

**2018-2019: „Victimisation of homeless people in Poland“; principal investigator: prof. dr Witold Klaus**

**Descrpton of the project:**

### **Victimisation of Homeless People in Poland**

Victimisation is not equally spread among all members of the society. Some groups are more exposed to the risk of becoming a victim of crime than others. And, conversely, some groups can feel safer. Criminological research shows that poor and socially excluded members of the community experience criminal activities and violence much more often than an average member of the society. But the most vulnerable group are the homeless and especially rough sleepers.

In research conducted in a number of countries academics have found that when compared to the averaged member of the society homeless people are 15 times more exposed to the risk of being robbed, and 35 times more to physical harm as result of being beaten. Generally, more than 80% of the population have been victimised during their life on the street, and for most of them it's not an unique experience, but rather an everyday part of their lives (Ballintyne 1999, Gaetz 2004, Jasinski i in. 2005, Grover 2008, Sanders i Albanese 2016).

The project constitutes the first research on victimisation and exposition to violence among homeless people in Poland. It contained 21 in-depth interviews with experts working with homeless and 37 interviews with homeless people themselves, including 13 interviews with representatives of Romanian Roma community. All interviewees were asked about: the types of violence and victimisation that homeless people experience during their lives on the street, their perception of those acts and exposition to them, perpetrators of those acts, and survival and protection strategies that homeless people undertake to increase the level and the feeling of safety. In addition, interviews covered questions of support services and their providers that should and could protect the homeless from victimisation and violence.

The research was quantitative, so it's impossible to present the scale of the phenomenon of victimisation of homeless in Poland based on it. However, the findings strongly indicate that violence is an everyday and constant experience of the representatives of the group. And yet this phenomenon is somehow not noticed by the providers of support services – most of the experts in my study declared that they gave any thought to this topic for the first time .

When it comes to the forms of violence that homeless in Poland usually experience, in most cases it's verbal and symbolic violence (exclusion from the public or semi-public space, lack of support, support that jeopardises human dignity). Physical violence is much more rare. The reason behind this is that in Poland the homeless are rather absent in the public sphere – or, to be more precise, are practically invisible for onlookers. This doesn't apply to the Romanian Roma community. Most of them beg for a living, and because of that they are present and highly visible on the streets. And they are exposed to different forms of violence to a much bigger extent. In the case of the Romanian Roma we could talk about intersectional violence – caused by their extreme poverty and their ethnicity.

Homeless women are in a particularly vulnerable situation as well. Despite the fact that the number of women living on the streets is not so high (they account for about 20% of the all homeless population) they are exposed to physical and sexual violence to a large extent. Most of the harm and exploitation they experience is caused by men. Another important fact is that that most of the perpetrators are 'normal', average members of the society – not other homeless individuals or criminals.

The research contributes to the development of victimology in Poland. This discipline lacks empirical research, especially when it comes to victims of marginalised communities, and when the research focuses on bringing victims' perspectives to the public.

