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A CHARACTERIZATION OF STREETWORKERS'  
WORK AND WORK ENVIRONMENT  
BASED ON A STUDY CARRIED OUT ON A PARTICULAR  
GROUP OF STREETWORKERS

**Abstract.** When helping another person we usually focus on what kind of help we offer and who we help. We often don't pay attention to the person who offers help. The goal of this summary is to talk about that person – to show, who the volunteer is, in a specific context of street work with homeless people.<sup>1</sup> This article shows not only who streetworkers are, but it also shows

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<sup>1</sup> Defining a streetworker as a volunteer has a double dimension: firstly, it means that the work is done completely for free, and hence it has the character of voluntary service. At the same time I am stressing that this does not mean understanding streetworking as unprofessional work that does not need any tools. This would belittle the value of voluntary service as an activity in general. In my research nearly all the streetworkers have been working without any payment (one streetworker coming from Świnoujście has a full-time job at the Municipal Council, but *de facto* he is a homeless person. If we work exclusively in order to earn a living, and our work (any work) is only a tool of earning it, we often have an ambivalent attitude towards the object or the subject of our work. In this case streetworking consists in offering aid wholeheartedly, with all the involvement, also emotional involvement. In this way offering support affects the subject that we serve. If we assume that I am a streetworker employed by a social aid institution and I carry out the task of a streetworker because it belongs to my duties, but I view the beneficiaries of the support with dislike, it may be assumed that my attitude towards the work is the same as to the person of the beneficiary. Streetworkers also have a number of tools they should use, so that their work has a real and appropriate dimension. In my opinion a volunteer more often works according to a definite plan, an individual one, also a plan for his own life, than many full time “helpers” employed by a social aid institution (here cases may be found of unwillingly done environmental social work). The work of a volunteer results from his inner need to help others, and is not treated just as a way of earning a living. This is why I do not agree to denying that the terms “a volunteer” and “a streetworker” are synonymous in the context of doing the environmental social work. My point of view is confirmed by the etymology of the word “volunteer” that comes from Latin. *Voluntas* may be translated as freedom of decision or as good will. Hence voluntary service means work done with good will, work that not everybody has to do. This definition em-

their work ethics and their attitude towards the people they help. The research that has been done omits detailed stat analysis in order to focus full attention to parameters and indicators of this particular social study. Because of this process we manage to obtain a vivid and true image of a streetworker's agenda.<sup>2</sup>

**Key words:** streetwork; homelessness; exclusion

## INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction into the content of the article streetworking should be referred to as a form of voluntary service performed most often in the most difficult circles of excluded or marginalized people. It is work that is done, as it were, outside the office; it consists in offering support to people who need it in their natural environment. This means really entering the environment of the aided person and establishing direct contact with them. The initiative of voluntary service is undertaken by young people who demonstrate the will to give help and to work in the field.

The base of the work of a streetworker, called a pedagogue of the street, is work in an environment that is close to the supported person. In this way the necessity to bring the beneficiaries to the place that offers them support,

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phasizes respect for the freedom of an individual, for his self-determination, his creativity and activity. See: Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and on Voluntary Service. In Art. 2 section 3 of the Act a volunteer is defined as a „physical person who voluntarily and without payment performs services according to the rules defined in the Act”. According to J. Grabias voluntary service is today „a form of building a conscious and open society in the sphere of counteracting all negative social phenomena”, so it is an activity with a prophylactic character. Reference to the idea of open society can be seen here, with perceiving voluntary service as a modern panacea that allows satisfying, among others, social needs. See: Joanna Grabias, *Wolontariat – praca społeczna alternatywą dla kary pozbawienia wolności*, in *Optymalizacja oddziaływań resocjalizacyjnych w Polsce i w niektórych krajach europejskich*, edited by Franciszek Kozaczuk (Rzeszów: Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, 2006), 211.

<sup>2</sup> Lack of a more profound analysis is the result of having too small a sample for the research, and so analysis with the use of Student's *t*-distribution test, chi-squared test, or testing the significance would not have much sense, and results of such analyses could not be extrapolated to a larger population. The study aimed at presenting a small but significant fragment of reality of supporting the homeless and it did not aspire to be a broad description of any population. Moreover, also the small scope of the article is a limitation for analyses carried out on small samples. See: A. Sokołowski, *O niewłaściwym stosowaniu metod statystycznych* (Kraków: Akademia Ekonomiczna w Krakowie, StatSoft Polska, 2013), 8-9, also: Janusz Wątroba, *Praktyczne aspekty szacowania liczebności próby w badaniach empirycznych* (Kraków: StatSoft Polska, 2013), 1-11.

or to persuade them to visit it, is avoided.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the Act on social aid of 12 March 2004 makes the use of services of social aid conditional upon the beneficiary's cooperation and activity. This has directed the work of institutions offering aid to increasing the client's activity and teaching him to become independent. The beneficiary (the homeless) now is not only a receiver of the offered aid, but he has become a partner in solving a difficult situation. An increase in subjectivity and partnership also means more responsibility for the undertaken actions. The aim of this approach is to enhance the inner motivation, and also to increase the efficiency of the actions undertaken by the homeless. In my opinion the need to educate the homeless occurs also here, as they are not only beneficiaries of support but first of all partners in the work that is done together.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the task of streetworking is to reach homeless people and to work with them, with the use of their resources and of the potential of the local environment; and this work aims at positive changes understood as the will to change the homeless person's way of life.<sup>5</sup>

Streetworkers' task is to identify the environment of homeless people (to define the places where they most often stay), to draw up characteristics of informal groups of the homeless paying special attention to sociodemography, and to define the threats occurring in the informal groups of the homeless (in the enclaves).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It should be agreed that streetworkers' activities are fairly differentiated with respect to the beneficiaries of their support. However, I think that in the environment of the homeless a streetworker also conducts a peculiar form of education, apart from direct support and often from saving the lives of the aided ones. The role of a pedagogue can be seen especially in the situation, when in extreme conditions threatening the life of a homeless person who is outside aid providing institutions (night shelters, hospices, warming centers), the threat to his health and life in the winter and low temperatures should be explained to him. In this case the work of a streetworker as a teacher may be many times more difficult than in the case of work with a group of young people or children of the street. Hence the thesis that a streetworker serving the homeless must be also a pedagogue.

<sup>4</sup> Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Aid, Government Regulations and Laws Gazette Nr 64, section 593, Art. 2, Art. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ewa Szczypior i Agnieszka Meller, *Standard Streetworkingu*, in *Podręcznik. Od ulicy do samodzielności życiowej. Standardy społecznej i zawodowej (re)integracji osób bezdomnych w sześciu sferach*, edited by Aleksandra Cenian-Dębska, Piotr Olech (Gdańsk: Pomorskie Forum na rzecz Wychodzenia z Bezdomności, 2008), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Łukasiewicz, *Eurobezdomność* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2013). See also: Roland Łukasiewicz, *Pod dachem Hiszpanii. Streetworking w enklawach polskich bezdomnych* (Lublin: KUL, 2012), <http://monar.info.pl/Article 178.html> [accessed: 3.03.2015].

