of being homeless were particularly emphasised by associations and experts working in the field. These categories included those who started to stay on the streets for economic reasons only; patients in need of treatment and their relatives (those who came to Istanbul for treatment and did not have a place to stay); those who could not find a job for a while after coming to Istanbul as seasonal workers and who are in financial deprivation; those who have no place to go in the period of adaptation and convalescence after leaving boarding institutions such as prisons/hospitals/orphanages/child support centres; and those who are in the evaluation process in order to receive institutional inpatient care services. The data obtained through the interview held with the İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager also confirmed this need.

We have nearly 3000 guests there Zeytinburnu Sports Complex [where winter services are provided to the homeless] every year. Those who are truly homeless number between 200 and 300. Those whom we define as real homeless... And if you question where we have obtained this solution? We calculated the percentage of those who stayed here every year and figured out this number.

The centres offer food, cleaning, and clothing services, as well as the shelter service itself. The dates for providing this service are determined in accordance with the weather conditions. According to the data reported by the İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager, the shelter, which starts to offer service on days when the temperature drops to 4-5 degrees, is closed in the first week of April. Considering the content and the time period of this periodic shelter service, it is clear that the target of this service is to prevent widespread death amongst people experiencing homelessness due to the cold. The Deputy Secretary General, responsible for the health and social service-related activities of the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, expressed the benefits and the temporary accommodation services provided to the homeless as follows:

You should also have heard the people who died due to cold up to date. But today you cannot get to know such news in İstanbul. We embrace them too. We host them in the facilities we have allocated for these services.



Consequently, İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager stated that such a service is not used for solving the problem of homelessness, but only aims to protect such individuals from risks. “(What is targeted with this service is) firstly, to ensure the health and life safety of the person, that is to protect them from risks. What is this? Let’s say the risk of freezing, or similar factors.” (İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager)

Apart from this service, there are no other public institutions that provide shelter services for men experiencing homelessness over the age of 18 in İstanbul. Despite the insufficiency of temporary and limited shelter services and the need for shelter models that can serve temporary and long term homelessness throughout the year being emphasised theoretically in all leader-expert interviews, the reasons for the actual absence of these services are hidden in the definitions, qualifications, and judgments of public leaders regarding people experiencing homelessness.

Based on their experience of the Temporary Accommodation Service for the Homeless, İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager state that the homeless do not require shelter services throughout summer, and hence even if a shelter is opened, it would not otherwise be used by people experiencing homelessness.

The people there [benefiting from the shelter service provided in the winter] are real people [chronic people experiencing homelessness] who do not want to live indoors, get bored and who want to get away as soon as possible. When the temperature gets gradually higher, the shelter begins to become automatically empty. But at the last moment we completely empty the place. (İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager)

The opinion of institution leaders is that the shelters would not be used during summer. Although a permanent shelter is offered, this service is based on stereotypes and judgments that categorise the homeless as the people ‘avoiding staying indoors’ and ‘preferring the streets’. However, the need for shelters and their temporary use by people experiencing homelessness is relatively high according to some leaders. The stereotypes about people experiencing long term homelessness are generalised to the entire homeless population. These stereotypes do not have any scientific basis apart from the estimates and experiences of the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Temporary Shelter Services; therefore, the quality of the service provided is not included in the inferences made by their leaders as a variable. However, this discourse becomes one of the factors that determines the associated structural conditions in terms of experiencing and surviving the state of being homeless; for this reason, the shelter service, which is one of the fundamental services offered to the homeless, is not provided throughout the entire year. Still, shelters have a very important place in the services offered to the homeless, provided that they are accepted as an emergency service (Birelma, 2014) and offer humanitarian conditions.

