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Experiences and Strategies of Women Affected by Street Homelessness in Zagreb

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ABSTRACT

NGOs and those working with people experiencing homelessness often suggest that homelessness is less common among women than men, which is confirmed by the available statistics. The literature shows that women are particularly vulnerable in terms of pathways to homelessness, especially in the context of numerous structural and social barriers that affect women in society. Women's experiences of homelessness differ from men's, reflecting broader gender inequalities. Life on the street presents many dangers and constant challenges to meet basic needs. Using public spaces is particularly challenging for homeless women, both because of their homeless status and because they are women. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse women's experiences of street homelessness in Zagreb, show its specific features, and identify their strategies in situations permeated with various forms of exclusion. For this purpose, ten interviews with six women with experience of street homelessness in Zagreb were analysed, as well as field notes, which are part of a wider qualitative research project. The paper presents the experiences and challenges of life on the street, which include feelings of insecurity and fear, unmet health needs, violence and sexual harassment, exclusion from public spaces, and strategies related to hiding, finding a partner/grouping, and distancing from unwanted identities. The paper points to the importance of recognising the severity and scope of the problem of homelessness, especially female homelessness, and the necessity of further research that includes gender dimensions and specific features of the problem.

Key words: street homelessness, women, invisibility, strategies

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1. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is on the rise across the world and in Croatia. FEANTSA[1] highlights that homelessness is increasing in all EU countries and has reached record-breaking figures in almost all member states in recent years (FEANTSA, 2017). The Croatian public and academic community have begun to approach homelessness, which had hitherto been largely neglected and downplayed, as a significant social problem only in the last ten to fifteen years. Thus, Bežovan (2019) points out that the issue of homelessness in Croatia was recognised as a legitimate and complex problem only in the context of a change in social policy as part of accession to the European Union.

The definition of homelessness was included in the Social Welfare Act only in 2011, referring only to "roofless" persons. Therefore, official estimates of the number of homeless people in Croatia do not reflect the extent of the problem. Official statistics on homelessness in Croatia, based on the number of people accommodated in shelters, count approximately 500 people, while the number of street homeless people is unknown (The Republic of Croatia Annual Statistical Report for 2020, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, 2021). The Croatian Homeless Network, on the other hand, estimates that around 2,200 people in Croatia are facing absolute homelessness ("rooflessness"). If the estimates were to include all categories of homeless persons according to the ETHOS typology[2], that figure would amount to 10,000 (Croatian Homeless Network, 2021).

The Croatian Homeless Network also points out that, for the sake of better chances of survival (e.g. more accessible services), the majority of homeless people migrate to larger cities, especially Zagreb. This form of migration is also driven by the fact that, despite the legal obligation, ten Croatian counties have not ensured adequate care (Šikić-Mićanović, Sakić and Stelko, 2020). Two shelters near Zagreb and one monastery in Zagreb that offers a place to sleep do not meet the capacities required to accommodate so many people. On top of these issues, homeless people face other administrative barriers which prevent them from accessing social services. Therefore, many of them are forced to live on the streets in the absence of other options.

Besides, despite the prevailing view that the majority of homeless people are men, which will be discussed later in the paper, civil society associations dealing

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1 The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (*Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri* – FEANTSA) is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1989 with the aim of researching the phenomenon of homelessness in Europe and combating homelessness and social exclusion.

2 The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, developed by FEANTSA, identifies four basic concepts of homelessness with regard to the living situation: rooflessness, houselessness (being without a house or an apartment), insecure housing and inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2005).

with homelessness warn of an increasing number of homeless women (Perković Rosan, 2020).

The literature – feminist, urbanist and geographical, as well as that focusing on homelessness research – points to the greater vulnerability of women at all stages of the pathway to homelessness and to numerous differences between homeless men and women. When faced with street homelessness, women in particular encounter multiple exclusions. Street life often abounds with various dangers, extremely poor conditions and constant difficulties in meeting basic needs such as shelter, food, water, clothing, healthcare and many others. All these challenges are further aggravated by various structural and social barriers that particularly affect women, including challenges caused by poverty, inadequate accommodation options, stigmatisation, discrimination, marginalisation, violence, unemployment, health issues and difficulties in accessing healthcare services, criminalisation, social exclusion and loss of rights (Cauce et al., 2000).

The following section of this paper will briefly present some previous research on gender differences in the causes and experiences of homelessness and the invisibility of homeless women. Then, the main body of the paper will focus on the study results: in order to identify key challenges and experiences of women who had experienced street homelessness in Zagreb in the past or at the time of the interview, as well as their survival strategies in circumstances of multiple exclusion, interviews with six women were conducted and analysed together with field work notes. The first part will address the use (or lack thereof) of accommodation services by women with street homelessness experience and the interpretation of their experiences, challenges and strategies for dealing with them as forms of resistance and in the context of gender-related specificities.

2. HOMELESSNESS RESEARCH IN CROATIA

The phenomenon of homelessness is under-researched in Croatia, with insufficient studies on its various aspects and manifestations. Research including a gender perspective is particularly lacking. Previous research has mainly focused on the demographic description of that group as well as on the analysis of the causes and reasons why people end up homeless, or their pathways to homelessness.