Experience in the field of offering aid to the ones who need it, especially to the homeless, shows that among the people who accept aid there are mainly institutionalized homeless people (ones who already have a kind of shelter), who do not ask for aid, or do it sporadically, and often need aid more urgently than those who live e.g. in a night shelter or St Brother Albert's homes. Often it is not a physical thing that plays the role of support, but a simple conversation, a contact, giving information that there is someone in the world who can offer aid.

A streetworker's task in the place where the beneficiary stays is also to observe and thoroughly record everything about the environment (in this case the homeless people's one). Observation is focused on the personal changes of the groups (do new homeless people come, or do old ones disappear), on the mobility of the homeless and on the needs they declare. Streetworkers serving the homeless should be characterized by a special kind of psycho-physical competences, openness, they should easily establish contact, be perceptive and involved in their work. Special predispositions that streetworkers should show are the cause why it is a circle that is peculiar and at the same time relatively small.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted individually by the author owing to help given by the Open Doors Community within the project "Station Homelessness" and to his personal contacts with streetworkers.<sup>8</sup> In the study a survey was carried out of 30 streetworkers. The aim of the study was to define the

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<sup>7</sup> The competences of a streetworker serving the homeless include: resistance to stress, stamina, the ability to make decisions, the ability to establish a contact in a situation, when the place is e.g. a rubbish tip, the ability to establish, develop and maintain contacts, the ability to hold negotiations in stressing conditions, assertiveness, regularity, self-reliance, the ability to organize one's work, openness to others, emotional maturity, diligence and independence in acting, the ability to solve problems and to take efficient decisions, the ability to motivate others, the ability to cooperate. See: Anna Adamczyk, Lech Bór, Maciej Dębski, Michał Gawel, Adam Koszutowski, Aleksandra Łukasiewicz, Anna Michalska, Piotr Olech, Rafał Stenka, Benita Zychowicz, *Standard Streetworkingu*, in Łukasz Browarczyk i Rafał Stenka (ed.), *Model Gminny Standard Wychodzenia z Bezdomności* (Gdańsk: Pomorskie Forum na rzecz Wychodzenia z Bezdomności, 2012), 343.

<sup>8</sup> The project entitled *Zmniejszenie skali bezdomności na dworcach kolejowych oraz ich otoczeniu* (*Decreasing the range of homelessness in railway stations and their surroundings*) was realized by the Open Doors Community and was co-financed by the Ministry for Labor and Social Policies in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> June and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.

streetworkers' attitude towards their work, and this is why it was mainly focused on the problem of their approach to their work and their attitude to the homeless people they help. Also their assessment of the circle of the homeless and of the question of the homeless' attitude towards exiting homelessness was an important element of the study. Owing to the demographic data the characteristics of the streetworkers were also defined.

## 2. STREETWORKING – VOLUNTARY SERVICE OF SUPPORT

In Poland the method of streetworking is used by few organizations. However, the great value resulting from this method has been noticed. It is innovative because it immediately reaches the target groups. Streetworkers establish contacts with their charges in their own environment. They often work in the streets, railway stations, in parks, in allotments – anywhere where people who need aid stay.<sup>9</sup>

Streetworking is a relatively new method of social work (it is even said that it is one of the results of the changes that occur in the circles of social workers employed by the Municipal – or other – Centers of Social Aid). This new form of social work is done by people properly prepared for it and with homeless people staying in their environment, according to their rules, at their pace. Streetworking is a team work, and work with any charges is always individual. The innovative quality of this form of work is propagated as a method of efficient and effective aid offered to people living in non-residential quarters (stations, allotments, uninhabited houses or buildings).<sup>10</sup>

Despite the above opinion the ideas of streetworking may be found even in the 1930s, when they appeared in connection with the economic crisis in the United States of America, and in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were transferred from there to Western Europe. They were present in such organizations as: Detaches Youthwork in Great Britain, Street Corner Work in the Netherlands or Gassenarbeit in Switzerland. At the beginning they took care of young people who belonged to subcultures and of ones who took drugs.<sup>11</sup> With time their work was extended to other groups. “In literal

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<sup>9</sup> *Pomost. Pismo Samopomocy*. “O bezdomności, o lęku oraz informator o placówkach,” grudzień 2006, 216.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.wrotapomorza.pl/plsprawy\\_spoeczne/archiwum\\_aktualnosci/2007/agenda\\_1](http://www.wrotapomorza.pl/plsprawy_spoeczne/archiwum_aktualnosci/2007/agenda_1) [accessed: 3.03.2015].

<sup>11</sup> Łukasiewicz, *Pod dachem Hiszpanii*.

meaning streetworking is work in the street that is supposed to lead to establishing cooperation with people who need aid. It consists in building positive relations with them in order to win their confidence, which in consequence leads to resolving actual problems and to satisfying clearly defined needs.”<sup>12</sup>

Streetworking is a resultant of the *outreach* method (work done in the street, reaching out of), that is work beyond institutions, in the environment where the person to be aided stays.<sup>13</sup>

A streetworker does not meet the homeless at the office, he does not grant benefits, he does not give referrals to refuges or other institutions. A streetworker has the task of giving information to people who are excluded; the information that concern the possibilities to use aid. He does not make people use benefits by force, he does not force them to do anything. He simply furnishes information, he educates people.<sup>14</sup> Such a model of work in the field started to be introduced in European countries, among others in Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Germany, at the end of 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s.

The connection may be stressed here with the work of Yard pedagogy. The idea of this area of pedagogy is realized by the person of the pedagogue on three planes. The first one is concerned with an immediate pedagogical influence, the second one – with intra-group social engineering, and the third one – with the environmental lobbying.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the idea of this form of work could have arisen in the work of Monar. People working in the street acted outside the center, playing the role of consulting-information points. The main direction in their work was to motivate a potential charge, a beneficiary, to undergo residential treatment.<sup>16</sup> The program assumed that certain harmful social phenomena occur, like the use of drugs, sexual behaviors connected with the risk of contracting venereal diseases, or providing sexual services, that have lastingly been inscribed in our society<sup>17</sup>. It

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.ab.org.pl/e-przewodnik/fr\\_index.html](http://www.ab.org.pl/e-przewodnik/fr_index.html) [accessed: 3.03.2015]. See also: Tomasz Biernat, “Doświadczenia streetworkingu za granicą. Analiza czterech programów,” *Wychowanie Na Co Dzień* 2009, nr 3, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Szczypior i Meller, *Standard Streetworkingu*, 71.