There are many critical studies on the shelters (Evans, 2011; Gowan, 2010; McNaughton, 2008; Arnold, 2004; Stark, 1994). According to the results of the field survey conducted with the homeless in Istanbul in 2016, the shelter service provided during winter was described as 'life-saving' by the people experiencing homelessness (Bekaroğlu Doğan, 2020, p.1013). Nevertheless, the homeless emphasised that they leave this service as soon as the danger of freezing and death disappears. This service is the last choice of the homeless. The reasons for the attitudes and thoughts of homeless participants included in the study toward this service are quite different from 'avoiding staying indoors', that is, the reasons reported by expert/public leader participants. Ultimately it is not a closed area or a shelter that is not preferred by the homeless in Istanbul, it is 'Zeytinburnu'.<sup>2</sup> The basic criticisms offered by the participants about temporary winter shelter 'Zeytinburnu' were with regard to the physical conditions.

The participants who stated that between 500 and 1 000 people might be staying together simultaneously in the centre further reported that there has always been a heavy and bad smell in the centre... that the number of camp beds supplied was insufficient and hence people have been sleeping on the ground or on the tribune seats and that the toilets were too dirty to enter. The absence of any health control or screening against infectious diseases when entering the shelter is another issue that worries the participants... Another criticism and concern of the participants using the centre is about security issues. Participants reported that they could not sleep any longer at night in the centre than they could sleep on the street due to security concerns and constant quarrels and fighting, and they stated that staying in Zeytinburnu was not particularly different from staying on the street in terms of security. (Bekaroğlu Doğan, 2020, p.1013)

Another issue that arose throughout the interviews held with the leaders is the provision of alternative services to housing, which have a very important place in maintaining the daily lives of the homeless, but which can in no way be considered an alternative to shelter and housing supply services. The rationale underlying the view that the street-based services constituting an alternative to shelter and housing services is the stereotype that argues the homeless do not use shelters outside winter because they prefer to avoid staying indoors and that they in general 'prefer to live outdoors'. The Beyoğlu Municipality Social Affairs Manager stated that none of the homeless who live in Beyoğlu region is not the resident of the Beyoğlu and added that they offer alternative services to meet the daily needs of people who prefer to live on the streets. She said that:

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<sup>2</sup> Since the service has been provided in Zeytinburnu Sports Complex for almost 10 years, until the winter period of 2017-2018, it is referred to as 'Zeytinburnu' by the homeless.

...When we question the main needs and requirements of a preferably homeless, who actually made it his own lifestyle, we found out that it was food... Well, he needs to wash up, cleaning is one of the main needs. And, cleaning of the clothes, if he has any. These needs of the homeless are met by Beyoğlu Municipality in Tophane and Dolapdere District Governorates.

Finally, the opinion emerging from the leader-expert interviews on the grounds of the definition, categorisation, and characterisation of the homeless by public institution leaders and the stereotypical judgment about their choices is that the limited-term shelter service and street-based services currently offered in İstanbul represent an adequate socio-political response to the problem of the homeless.

The Secretary General of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality has stated that İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality carries out a lot of work that is not specifically its responsibility in accordance with the legislation, works within the framework of the 'citizen/voter expectations', and that the municipality has intervened in new problem areas emerging in parallel with the changes in the city. This however must be viewed with that of the discourse of the İstanbul Darülaceze Hospice Manager stating that 'people experiencing homelessness prefer to live on the streets as long as the weather conditions permit'. It is clear that the idea indicating that İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality has fulfilled all its responsibilities toward people experiencing homelessness still prevails.

It is the local government that the citizen perceives as the first addressee. Whether legal regulations are present or not, are not important for them [citizens]; in this context, the state of being homeless is, for sure, a problem. This seems to be a bigger problem particularly in the winter months. In summer, the situation is more comfortable. So, people may not need that much. Therefore, in the winter months, we try to meet every need what we call as the need of the age and exist wherever people need us. Regarding the homeless... we embrace them too. We host them in the facilities we have allocated for these services. (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Deputy Secretary General)

Expressions such as 'responsibility of being a protector for the outcast', as used by Deputy Secretary General to draw attention to the services provided by the Metropolitan Municipality for the homeless, as well as concepts such as 'citizen expectations', 'preventing deaths due to freezing', 'embracing', and 'hosting' referred to in the quotations above indicate that the municipality does not perceive that services for people experiencing homelessness should be offered to those who deserve it. Further, the services provided for the homeless are focussed on managing the state of being homeless in relation to citizen expectations, rather than being based on the state of being homeless and the demands of the homeless themselves. After all, the limited-term shelter service offered to homeless who do

not use the shelters when the weather gets warmer but protects them from dying from cold in winter meets the demands of the voters. This service is also regarded as sufficient for the local governors of İstanbul within the framework of stereotypes regarding the accommodation preferences of the homeless.