Thus, a study by the United Nations Development Programme (Aguado Asenjo et al., 2006) showed that in Croatia, as in other post-transition countries, the key cause of homelessness was a high unemployment rate, as well as the inability to pay housing costs. Mlinar and Vidić (2013) identified differences between the profiles of homeless people in Croatia today and those who were homeless in the early 1990s. They argue that people facing homelessness today are mostly unemployed young people of working age or older working-age people awaiting retirement. Among them are also mentally ill and older people (whom the system does

not help either by providing or facilitating accommodation in a pensioner's home or in foster families). Other groups at risk of homelessness are families with children (where parents are afraid of being separated from their children due to the inability to ensure adequate conditions for the children's development and life), young people who have left institutional forms of care, people with intellectual disabilities, veterans and other groups of social welfare beneficiaries (Mlinar and Vidić, 2013).

In most studies of homelessness in Croatia, the samples included significantly more men than women (e.g. the first comprehensive study of homelessness in Croatia conducted by Družić Ljubotina, Kletečki Radović and Ogresta in 2016 included 80.8% of men and only 19.2% of women). Only one study in Croatia dealt specifically with women's experience of homelessness: "Homelessness from a gender perspective" (Šikić-Mićanović and Geiger Zeman, 2011), which included women from fourteen Croatian homeless shelters. The results show that women are particularly vulnerable because they have to struggle with discriminatory and subjugating practices. The authors conclude that, "while both women and men are affected by unemployment, low incomes, as well as inadequate social care and housing in Croatia (all factors that can eventually lead to homelessness), women additionally have to struggle with discriminatory social practices, violence as well as with the traditional responsibility of caring for children" (Šikić-Mićanović and Geiger Zeman, 2011: 254).

It can be concluded that the phenomenon of homelessness is under-researched in Croatia and that there is a lack of studies that would cover the various forms and manifestations of homelessness, from people who are at risk of homelessness to those facing the most severe forms of street homelessness. There is a need for longer-term and more comprehensive research (which can track the process and the pathways of people into and through homelessness and thus provide a more complete picture). Most of the authors who have dealt with this topic point to the importance of additional research into the phenomenon in order to better understand its various dimensions. In Croatia, there is a particular lack of research on women's experiences and specificities, and there has been no research that would address the experience of street homelessness among women, which is the purpose of this paper.

3. WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF AND PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS

Since the 1970s, a period until which the phenomenon of women's homelessness had been largely neglected in the world scholarly literature (Parsell, 2010), numerous studies on the female experience of homelessness have shed light on women's unfavourable and subordinate position.

In their study, Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006) showed that the experiences that most often lead to homelessness among women include sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment and family problems, "maternal trauma" (reproductive health issues, loss of children), enduring violence and death of a spouse. The author stresses that all these issues are not specific to women, but are gender-related: they are more often experienced by women or women experience them differently (the "maternal trauma").

Reeve (2018) also stresses that women's homelessness may be understood in the context of the sexual division of labour that produces and reproduces inequality and disadvantage in the labour market (Tessler, Rhinenheck and Gamache, 2016), but also a distinctive relationship with the home and non-domestic space (McCarthy, 2017; Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Watson and Austerberry, 1986, cited in Reeve, 2018). Women are, therefore, at particular risk of homelessness, face specific barriers to resolving their housing crises, the loss of home may have profound implications for their identity, and they are more likely to be perceived as transgressive (i.e. of gender norms) or deviant (Reeve, 2018).

Authors have also identified some of the key differences between men and women in their experiences of homelessness. Meanwell (2012) states that women are more likely to be single mothers with children, which is much less common among men. They often lose custody or give their children up for adoption. While homeless men frequently face physical violence, homeless women experience it more often than men, especially sexual harassment and assault (Jasinski et al., 2010). Women are also more likely to have unmet health needs (Lewis, Andersen, and Gelberg, 2003). While both homeless men and women suffer from unmet needs, women's needs are of a different nature, particularly given the lack of privacy, the inability to maintain personal hygiene and access healthcare, especially when they are menstruating or are pregnant. Furthermore, authors report a greater sense of precariousness and fear among homeless women (Dordick 1997, cited in Meanwell, 2012). On the other hand, some studies show that men face more difficulties in reaching shelters and obtaining social assistance than women (especially compared to women who have children). This trend is considered to be linked to ideas about gender, to addiction problems being more common among men, and to high levels of chronic homelessness among men (Burt and Cohen 1989; Passaro 1996, cited in Meanwell, 2012).

The results of the study conducted on homeless women in Croatia (Šikić-Mićanović and Geiger Zeman, 2011) point to frustration and feelings of abandonment, exclusion and isolation, as well as complete distrust in institutions and the social welfare system (Šikić-Mićanović and Geiger Zeman, 2011).