<sup>14</sup> M. Kamiński, “Bezdomność trzeba rozumieć,” *Dziennik Stupski* 14.09.2007.

<sup>15</sup> Lesław Pytka, *Pedagogika resocjalizacyjna. Wybrane zagadnienia teoretyczne, diagnostyczne i metodyczne* (Warszawa: APS, 2000), 298.

<sup>16</sup> In 1996 in the Krakow Department of Monar realization was started of a street program based on the idea of harm reduction.

<sup>17</sup> Harm reduction is a program connected with the use of drugs, whose aim is to prevent the spreading of the HIV, HCV and other contagious diseases, as well as crime prevention.

obviously concerned the issue of dependencies, but it was noticed that it also fitted very well work with other circles of people who are excluded or marginalized.

One of the basic principles in the functioning of a streetworker is to support the beneficiaries, and also not to change the person whom he helps. A streetworker works mainly in order to help the aided person with resolving a definite problem in such a way that it can cause possibly the fewest side effects, and not to eliminate the problem completely. Such support in consequence should lead to the homeless person's reflection on his situation, and perhaps to an attempt to change his life. Thus a streetworker's task is not dragging a person by force out of a certain state, but winning his confidence and indicating the possible ways to him, so that he could return to the society. Hence a streetworker has to be communicative, comprehensible, worthy of being listened to, matter-of-fact and credible. Apart from this he has to have something to communicate to his charges besides a good word – sometimes some financial support, but also information concerning e.g. job offers, or directions to a place where he may obtain some target aid. If in the course of offering aid confidence is won, which is usually a very long process, a streetworker tries to talk and persuade such a person to change his present way of life. In the circle of streetworkers people may be encountered who used to live in the street themselves, and thanks to their perseverance and to the support from other people they exited homelessness and with their attitude they want to change the world they have left and to help others who cannot or do not want to exit it. A streetworker working in Świnoujście can be an example of such an attitude. Formally he is still a homeless person, but an institutionalized one, who wants to win “his own place in the world” with his own work.<sup>18</sup> The municipal authorities that struggle with the problem of the homeless have employed a streetworker to work full time; his task is to monitor the constantly changing circle of migrating homeless people.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The category of institutionalize homelessness includes homeless people who by definition belong to groups of homeless people, but they permanently stay in support centers, like St Brother Albert's Homes, shelters for homeless people, and also night shelters or warming centers. As out-of-institution homeless such people are defined who permanently stay at places that are not designed for residence, that is at shacks, railway stations, allotment cottages, rubbish tips, railway cars etc.

<sup>19</sup> The following models of work with the use of the method of streetworking may be distinguished: professional, self-help (persons who have finished the reintegration process and exited homelessness are streetworkers), mixed (a professional streetworker + a person who has exited homelessness). See: Adamczyk, Bór, Dębski, Gaweł, Koszutowski, Łukaszewicz, Michalska, Olech, Stenka, Zychowicz, *Standard Streetworkingu*, p. 343. Personally I would recognize one more model

Streetworking plays an important role in the issue of homelessness (it also concerns groups involved in prostitution, taking drugs and others). Volunteers do not cooperate with the police. They usually work in pairs. Patiently, slowly and systematically they reach people who need help.

Two forms of streetworking may be distinguished. The first of them is the professional work done by social workers who, apart from their obligatory work “at the desk” realize tasks in their charges’ environment. This concerns not only homeless people, but also ones who are poor, pathological families, single parents. The other form, one that is interesting from the point of view of the present article, is voluntary streetworking realized by volunteers in their work with the homeless. This form also occurs in other circles, e.g. in the groups involved in prostitution and drug addiction that were mentioned above.

### 3. THE CIRCLE OF STREETWORKERS

The method of streetworking allows increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of aid actions thanks to reaching people who are not embraced by support actions, and also thanks to giving information and including it in the system of social aid. Streetworking may be a method used not only by non-government support institutions, Municipal Centers of Social Aid or other Centers of Social Aid. This is also a perfect method of work for the police and City Guard.<sup>20</sup> Its special value is the use of the direct participation and observation in the circle of the beneficiaries of support. It is as if we used the method of participant observation in a social study. Indirectly we become participants in a definite circle. Winning confidence allows getting to know other participants more fully. This cannot be substituted by any survey or work at the desk. It is also a kind of monitoring of the beneficiaries of support, contributing to rational spending of financial means by social aid institutions,<sup>21</sup> which – as it is known – is not meaningless.

In the study 30 streetworkers took part – including 12 women and 18 men. In the sample there were mostly people aged between 30 and 36, then between 15 and 21, 22 and 29, and the smallest group was constituted by

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of voluntary service rendered by volunteers/streetworkers only: realizing the tasks of streetworking within one’s inner need to offer aid in associations or NGO’s supporting the homeless.

<sup>20</sup> *Katalog Rezultatów Inicjatywy Wspólnotowej EQUAL* (Warszawa: Fundacja „Fundusz Współpracy”, 2007), 54.

<sup>21</sup> [www.ab.org.pl](http://www.ab.org.pl) [accessed: 3.03.2015].



field workers 37 or more years old. Most streetworkers (29) came from a town with a population of more than 500 000. Streetworkers are a group of rather mature people that in their practical work often use the support of student-volunteers. Also the place where their work is done is not a surprise – it is a big city.<sup>22</sup> This is adequate to the places where homeless people stay, especially in the winter.<sup>23</sup> More than a half of the respondents declared that they had university education, 20% – high school education, 10% – basic vocational school education, and 10% – primary school education. More than a quarter of the studied sample are social workers, 30% of the surveyed people are students (first of all students of extramural studies). As far as profession is concerned 20% of the studied streetworkers are pedagogues and psychologists, and – which is very interesting – there is one car mechanic. A decided majority of streetworkers are single, and the remaining part are married. More than half of them have children. In a further part of the article a detailed characterization of the studied group is presented.