### ***'Pollution displacement': the use of public spaces***

There are certain policies regarding the use of public spaces, which are the only alternative for people experiencing homelessness in İstanbul where there is no permanent shelter service and no housing-oriented public social services.

The head of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Public Security Department and the Chief of Police state that they 'do not intervene' with the homeless or people living on the streets provided they are in secluded and out of sight places and do not disturb the environment; however, they do intervene with those who occupy the 'parks, squares, boulevards, streets, and main arteries', particularly when they build temporary structures there. Public Security Department officials further stated that they intervene with the person in cooperation with law enforcement officers if there is a bad smell or problematic alcohol and substance use. They pointed out that the basis of their intervention is related to articles associated with 'environmental pollution', 'environmental disturbance', and 'behaviour disturbing the public' under the Law of Misdemeanour. The head of the Public Security Department referred to this practice as 'disposal' and 'postponing' pollution from prestige venues and main arteries.

Roma Park is maybe one of the most scenic places in İstanbul and perhaps everyone who visits İstanbul goes to see it. If you say you can see such a profile there, this may be true. If you say they shouldn't be there, we have just talked about the methods [disposal, postponing]... I told you we do not intervene as long as they stay in other places [invisible, isolated places] and do not cause disturbance to others.

The Beyoğlu District Police Chief, on the other hand, stated that the homeless and people begging create an 'anxiety factor' in terms of security and cause 'visual pollution' in prestigious places like İstiklal Avenue.

... If you see a homeless, tacky person on İstiklal Street in this way... If you need to walk around on İstiklal Street with your spouse and your children among those who give such a view, would you feel safe as a mum? You may not feel it, but people are afraid of things and people whom they do not know, because they do not know the homeless. If you think collectively, maybe there are 5 or 10 such prestigious streets at a maximum in Europe. These and similar images, as I said

before, cause image pollution and make people chill... Those images do not present a beautiful image. Beggars and homeless... The majority of those homeless are addicted to alcohol, substances, and so on.

One of the points that drew attention in the narratives of the interviewees is that the homeless, in some cases, may be intervened with indirectly through the arrangement of the urban area.

We have a bus stop in Fatih; with a wooden bench, 'u'-shaped and covered. There is no gap between the benches; it is in the form of a 'u', 50-55 people lie there. They turned the bench forms to a normal bank; they opened the roof and left the spaces in between blank. No one has been there since then. (Mu.K., Soup Kitchen Formation Volunteer)

One of the results of using public spaces is that people experiencing homelessness, even when they have money, avoid entering places where other 'people having a house/shelter' socialise, and cannot even buy services due to the signs indicating that they are considered physically homeless after staying on the street for a certain period of time. Bauman (1997, p.28) referred to this situation as an 'anthropoemic strategy',

... vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication with those inside. This was the strategy of exclusion – confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos or behind the invisible, yet no less tangible, prohibitions of commensality, connubium and commercium; 'cleansing' – expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory; or, when neither of the two measures was feasible – destroying the strangers physically.

H.Ö. reported this situation, based on the death of a homeless person he witnessed, as follows:

I saw that there is a crime scene investigation team under the bridge. There is a man wearing a mask. The age of the man is between 35 and 40. Eyes are black, beard and hair are elongated; it is clear that the man is a homeless, living on the street. He died on the street. The man's eyes were shining bright, but he was dead. They started to undress him and there was some money out of his pocket. They encountered a more interesting picture as they undressed him more. The man tied cardboard all over his body to avoid getting cold. Cardboard injured his body. Now, if this man goes to the hotel in that outfit, the hotel does not let him in. If he goes to the bath, they don't let them in; if he goes to a restaurant, they don't let them in either. In other words, the money in your pocket has no power.... (Şefkat-Der Volunteer, H.Ö.)