4. INVISIBILITY OF HOMELESS WOMEN

When it comes to popular views of homelessness, one usually imagines an older, bearded and dirty man, or a "panhandler" (Radley et al., 2006). While the image of a woman sometimes appears in popular culture, it is less common and mostly limited to the image of an older woman or a vulnerable little girl. Such views of homelessness, as well as measurements and statistics which mostly suggest that two-thirds of the homeless are men, could create the impression that women's homelessness is much less present. On the other hand, many of the aforementioned phenomena indicate greater vulnerability and more risks among women. Why is it that women, although at greater risk, are often neglected in discussions of homelessness?

Although it is not clear at first glance, women's homelessness is widely present. However, due to several intertwined factors relating to gender specificities, inequalities and associated dangers, homeless women are largely invisible and have been neglected in the literature for a long time. According to Watson (2000), it is impossible to analyse women's homelessness without recognising the interconnections between three inseparable layers: visibility/invisibility, estimated significance of the problem and its definition. On the one hand, the invisibility of women in measurements and statistics is due to the definitions of homelessness, the ways in which homelessness is measured, the specific dangers faced by women, and the differences in the ways in which homeless women support themselves and adapt to life in homelessness, which is also linked to broader gender differences and inequalities. For example, if homelessness is defined (as, for example, in Croatia)[3] as being "roofless" or as the homelessness of single people, referring exclusively to the male gender, then women's homelessness (homeless women are more often accompanied by children, staying on the "couches" of relatives and friends, etc.), becomes invisible, statistically non-existent and underestimated (Baptista, 2010). Baptista suggests that the reason for this invisibility may also be sought in the fact that women and their children are seen as "fragile" families and therefore are concealed by welfare systems. In the literature, the invisibility of homeless women is also associated with the traditional attitude towards women on the streets. May, Cloke and Johnsen (2007) recount that, historically, one response to the unaccommodated woman was to rename her, describing how, in 19th-century Britain, ac-

[3] In Croatia, the definition of homelessness was included in the law only in 2011, in Article 4.13 of the Social Welfare Act, but in a very narrow form that only refers to "roofless" persons. The problem of defining homelessness is clearly presented in the literature. The definitions are diverse and include, apart from obvious homelessness, hidden or latent homelessness of people who live in inadequate and precarious conditions, as well as the most widespread category, those who are at risk of homelessness. Depending on the definition of homelessness, the figures for homeless people are also estimated, and considering the very narrow definition of homelessness in Croatia, official estimates are also inadequate and mainly based on the capacities of shelters and overnight shelters.

counts of women's homelessness were inextricably bound up with prostitution: in this way, women's homelessness provoked peculiarly repressive responses, while the true problem it posed was underestimated.

5. EXCLUSION OF HOMELESS WOMEN FROM PUBLIC SPACES

The exclusion of women from public spaces is often implied in scholarly literature and women's geographies of homelessness are mostly associated with institutional and private spaces. For a long time, it was a common opinion that "women are much less likely than men to sleep rough, or in public places" (Smith, 2005: 143).

There are several reasons for the lower presence of homeless women on the streets. First of all, numerous studies show that women face greater danger in public spaces and that their use of those spaces is shaped primarily by gender restrictions (Day, 2000). Sleeping rough is particularly challenging for women not only because of the greater risk of sexual violence and abuse, but also for hygienic reasons, such as maintaining hygiene during menstruation, which is also a method of self-protection (Smith, 1999). Women may remain hidden because they seek to avoid the increased risks of staying on the streets or in shelters, or because they have managed to secure an alternative housing solution (such as living with family or friends) (Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen 2006; May et al., 2007). Some of the reasons include the specific stigma attached to women living on the streets. Casey, Goudie and Reeve (2008) explain the stigma by referring to women's specific relationship to the home, which is a product of gender experiences and arises from the "separation of spheres" ideal, a Victorian concept that delineated private, domestic spaces for women, while public spaces and activities were the domain of men. Watson explains how, by sleeping rough, a woman seriously disrupts the boundary between private and public, whereby the private, associated with femininity, domesticity and sexuality, passes into the public in a disruptive and threatening way (Watson, 1999). Despite the many ways women enter the public space, this ideology still shapes women's daily lives and social expectations about women's habits and behaviour (Kemp, 2001).

Furthermore, a considerable amount of literature dealing with urban homelessness points to the general exclusion of homeless people; increased control of public urban spaces, including increased police surveillance, and regulation/criminalisation, which lead to the spatial exclusion of homeless persons in European cities (Doherty et al., 2008; Busch-Geertsema, 2006). Homeless people are most often pushed to the outskirts of cities, to places where they are tolerated or where marginalised groups are "expected to stay". From this perspective, homeless women will be invisible in public spaces because their use of those spaces is limited because of their homelessness (not only because of their gender) (Casey et

al., 2008). While this does not explain the differences in visibility between men and women, the general exclusion of homeless people from public spaces is a factor worth mentioning. Therefore, homeless women are excluded from public spaces both because they are homeless and because they are women.