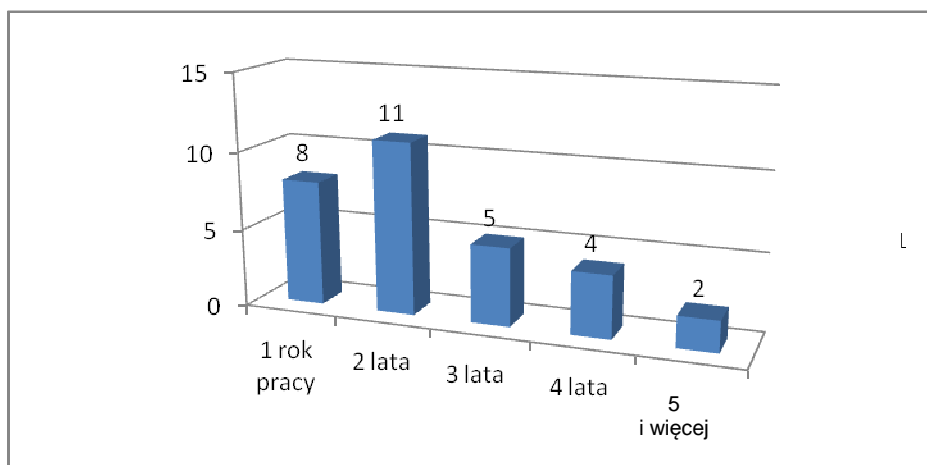


Figure 1. Work experience of the studied streetworkers

Source: The author's own study.

[1 year's experience; 2 years; 3 years; 4 years; 5 and more years]

<sup>22</sup> Homelessness is mainly a problem in big cities, because of the migration of homeless people to places where they may receive better support or where the range of support is wider. They are mainly big city agglomerations, or, as it is the case with Świnoujście, health resorts or holiday places, with the latter ones being rather places where homeless people stay in the summer.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Social Aid of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy. See also: [http://www.bratalbert.org/tl\\_files/brat\\_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/przymenski01.pdf](http://www.bratalbert.org/tl_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/przymenski01.pdf) [accessed: 15.02.2015].

On the basis of Figure 1 it may be stated that most respondents in the study do not have much experience, which results from their short period of work. Certainly by no means does this influence their professional experience. As streetworkers only two people have 5 or more years' experience, and 4 people – 4 years of work. As it was stressed above, a sociodemographic characterization of streetworkers has not been done yet and it is difficult to state if the small number of people with a long experience of the work is a result of studying a small group only, or if this is a form of voluntary work that selects streetworkers after some time. Selection may be due to the feeling of being tired of work in a definite environment, of work only in definite projects or of student voluntary service, which obviously most often ends with the end of the studies. The study shows a relatively short time of work in a definite role. The described places where streetworkers act can be generally termed as the beneficiaries' "natural" environment. The form of a streetworker's work, that is work outside an institution and in an environment where people who need help live, allows to be fairly flexible in one's activities, and to reach a wide range of people who need support and aid. In Poland, as opposed to other countries, in principle no state actions are taken that are directed to people who are homeless all year round.<sup>24</sup> Still, if such actions are taken, they only have the character of temporary, periodical aid. Support for the homeless is intensified, in the supporters' opinion, in the period that directly threatens the lives of homeless people. In difficult periods it is concentrated mainly in two kinds of space – generally in the street (meaning squats, parks, dunes, stair-cases etc.), and in the spaces of non-places.<sup>25</sup>

The next question streetworkers were asked was concerned with places where they mainly carry out their tasks. It has turned out that most of them work in the neighborhood of railway stations and in the very stations. However, the study, conducted in winter, was concerned generally with the realization of streetworkers' task, without taking into consideration the season of the year; and the experience of the behavior of homeless people may indicate that in the winter season they gather exactly in stations or in their neighbor-

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<sup>24</sup> The Chief Board of Supervision about state actions for the homeless see: Information about the results of the control, Actions of the public administration for the sake of the homeless, NIK KPS-4101-05-00/2013 nr. ewid. 20/2014/p/13/113/KPS2014. In this case only actions taken by non-government organizations as part of support programs party subsidized by the government may be taken into consideration. I personally think that even they are only temporary and they function intensively and permanently only in the time when they are subsidized. Most often they are concluded with a call for more lasting support within next programs or for permanent support.

<sup>25</sup> Roland Łukasiewicz, *Nie-miejsca bezdomnych emigrantów* (Kraków: UJ PAU, 2012).

hood, whereas in summer they stay elsewhere. This is confirmed, among others, by works by Andrzej Przymeński<sup>26</sup>. Conducting the study in another season could have given quite different results, but – as it was mentioned above – streetworking still focuses on seasons directly threatening the lives of homeless people.

Streetworking is an innovative method because unlike other methods it is characterized by the idea of directly reaching target groups. Streetworkers establish contact with their charges in their environment. Hence they work in the streets (30% of the surveyed streetworkers), railway stations and their neighborhoods (70% of the surveyed ones) – anywhere where people needing aid may stay (Figure 2).

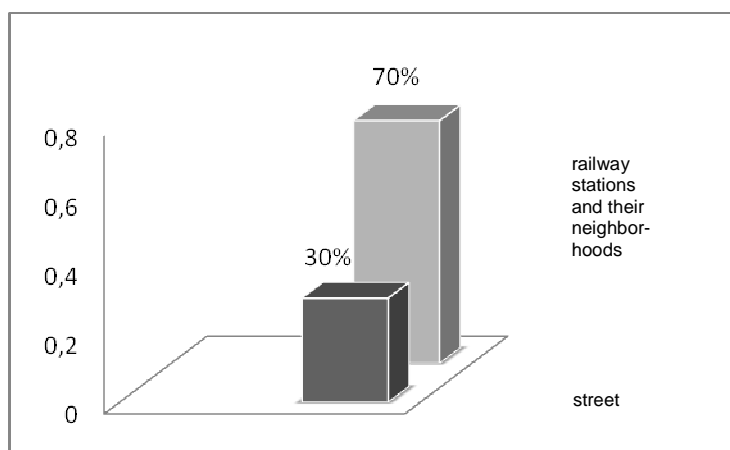


Figure 2. Where do you mainly carry out your tasks?

Source: The author's own study.

In the environment of people working in the street, in difficult groups of people who are excluded, often arguments and discussions happen about in what way work should be done, taking into consideration the issue of safety (see also the description of Figure 3). Usually the rule is kept to that a streetworker's work may not be done individually; it is not advisable that a worker should enter a circle of homeless people alone. Hence patrols of two people are used, or sometimes larger teams. In secluded, difficult places – a team of two, three people is indeed required (Figure 3). This is not because

<sup>26</sup> Andrzej Przymeński, "Geografia i skala zjawiska bezdomności w Polsce," *Roczniki Naukowe Caritas* 1 (1997). See also: Departament Pomocy Społecznej MPiPS 1998. See also: [http://www.brat.albert.org\\_files/brat\\_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/przymenski01.pdf](http://www.brat.albert.org_files/brat_albert/pdf/konferencja%202001/przymenski01.pdf) [accessed: 15.02.2015].

of the workers' safety, but also for the reason of generally understood support. It should be psychological, and often also physical, if we take into consideration the fact that it is not rare to offer direct aid to homeless people staying outside the centers. Streetworkers' place of work is first of all a city agglomeration. They work outside institutions, where they may meet homeless people. Most often they work in railway or bus stations, railway cars, railway sidings, station benches, waiting rooms in railway and bus stations; distribution centers of central heating systems, heating ducts; streets; bunkers; woods, parks, greens; shopping centers; crypts in cemeteries; staircases; chutes in blocks of flats; cellars, attics; warming centers; allotment gardens; car parks; abandoned cars; points where ATM's are placed.