To sum up, there are both formal regulations and informal patterns related to the use of public spaces by the homeless and they also prevent the homeless' from using public spaces, even though they have no alternative other than these public spaces.

## Conclusions

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The interviews showed that social policies carried out at the macro-level and social practices at the micro-level to combat the state of being homeless are directly related to the public leaders' definitions of the state of being homeless and are influenced by stereotypes and prejudices.

According to the public institution officials and civil society leaders interviewed, a homeless person is not a 'person without a place to stay', but rather a 'free person, who rejects the system/order and who avoids assuming responsibility'. In this case, the state of being homeless is a 'lifestyle' and a 'choice' that is influenced by the character and preferences of the person experiencing homelessness. In particular, the leaders of the public institutions depicted the homeless as 'people who avoid living indoors and obey certain rules' and portrayed the homeless as being mainly responsible for the very state of being homeless. For example, the fact that Zeytinburnu is not preferred by people experiencing homelessness is interpreted by experts and leaders as 'people experiencing homelessness do not want to stay indoors'. This causality correlation established on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes of the leaders is highlighted as substitutes offered instead of the housing-based public service responsibilities that should be offered to the homeless. However, many studies show that the quality of the service provided in shelters plays an important role in the choice of shelters by the homeless.

Another noteworthy result was that although leaders and experts do not consider the homeless homogeneous group and categorise them accordingly, they tend to neglect short-term homeless in their policy. As a result of this categorisation/classification, which coincides with the long term-chronically homeless, the short-term-periodic homeless definitions that we encounter in the literature, especially from the leaders of public institutions, describe the long term homeless as the 'real homeless' and construct all their social policies addressing the issue of the homeless through this group. From the viewpoint of public leaders, this category of the homeless population is few in number, that is, it represents a very marginal segment of the population, and characterised by the rejection of the use of the existing shelter services, especially when the weather gets warm. This causality correlation and definitions based on stereotypes about the individual characteristics, characters, and preferences of the homeless results in missing the focus on the structural causes of being homeless and excludes different categories of the

homeless such as the short-term, periodic homeless, and the secret homeless from being the subjects and targets of social policies. Ultimately, the leaders of the public institutions consider street-based services and temporary shelter services provided via different institutions and civil organisations representative of an adequate social political response to homelessness within the framework of the causality correlation that they have established. Unlike public institution leaders, field experts and NGO leaders emphasise the high number of temporary people experiencing homelessness through the same classification and highlight the necessity of a permanent shelter service that should be offered for this category.

In the current situation, the only living space that people experiencing homelessness can use continuously is 'public space'. However, there are some direct and indirect restrictions on the use of such public spaces. Although there is no legal regulation regarding the use of public spaces by people experiencing homelessness, public security officials may intervene with the homeless in the form of 'discharging' them from prestigious venues and main arteries and 'displacement' within the framework of legal regulations regarding 'environmental pollution', 'environmental disturbance', and 'public disturbance behaviour'. These interventions were justified by the leaders of public institutions in the form of 'image pollution' and 'creating social anxiety'. Urban management can also restrict the use of public space by the homeless through changing the design of urban space. People experiencing homelessness are also unable to benefit from the public places used by each citizen in return for their fees, even if they are able to afford it, as they are rejected due to their appearance and clothing.

People experiencing homelessness are considered a disadvantaged group who do not want to receive assistance on the basis of the stereotypes and prejudices held by leader-experts, and thus, are excluded from shelter/housing-oriented social policies and services. Problems with the everyday life facilities built in İstanbul for people experiencing homelessness, who are affected by stereotypes and prejudices and stigmatised within the scope of using public spaces, remain increasingly unsolved, although they are managed by the different coping strategies enacted by people experiencing homelessness themselves.

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