On the other hand, several authors have also questioned the prevailing opinion about the scope of women's presence in visible homelessness. In their research, Casey et al. (2008) have shown that women frequently use public spaces to meet their own needs. Kesia Reeve (2018) has shown that many women sleep rough – her research indicates that 62 per cent of the 144 (single) homeless women surveyed had slept on the street, which she confirmed in other studies of homelessness in Australia (Reeve et al., 2009, Reeve and Batty, 2011).

5.1. Strategies employed by street homeless women

Some authors suggest that the strategies of street homeless women are different than those employed by homeless men, often aimed at living in the shadows and concealing one's state of homelessness.

Women in public spaces employ strategies of invisibility, such as sleeping in sites that are hidden from view, or remaining in plain sight but disguising their homelessness status (Reeve, 2018). They do so because they are less safe on the streets, which is a result of patriarchal power structures and associated cultural imagery that renders them vulnerable (Reeve, 2018). Discussing the body of a homeless person, Julia Wardhaugh (1999) argues that, in the absence of a home, the body, which she calls the "second skin" becomes extremely important and the first line of defence against a dangerous world. She claims that homeless people respond to the loss of their homes and the vulnerability associated with homelessness in two ways: by shrinking or expanding their bodies, which is a largely gendered process. Shrinking one's body, which the author associates with homeless women, implies efforts to avoid the stigma associated with visible homelessness and the risks of physical assault by hiding from public view, avoiding public spaces and shaping spaces for oneself in the interstices of the city, ultimately withdrawing "into one's own skin" – withdrawing into oneself and refraining from sharing personal information. On the other hand, homeless men can deal with the situation by expanding their space, by claiming a certain space (the streets), thus expanding the boundaries of their body – and then defending them with physical violence, protecting the space they consider their own and call their home (Wardhaugh, 1999). According to Wardhaugh, this is why homeless women live in the shadows, on the edges of male-dominated streets, rarely engaging in activities that would make it obvious that they are homeless.

According to Casey et al. (2008), roofless women living in public spaces challenge the norms that govern their use of public space merely by being in it; precise-

ly by being active in it – the authors perceive this as a form of resistance, because they are not passively accepting gender norms and expectations concerning spatial belonging, but violate and challenge them.

Relying on previous insights about the differences in how men and women survive in the circumstances of street homelessness, the remainder of this paper focuses precisely on understanding the strategies of women with experience of street homelessness in Zagreb. By observing their strategies, the aim is to understand the specific features of their experiences, gain insight into the gender dimensions of street homelessness, and examine various forms of their action and resistance.

6. METHODOLOGY

Given the rarity of research on homelessness in the Croatian context, especially the absence of research dealing with the experience of women's street homelessness, this paper aims to analyse women's experiences of street homelessness in Zagreb and to identify and analyse the strategies women use to cope with various forms of exclusion.

The paper does not estimate the number of women living on the streets in Zagreb, nor does it contribute to discussions on how many women are affected by street homelessness, but rather sheds light on the experience of those women who live in urban public spaces[4]. Therefore, the paper asks the following research questions: how did women who had/have the experience of street homelessness use the city's public spaces and what are their experiences and challenges relating to living homeless on the streets? What are the strategies women employ to cope with living homeless in the streets of Zagreb?

The paper is part of a broader study within the CSRP[5] project, which includes the implementation of qualitative research based on the methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and walk-along interviews with homeless people in order to explore homelessness and pathways to social inclusion.

The ethnographic approach and method enable the development of relationships and trust with the participants, as well as the breadth and context of information that is more difficult to obtain with quantitative methods. The ethnographic method is particularly used in research on homelessness, because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of this complex social phenomenon. Furthermore, with

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4 In this paper, the term "public spaces" is used in terms of public use – that is, spaces that are available for use by the public (this also includes institutions or private buildings accessible to the public).

5 Four-year international project (No. IZHRZO_180631/1) *Exploring Homelessness and Pathways to Social Inclusion: A Comparative Study of Contexts and Challenges in Swiss and Croatian Cities* (CSRP). It is conducted by the teams from the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar and the Institute of Social Planning, Organizational Change and Urban Development, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland in Basel.

an approach based on establishing trust and a relationship with the researched group, ethnography provides access to a group that is otherwise difficult to reach, distrustful and reluctant to communicate with researchers. During the research, special attention was paid to the observance of ethical standards in the collection, storage and analysis of data. Therefore, all research material in this paper is confidential and anonymised, and all names and details that could identify the participants have been changed.

As part of this broader study, as the author of the paper, I conducted participant observation and volunteered for a Zagreb association that distributes food, clothing and other necessities to its beneficiaries twice a week and provides them with other forms of field support. The analysis of the field notes has been used in this paper to clarify the context and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' statements. To explore the experiences of street homeless women relating to public spaces and the meanings they attach to them, I conducted a thematic analysis of nine semi-structured interviews and one walk-along interview conducted with six homeless women[6] in Zagreb[7].