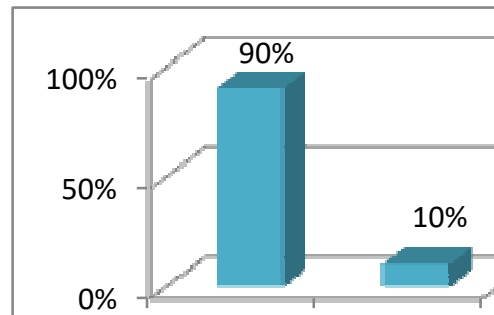


Figure 3. Work in a team

Source: The author's own study.

[yes; no]

A decided majority of the studied streetworkers work in a team. As it was mentioned above, such a form of work allows exchange of information, makes it possible to share observations and impressions connected with particular people and contacts. It gives a sense of safety when a new place is checked. It also gives a homeless person the possibility of choosing the worker with whom he or she wants to talk during a particular meeting.

In streetworkers' work teams do not include uniformed people, although a possibility of this kind of groups is not excluded. Most often uniformed people are members of teams if it is found that an environment is dangerous or when commissioned tasks are carried out, e.g. a yearly examination of the homeless. On the basis of studies it may be stated that a decided majority of the subjects do not receive support from uniformed services. Only 20% respondents say that they receive such support, and so uniformed people are sometimes included in the teams.

Another area of interest was the reason for having this – rather un-rewarding – occupation. The question was a multiple choice one with several possibilities to choose.

All the respondents indicated the willingness to offer help to people in need. The second most frequent reason was to gain new experience. As it can be seen, a decided majority of the studied streetworkers would like to do something good for the society – to decrease the range of homelessness. Such a form of work gives them satisfaction and fills their free time they would like to use in a positive way. A decided majority of streetworkers are satisfied with their work, only 10% indicates a different answer. Figure 5 shows answers to the question about satisfaction with the work they do (the respondents were asked if they feel satisfaction with the work they do). It is interesting that when asked the question from Figure 4, 50% of them indicated doing the work in order to get satisfaction. On the other hand when asked about getting satisfaction – 90% gave a positive answer, and 10% indicated a lack of satisfaction (Figure 5). Hence the question should be asked why they do it and why the work does not give them satisfaction.

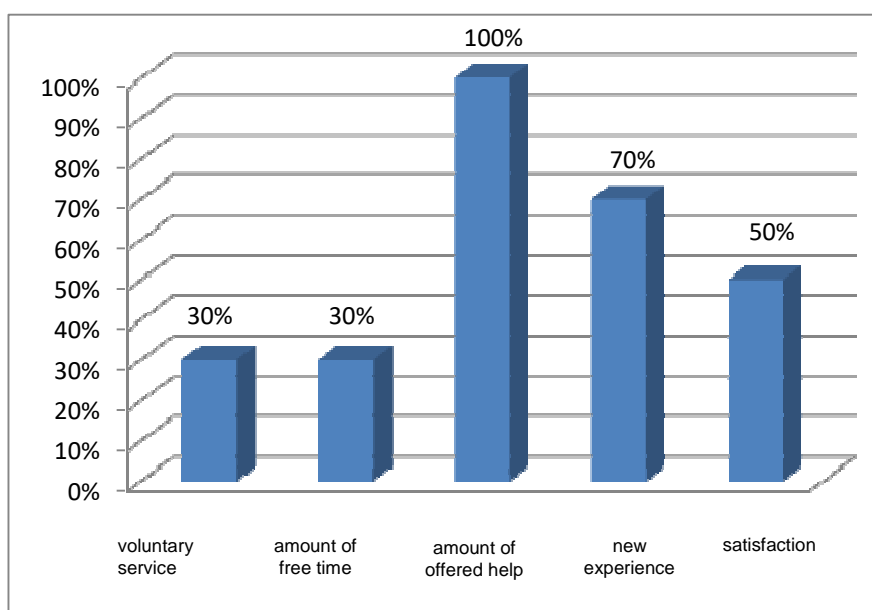


Figure 4. Reasons for choosing streetworking

Source: The author's own study.

Again I will refer to my own study experience, in which a lack of satisfaction with the work that one does may occur if the work does not give him the expected results. Most often those people are not satisfied who work for a long time and people working in support institutions who are “sent” to the street – it may be supposed that without their inner consent.

Streetworkers who declare that they get satisfaction say that they may test themselves in a new social work that was unknown until then. The work gives them a lot of knowledge about homelessness – about its causes, prophylaxis and kinds of aid offered by institutions. The subjects remarked that field work is also characterized by lack of monotony. Aid offered to others allows one to realize his own values of humanism, and in a way that suits the situation he can express them. Moreover, work in the circles of excluded people lets one gather new, interesting experience, both for the professional work (this concerns social workers), and for the studies – or just for oneself.

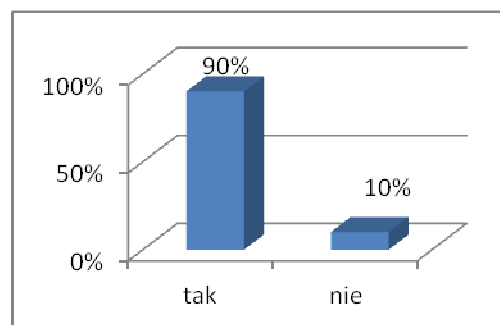


Figure 5. Satisfaction with the work

Source: The author's own study.

[ yes; no]

The respondents were asked to mention four things that they find offensive in their work with homeless people. These elements, which is worth stressing, are often the cause why streetworkers are discouraged from their work. The answers are presented in Figure 6.

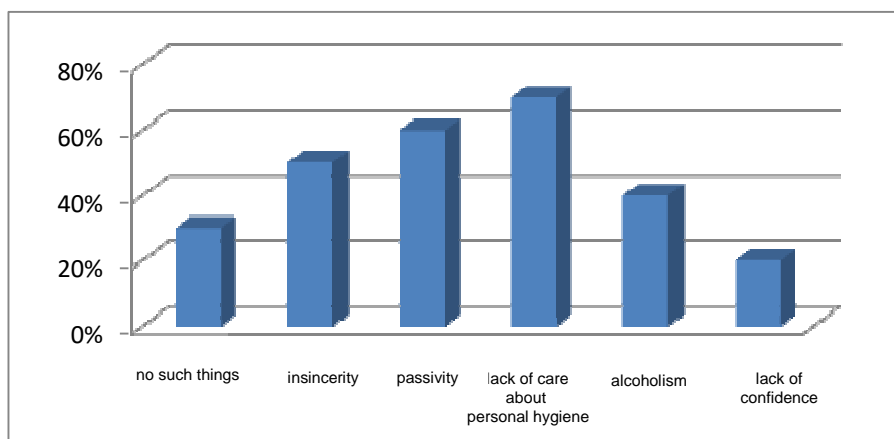


Figure 6. What discourages streetworkers from their work?