6.1. Research participants

The women included in the analysis were between 27 and 57 years old. Each of them had the experience of living on the streets homeless, Jagoda's being the shortest – 21 days. Katica and Nataša had lived on the streets for several years, while Nataša had stayed in wagons at the Zagreb Main Station for three consecutive years. Four women were single, one was a widow, one was divorced, and at the time of their interviews, Nataša and Tina were in relationships with partners who were in the same situation as them – living on the streets. Although the literature recognises that homeless women are often accompanied by children, none of the respondents had minor children. One respondent lost custody of her six children.

Two participants completed elementary school, three completed secondary school, and one completed several years of university. All respondents had valid identity cards and all, except two, had health insurance. All of them had work experience ranging from one to 30 years, which was a figure reported by Jagoda, the oldest of them.

I accessed the interview respondents through the association I volunteered for. Although during the ethnographic field work I had established long-term contact with several women (who are significantly less present at the association's gatherings), they were less willing to participate in the research and agree to an interview

[6] The names of the six participants are pseudonyms.

[7] One interview was conducted with Natalija and Nataša each. Two interviews were conducted with Jasminka, Tina and Jagoda each, at least six months apart, and an additional walk-along interview was also conducted with Jasminka.

compared to men. A potential limitation/benefit was that I was perceived as a volunteer of the association. On the one hand, connecting with the association was useful for research – beneficiaries wanted to help and remain in good relations with the association's volunteers, so they were more open and accommodating, but on the other hand, their statements about the association itself were perhaps not the most honest.

From an ethical point of view, I had to pay special attention to the balance of power because, by associating me with an organisation that is often a source of food, clothing, and income for them, there was a possibility that they would feel forced to agree to an interview. That is why it was important to repeatedly inform the participants about my role in the research.

As argued by many authors, the gender and age of the researcher may influence the dynamics of the relationship and, consequently, the information shared in the interviews (Billo and Hiemstra, 2012). The key position that made it easier to gain trust concerned these dimensions – since I am a younger woman, it was possible to discuss topics that, as the participants themselves confirmed, they would not have discussed so openly with men. Considering that on the streets, they are surrounded by men, the women often appreciated the opportunity to bond and talk, and even complain to another woman, about the problems men caused them.

By revealing some information about myself, I managed to establish a more intimate relationship with the respondents. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that it is unfair to expect participants to be honest and open about their social worlds without the researcher sharing details of their own life with them. On the other hand, the disclosure of certain information sometimes further distorted the power relations, which could make participants feel inferior – so, I was particularly careful in disclosing information about myself, trying to highlight similarities rather than differences. I established a long-term, months-long contact with a participant who is younger than myself, with whom I conducted three interviews during which I was perceived as a kind of "counsellor", a friend, a trustworthy person who would provide emotional support in difficult times. In that case, I paid particular attention to awareness of various roles and compliance with ethical principles so that the participant would not feel exploited, dissatisfied or forced to participate in an interview. In that situation, my similar age was the key reason why the participant felt closeness and trust.

6.2. Analytical procedure

I selected the interviews for analysis by focusing on those with women who had or have experience of life on the streets. All interviews were transcribed and read several times to ensure comprehension. The interviews were coded using open coding in ATLAS.ti software for qualitative data analysis. Primary codes were sort-

ed into categories that generated several broad themes relating to the research questions. In this sense, codes and categories were developed inductively based on the collected material. However, when identifying themes, I was guided by an inductive-deductive approach, where themes were operationalised as a category deductively informed by research questions and existing literature, but inductively specified by lower-level categories based on open codes.

While analysing the challenges of street homelessness, I identified themes of fear and precariousness when living on the street, health and hygiene problems, experiences of physical and sexual violence and harassment, and challenges relating to exclusion from public spaces. Concerning the strategies employed by the participants to cope with these challenges, I identified the following themes: grouping/finding partners, invisibility and hiding (physical hiding and hiding the status of homelessness) and distancing from an unwanted identity. Participants' experiences with accommodation services for homeless people were analysed as an additional topic important for understanding the context and the pathways that led them to street homelessness.

7. EXPERIENCES WITH ACCOMMODATION SERVICES FOR HOMELESS PERSONS

As already mentioned in the paper, research shows that women's pathways to homelessness are different from men's, and many studies addressing the invisibility of homeless women suggest that they avoid the streets and are more likely to rely on available services or assistance from institutions. However, given that this paper discusses street homelessness, it is clear that our participants could not or did not want to rely on services, and the question is to what extent these services were even available to them. Considering that the issue of the use and availability of accommodation services for homeless people is of the utmost importance for understanding street homelessness, this section will describe the experiences and problems faced by our respondents. As far as accommodation services are concerned, there are two homeless shelters in Zagreb and its surroundings, one of which receives only men, and the other only women. In addition, homeless men are offered accommodation in a monastery in the centre of Zagreb. No emergency accommodation services, such as overnight shelters, are provided in Zagreb, and as for other facilities that allow daytime stay, there are three day care centres – however, during the pandemic, those centres often offered a limited stay[8].

Of the six respondents with experience of street homelessness, only two have experience staying in a shelter, Jasminka for three months, and Katica for five years. Jasminka grew up in a children's facility. Upon turning twenty-one, she left her foster family to try to fend for herself. However, since then she has not always

[8] The names of shelters/day care centres have been omitted for the purpose of anonymisation

managed to earn enough money to pay for accommodation, so during that period she occasionally stayed on the streets: in railway carriages or in abandoned buildings. She spent three months in the shelter, and left it because she did not feel well there and went to live with her brother. After her brother died, she went to live on the streets again, where she spent a year and a half, this time without the desire to try to request an accommodation in a shelter. While describing her experience, Jasminka mentioned feelings of embarrassment and precariousness, primarily because of the people with whom she shared her accommodation:

> *Well, the [reception centre] itself is ok. As far as the staff are concerned, everything is ok, but the problem is the residents there, and you have all kinds of people there, from murderers to addicts of all kinds, and me being with them – that was not good for my psyche. I packed myself up one day after three months and... (about leaving) Yes, because I simply felt suffocated, constricted, I was getting paranoid, you know. (Jasminka, mid-twenties)*

By contrast, Katica stayed in the shelter for as many as five years after becoming homeless due to the loss of her job and lack of family support. Five years later, the staff asked her to leave the shelter. After leaving, she ended up homeless again, and she got by sleeping during the day in an inadequate storage room near the shelter.

On the other hand, Natalija, being a foreigner without appropriate documents or citizenship, could not resort to shelters during the period of homelessness, which lasted approximately six months, because they were not available to her. Nataša faced homelessness when she left her ex-partner's apartment after experiencing physical violence. She tried to obtain accommodation in a shelter, but the services offered were inflexible in meeting her needs and adapting to her circumstances, with which she expressed her dissatisfaction:

> *However, I told them that I didn't want to report him. I cried, I begged them, I only asked for accommodation for a month, just so that I could recover, I would find a job, I just wanted to collect myself... They said, no, your only option is to report him and go to a safe house. I said, excuse me, if I go to a safe house, I have to be there, right? I have to be there. If someone is in a safe house under someone's protection, and you have to be under protection... There is no going out. How am I supposed to go out, will you accompany me to work? So, that's a mission impossible.* (Nataša, late thirties)

Those experiences left her deeply resentful of the social welfare system, in which she lost confidence and from which she no longer wants to seek help:

> *So, the social welfare centre is a centre for helping people, but, in essence, we get absolutely nothing from them.* (...) *I don't accept it and I don't support it, I told them the last time, when they rejected me because of that Kosnica, I told*

them – I will absolutely never come to the Social Welfare Centre. (Nataša, late thirties)

Nataša also tried to go to the women's shelter in Rijeka, but it did not accept her because she resides in Zagreb, not in the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (a prerequisite for placement is having last permanent residence in the county of the shelter). As she has no alternatives, she is forced to stay on the streets. Jagoda had a similar experience. Although she only stayed on the streets for about twenty days, she could seek help during that time because she is not entitled to accommodation in the Zagreb shelter due to her permanent residence in another city (except in exceptional conditions in winter). Tina was homeless on two occasions, both of which were triggered by her partner going to prison and her argument with his mother, with whom they lived. She and her partner explained that they would like to be accommodated in a shelter, but they see no particular chances for that: they do not think that it is administratively feasible (they are not from Zagreb), they are aware of the demanding and lengthy procedure for collecting documentation, they believe that there are quarantine restrictions due to the coronavirus, which further complicates the situation.

All of the above indicates that our respondents' experiences with accommodation services are generally not positive, and four participants were denied access to the services due to administrative obstacles, although they would have used them if they had had the opportunity. As there are no emergency overnight shelters in Zagreb, with no alternatives, our respondents are forced to use public spaces in the city as a place to live. Therefore, homelessness among our participants is primarily associated with and perpetuated by the unavailability and inflexibility of services and dissatisfaction with those that are available.

8. EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF STREET HOMELESS WOMEN IN ZAGREB

8.1. Finding a place to sleep and precariousness

What characterises the experience of street homelessness is a constant search for places to sleep and rest and a constant sense of fear and precariousness. The street is full of dangers; they have been described in the literature, and many of them can be assumed according to common sense. However, those particularly exposed are women, who feel particularly vulnerable due to possible sexual and physical assaults. Jasminka, who spent a period of her street life sleeping in carriages at the Main Station, provided the following description of her experience:

The cold and the fear that someone will break in or something, because it happened a couple of times – either someone was dead or they killed him, or this or that. (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

8.2. Health issues and hygiene

As already mentioned, since women have specific health needs, they are more likely to suffer health issues while living on the streets. Several participants highlighted issues related to reproductive health and obtaining menstrual supplies. Natalija talked about the problems caused by the cold:

Homelessness, when you have, like, women's problems, always take care of your uterus, that's what I tell men, it's like a wound, 365 days a year (...) *When you sleep outside in the cold here and there, or in the rain..., the body, like, it cannot possibly be healthy...* (Natalija, early fifties)

Tina, on the other hand, described the cold in the carriages and the constant feelings of fatigue and exhaustion:

So, I'm chronically sleep-deprived. We hop around, you know, from morning until dusk, from carriage to carriage, we check who is there while it is heating, then we check who is there until it heats up, then these HŽ people [translator's note: staff of the Croatian Railways] come to tell us that the train is about to leave, so we get out of that carriage and get into another one... and that's about a dozen, maybe more, carriages a day. (Tina, late thirties)

Furthermore, several participants mentioned the challenges of maintaining hygiene and the impossibility of meeting their needs. Natalija also talked about the lack of privacy when performing personal hygiene activities. If she performs them in a public space, she risks unwanted remarks from men who are looking for sexual favours.