Source: The author's own study.

Few people stated that there are no offensive things in their work. For most respondents insincerity of homeless people, their lack of confidence in their own possibilities, lack of care about their personal hygiene and accepting their own addictions discourages them from this work. Statements shown in Figure 6 were the ones most frequently indicated by the respondents. As it can be seen, the most offending, and hence the most discouraging from the work, is lack of care about one's personal hygiene in homeless people.<sup>27</sup> Also passivity of the homeless puts one off, as the people, despite many efforts made by the volunteers, are as if deaf and blind to them; the same goes for their lack of sincerity. They often treat the offered support as something unnecessary, or indeed something that interferes with their lives. An example I have often quoted when describing the environment of social workers or of the homeless, is the answer given by one of the charges to the question why he does not work or even look for a job. He said that he had such an education that there was no job for him in Poland. When asked what his profession was, he answered: "a pearl diver". Such situations can hurt and discourage a worker, the more so because such a careless, or even frivolous

<sup>27</sup> In my studies for the habilitation thesis (in print) I created a special index of privation in the questionnaire, that took into consideration the issue of practicing hygiene by homeless people. From the research conducted for the thesis it has appeared that homeless people, even when they stay in support institution, e.g. in night shelters, have a significant problem with keeping clean. It is a factor that in a significant way deprecates them, and at the same time harms proper social relations. For obvious reasons abusing alcohol does not have to be mentioned here.

approach to a serious problem takes the space and time that should be given to those who really need support.

Discouragement is shown in Figure 7.

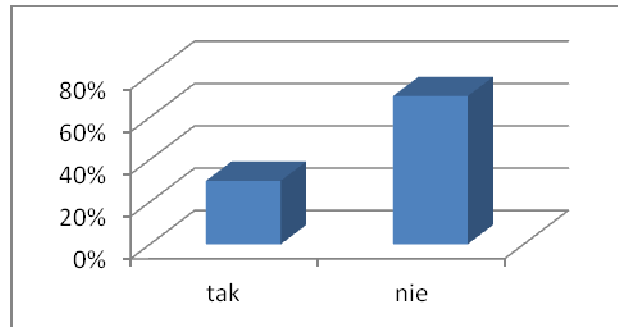


Figure 7. Factors discouraging streetworkers to do their job.  
[ yes, no]

Source: The author's own study.

On the basis of Figure 7 it may be stated that most subjects do not mention any elements that could discourage them from doing their work. One third of the respondents (30%) declaring that there are certain factors discouraging them from streetworking most often mention: lack of vacancies in the shelters, their helplessness when it comes to suggesting places where homeless people can find refuge, lack of cooperation and communication between particular institutions, their charges' indifference and helplessness in the situations when apart from a good word they cannot offer anything to their charges.

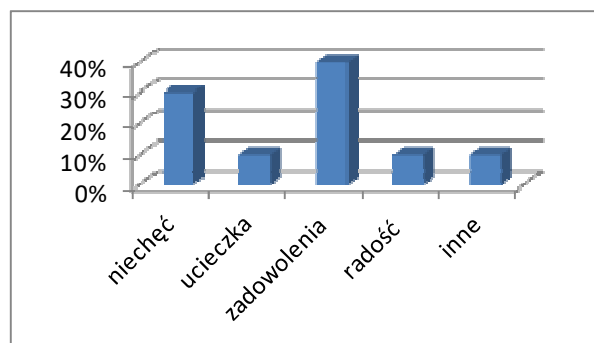


Figure 8. Homeless people's attitude towards streetworkers' actions

Source: The author's own study.

[niechęć – dislike; ucieczka – escape; zadowolenie – satisfaction; radość – joy; inne – other]



Answers to the questions about the charges' reactions to streetworkers' actions and to their presence in their environment (Figure 8) show that most respondents think that homeless people react to them with satisfaction. Unfortunately, a group that is not much smaller is made up by people who treat streetworkers with dislike. It may be indicated that dislike most often occurs at the beginning of work with a homeless person. It happens so because excluded people approach the offered aid with dislike and with a lack of trust, but with time they become glad about it. First of all a person who is offered aid has to feel support and acceptance of his decisions concerning his life from the streetworker. When the worker's intentions are positively interpreted the streetworker has a chance of establishing cooperation with the homeless person.

The respondents were also asked if the state should increase the level of support of homeless people. All of them gave positive answers and specified them by saying that the support should be constructive, not making the aided person lazy, and in this way they indicated that it is not the form of the distribution, but emotional support, help with finding a job, psychological aid etc. that can bring the expected results.<sup>28</sup> Figure 9 presents the most important, as indicated by the respondents, supporting actions: help in finding a job and in issuing relevant documents, building a greater number of shelters for the homeless, developing prophylactic work and long-term aid.

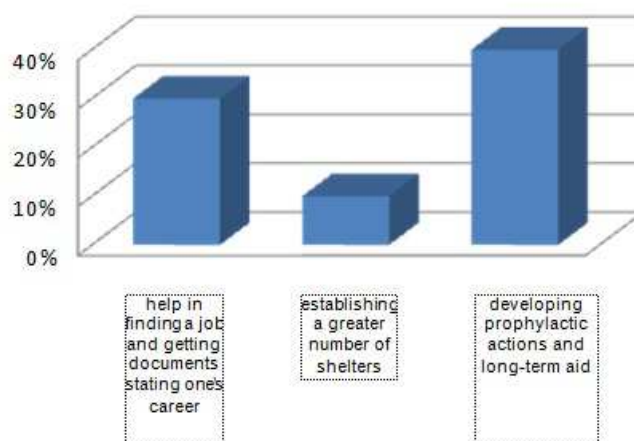


Figure 9. Forms of increasing the state's aid

Source: The author's own study.

<sup>28</sup> Roland Łukasiewicz, *Równouprawnienie i praca z człowiekiem wykluczonym na podstawie myśli korczakowskiej. Krytyka systemu wsparcia*, WSM [in print].

In his work a streetworker helps resolve individual and everyday problems that homeless people have; they are problems connected with health, psychological problems, or formal and legal ones. A field worker, thanks to his work, reaches people who up till that moment functioned outside any systems, that is, they did not figure in any registers, ones who often did not have their identity cards. The data streetworkers collect may be a valuable source in constructing social models of aid. They state that an institution, or one place, should be established where excluded people could receive support in the form of:

1. Helping to get the necessary documents or ones that have been lost (identity card, certificate prolonging the right to get a benefit, prolonging the certificate stating one's homelessness).
2. Helping with filling in documents, official letters (in some cases – a lawyer's help is necessary). It happens that help is needed with filling in documents, as in the circles of homeless people the index of loss of literacy is high).
3. Registration of homeless people.
4. Registration in the employment agency, helping to get the health insurance.
5. Aid of the general practice doctor.
6. Giving referrals to special medical treatment, psychological treatment, detoxification.
7. Giving referrals to particular night shelters or refuges (the need to build more such objects is connected with it).
8. Information about the rights and duties.

People working in the environment of homeless people stress the significant role of support and the necessity to broaden institutional work to bring the problem to a minimum. All the respondents have the same opinion, emphasizing that homelessness is one of the most dramatic manifestations of social exclusion and it is closely connected with poverty; and that is why the homeless need aid when they begin to live a normal life. The problem of homelessness is a global one. Many countries struggle with it, particularly in the recent decade, and the stress is on the factor of the economic crisis of 2008, when hundreds of thousands of people were turned out on the street. Each country deals with the problem in its own way. An example of the way in which homelessness can be dealt with is the Marseille way of tagging homeless people with a health badge in the form of a yellow triangle. The French originators of the idea justify their decision with the possibility to quickly give the homeless person medical aid when his or her situation

threatens their lives, and when contact with them is limited because of their disease or due to their being under the influence of alcohol. A yellow card is supposed to carry vital medical information about the homeless person's diseases and to allow emergency services to treat him more effectively. The idea was immediately criticized by the homeless themselves, and also by organizations supporting them. The voices opposing the badges stress stigmatization of the excluded people. Moreover, it has been recognized that the yellow color is associated with the Holocaust. The Marseille authorities were not discouraged, however, and they sustained their decision, changing only the color of the badge. But the problem seems to be not so much in the tagging itself, as in using the sensitive data concerning the age, state of health (e.g. HIV carriers) or their bad habits<sup>29</sup>. Homeless people will be cruelly stigmatized in such a situation.

The respondents were also asked about this, rather controversial, method of dealing the problem of homelessness (Figure 10).

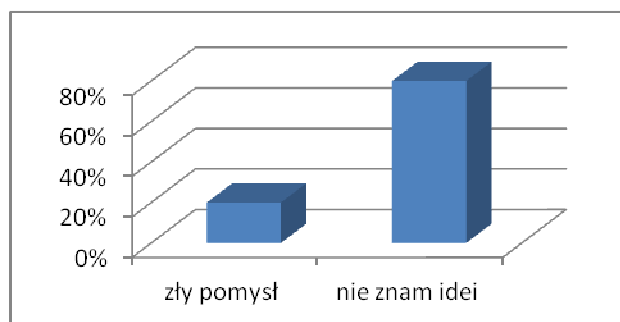


Figure 10. Tagging homeless people

Source: The author's own study.

[zły pomysł – bad idea; nie znam idei – I do not know the idea]

Among the respondents 20% stated that it is a bad idea. A decided majority of the streetworkers admitted that they did not know the whole of the French idea. A suspicion arises which is my own a reflection based on the experience of the studied circle. It seems important that people supporting the homeless should have a broad knowledge of the issue within which they act. Such knowledge in a significant way may increase the quality of the of-

<sup>29</sup> Roland Łukasiewicz, "Prawa człowieka w kontekście wykluczenia społecznego osób bezdomnych," in *Prawa człowieka fundamentem Europy. Wartości*, edited by Cezary Szyjko (Warszawa: Biblioteka Naukowa Klubu Integracji Europejskiej, Wydawnictwo M.M., 2014).

ferred aid. I think that streetworkers should be familiar with such ideas as the French one.

In this way the main point of the study has been transferred to the streetworkers' knowledge concerning the circles of the homeless, or more precisely, concerning what homeless people are afraid of (Figure 11).

The respondents found it hard to answer this question because these are quite individual problems. It follows from their observations and statements that in the first contact these are essential questions concerning the problems of the cold, of lack of shelter. This, in turn, is connected with the fear of death. People who have a criminal record are afraid of uniformed services and of the consequences of the past. Excluded people are also afraid of loneliness and responsibility. This is typical of a relatively big group of homeless people.

A similar question that checked streetworkers' knowledge of the circle was the question concerning homeless people's expectations (Figure 12).

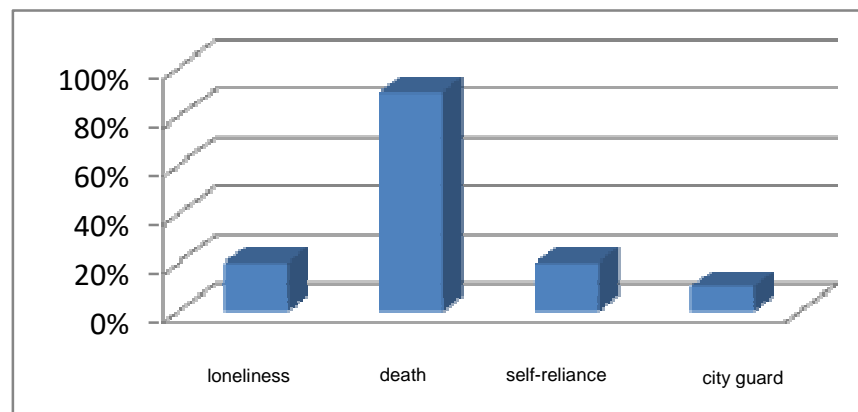


Figure 11. What are homeless people afraid of in the streetworkers' opinion?

Source: The author's own study.

According to the respondents homeless people expect constant aid, psychological support as well as repairing their lives. What is typical, they often think (blaming also others for the state they are in) that somebody else should take care of finding a remedy for their homelessness, e.g. the state administration or people the homeless blame for their situation.

Finally the streetworkers were asked to give their opinion on the question if homeless people want to exit homelessness (Figure 13).

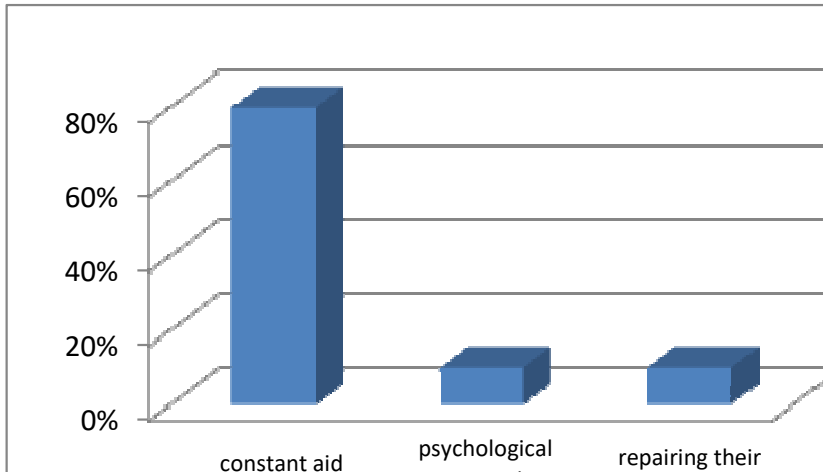


Figure 12. What do homeless people expect?

Source: The author's own study.

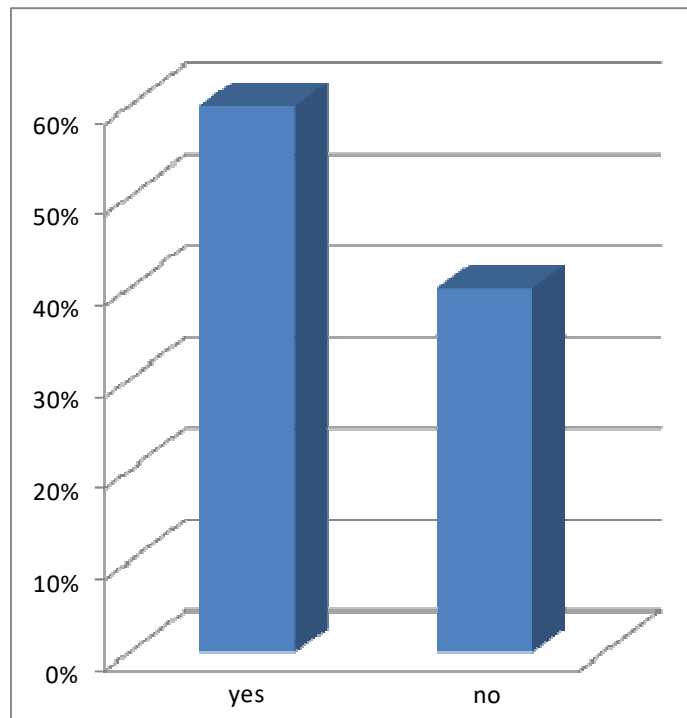


Figure 13. The willingness to exit homelessness

Source: The author's own study.

More than a half of the surveyed streetworkers say that homeless people want to exit homelessness, whereas 40% – that they do not want to change their state of exclusion from social life. Studying streetworkers' opinions partly confirm the result of the study carried out in the very environment, the difference being that asking homeless people about their willingness to exit homelessness shows that unwillingness to exit homelessness is greater.

However, the declarative character of the answers should be taken into consideration, for often the declaration of willingness is different from homeless people's actions that verify their answers, for they would rather use a broad range of support, and not make efforts to change of their status. Hence the question is important about the things that hamper exiting homelessness (Figure 14).

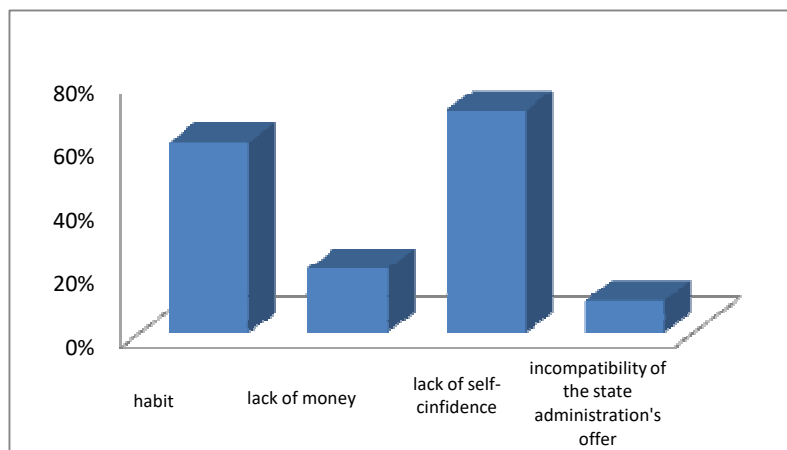


Figure 14. Obstacles to exiting homelessness

Source: The author's own study.

On the basis of Figure 14 it may be stated that homeless people lack the faith in their own strength. Also alcoholism is a hindrance. However, streetworkers emphasize that alcoholism is not the cause of homelessness, but one of the factors that accompany it. Winter is the most difficult time for them, because season jobs are no longer available and it is harder to find a temporary job.

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## CONCLUSION

Streetworkers in their work, because of its isolation, often become people initiating the process of building a homeless person's trust in the whole system of institutional aid, and this is why they are always obliged to have current knowledge of the homeless' rights and they should keep raising their qualifications.

One of the streetworker's basic tasks is to awaken in a homeless person his needs and to make him realize them, and then to initiate a change from the perspective of "here and now" to thinking about the future. A streetworker has to be conscious of the fact that the efficient cause that can better the life of a homeless person should come from the person himself.

The main advantage of the work of a streetworker is that it makes it easier to get to know the circles of homeless people and to quickly react to their particular needs. Monitoring systematically non-residential places, which is done by streetworkers, allows more and more homeless people who stay outside any institutions to be under some kind of control, thank to which it is easier to prevent situations that threaten their health and life.

Streetworkers' constant presence in the environment of the homeless makes it possible to plan adequate means and forms of aid for them. Exiting homelessness is a long and often frustrating process. Fortunately, there are people who try to help to secure at least basic conditions of existence for the homeless.

Streetworking is an expression of opposition to social marginalization; ultimately it may lead to exiting homelessness, or at least contribute to social reintegration of homeless people. Apart from that more homeless people who live outside any institutions are under control, thanks to which it is easier to prevent situations threatening their health and life. Streetworking also contributes to an increase in the feeling of security in public places, owing to the streetworkers actions. They consist in cooperating with centers of social aid in referring homeless people who stay in non-residential places to specialist institutions. It is also "familiarizing" people with the fact that there are specialists who have proper tools for work with homeless people and who are able to offer help immediately when a need arises.

Streetworking is the taking of actions directed to challenging the negative stereotype of homeless people in the society through the fact that a group of people have appeared who offer help to inhabitants of public spaces, and who are a tool for propagating the idea of aiding people who need it.

The study of people dealing with the problem of homelessness had a character of a short reconnaissance in the environment that is very significant for supporting this extreme form of exclusion. Carrying out this form of mini-study has not resulted in describing the whole society in detail, but it decidedly has demonstrated the necessity to broaden the range of diagnosing this social group, including the use of their knowledge of the homeless.

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