8.3. Physical and sexual violence

Many women also provided detailed accounts of their experiences of violence, which were in some cases very disturbing. A respondent mentioned the experience of a very violent assault:

Both idiots tried to kill me with a piece of wood three times. They also broke my handy, my mobile phone. (Natalija, fifties)

She also mentioned how a very upset person in an intoxicated state threatened her with a knife after she said something that the person did not like.

Apart from direct physical violence, the participants talked about frequent sexual advances and sexual harassment on the streets. Two participants provided the following descriptions of their experience of harassment and unwanted advances:

> *Now, as I live on the streets, I don't know, people look at you differently, you are a woman, like this and that. So okay, I'll treat her to coffee, let her take a shower, change her clothes, I'll buy her a slice of pizza or pastry. She'll give me something in return. And that's intolerable for me.* (Nataša, late thirties)

> *The worst thing for me, as a woman, it's a little different for women out there, I don't like it when a man flashes me, he drinks too much and flashes me, just go away... So, such people, you know, they can be annoying in such situations, they always ask: "Where are you going to sleep?"* (...) *They look at us homeless women like we are whores, loose women, you know, who are easy to get... and that's how many, many men behave.* (Natalija, fifties)

8.4. Spatial exclusion

The participants of this study mentioned various public spaces in the city that they had used to meet their needs. Spaces useful to many street homeless people in Zagreb are mostly located in the city centre, enabling them to survive (due to the circulation of people, these are spaces such as shopping centres, libraries, means of transport, churches, parks). More specifically, some sites mentioned by the respondents were the Main Station area, the nearby underpass and the Importanne Gallery, King Tomislav Square, then Bundek lake, Jarun lake and Ribnjak park, the Bus Station, churches, trams, and shopping centres. In many of these places homeless people are only allowed to stay at certain times, but are also often chased away, which our respondents mentioned, too.

An example of a space that is of great importance for homeless people and illustrates the challenges faced by the respondents is the area of the Main Station. Four respondents stated that they had spent a significant amount of time at the Main Station. They used the Main Station as a place to rest, socialise, perform hygiene activities, earn money (which sometimes included illegal activities such as shoplifting and reselling stolen items). There they obtain information about how to support themselves and how to access services.

However, the Main Station area is particularly challenging for homeless people, primarily because it is a very well-known place in the city that is often monitored by the police, who often perform "sweeps", forcing homeless people out (Grgurinović, 2021). Since the 2020 earthquake, a police station is situated near the Main Station, and respondents also report more frequent patrols: both because they are closer and because some other activities have been reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to many people who have had the experience of street homelessness, the police can be quite brutal in cases where the people they find are

intoxicated, under the influence of drugs or have previously been in conflict with the police. Croatian Railways staff tolerate sleeping in carriages if there are no incidents, but sometimes, especially outside the carriage maintenance period, workers lock them, thus preventing entry. If there is an incident in a particular carriage, it is relocated and may no longer be occupied. The Main Station is dangerous because during the night it is a gathering place for groups of people who consume alcohol and drugs. From time to time, major incidents occur in the carriages (there is also talk of rape, physical conflicts, death cases caused by overdose). Therefore, while the Main Station allows for the satisfaction of their needs, it is also a place of constant danger, fear and exclusion. But in the absence of an alternative and because of the need for a place hidden from view, many people often stay there, sleeping in carriages. For example, Jasminka (26), who had slept in carriages for a year and a half, says that, when searching for a warm place to sleep, there is no better option than a carriage, although sleeping there was traumatic for her and filled with constant fear:

> *You have nowhere to go, there is no place warmer than a carriage, there is none, but then again, it was disgusting there in the winter, that's why I have problems with my bones now, when the weather changes, everything hurts.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

While the challenge of staying at the Main Station is specific to Zagreb, the participants mentioned many other spaces that are inaccessible and where they are frequently chased away and denied access, and where they face discrimination and stigmatisation. Spaces such as shopping centres, trams, tram turnaround stations or train station waiting rooms were only available to them at certain times and under certain conditions, for example if they looked appropriate, fitted in and used these spaces in accordance with their intended purpose. Sites such as city parks and tourist spots provided a greater possibility of hiding, but also under certain conditions. The following section will describe the strategies that the participants used to deal with the dangers and possible exclusion from these spaces.

9. STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY STREET HOMELESS WOMEN

9.1. Hiding homelessness

One of the ways in which the participants dealt with exclusion during life on the streets was to hide their own homelessness. They do so by avoiding staying or maintaining hygiene and physical appearance in certain places at times when they are visible, and by keeping away from places that associate them with homelessness, such as soup kitchens and other homeless services.

Jasminka used to go to sleep alone in a dark carriage, where she made no mess and she cleaned up after herself, knowing that in that way she would avoid attracting the attention of the police, and Croatian Railways workers would tolerate her stay in the carriage. Having learned the schedule of trains and the timing of police patrols, she knew at what time she could enter the carriages to avoid attracting attention:

> *Like, you have to go* (into the carriage) *after 12 so that the police don't chase you away, you must not go before 12.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

Natalija mentioned a change in her daily routine, which allowed her greater invisibility and safety while staying on the streets:

> *I used to work overnight and sleep during the day, because I knew it was better to be awake at night, you never know who will assault you and who won't.* (Natalija, fifties)

A very important need of the participants, which enabled them to hide their homelessness, was maintaining adequate hygiene, which is often very difficult under street life conditions. Having a neat appearance, they avoided attention and could stay in public places unnoticed, pretending to use those places in the usual ways. A respondent described her experience during the cold days when she tried to warm herself in the trams. She stated that it was very difficult and that the conductors would constantly force her out. Faced with this problem, she adapted to the situation in two ways: by looking decent, thus hiding her identity as a homeless woman, and by changing her daily routine in order to be on the tram at times when she would be less noticeable. First, after the opening of a day care centre that allowed showering, she could maintain hygiene. Additionally, she found an inadequate tin house near the city shelter where she spends time during the day. At night, she warms herself in trams. In this way, by kind of hiding and making herself invisible, she succeeds in manoeuvring the rules that make her situation difficult:

> *So during the day they won't see me, and at night I might go and warm up a bit so I don't freeze outside, so I don't freeze.* (Katica, early forties)

Natalija described how the lack of privacy for performing hygiene activities (which necessarily require her to undress) had often led her to situations in which she was sexually harassed and faced persistent advances and persuasions to have sexual relations. One way she deals with this is that she avoids performing hygiene in public spaces and at certain times and tries to isolate herself and hide from view by performing hygiene at night when she has privacy. She stated the following:

> *I mean, who would be up at 2 in the morning, washing their hair, both of them women... But we don't want men to offer us a shower or a place to sleep. (*Natalija, early fifties)

Another participant, not being able to perform adequate hygiene, actively kept away from places such as shopping centres where she could get warm, knowing that going there would make her visible, which she tried to avoid:

> *No, I've never spent time in shopping centres because, unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to take a shower every day, so how could I go to a shopping centre like that, there are heaps of people in there, I couldn't do that.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

Besides, some participants avoided homeless services to protect themselves from the stigma that using such services could cause them. Thus, Jasminka said that, on one occasion, she did not eat for more than twenty days, which was more acceptable for her than going to the soup kitchen:

> *Well, I was embarrassed, honestly, I didn't want to show everyone that I was living on the streets and all that, some people knew it, but no.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

The same participant hid her homelessness even from the people she kept company with at the Main Station, fearing additional discrimination. In her case, it is important to take into account the multiple stigmatisation she experienced: she is a Roma woman, she was afraid of being judged by others, even though many of them were also homeless:

> *Well, I didn't want them to look at me in the same way because I don't like being looked at, I don't like judgements* (...)*. Unfortunately, a lot of people have prejudices, my biggest, my biggest, let's say, I was attacked the most just because I am a Roma woman, that was the biggest problem, a person just sees you, look, a Gypsy, look at this, look at that, I am a Gypsy, but I am more honest than all of them there, at least they know that I will never steal.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

One homeless woman's strategy, although not a hiding strategy, is interesting because it is the exact opposite. In order to avoid dangers on the streets, Jagoda tried to sleep near police stations, which would calm her down and make her feel safer:

> *Sweetie, most of the time I was dozing, how can I explain it to you, dozing. In Sesvete, in the park near the police, in Dubrava near the police, in the Main Square near here, in Petrova Street near the police, wherever the police are near, so that I don't get assaulted.* (Jagoda, late fifties)

9.2. Finding a partner/grouping

Three participants point out that, while staying on the streets, it is very important to find a group that can provide protection. Thus, Jasminka, who had slept in carriages for a year and a half, explained why she preferred carriages:

> *There was a crew in there. It's easier to fit in with them there, than to wander around the city and be alone* (...) *it's safer to be with a group you know, than to be alone.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

Speaking about her experiences of violence on the streets, Nataša points out that she feels safe among the group she stays with in the carriages and states that, although she witnesses violence, nobody touches her there:

> *So far, no one in the carriages has raised a hand against me. Because, even though these people are from the streets, they are people with a messed-up psyche, with severe and difficult problems. These people are my foothold. Now, for example, if someone had attacked me in the carriages last night and I had come today, I don't know, to someone, they would have forced their way... Because there are indeed some men who are violent towards women, but simply no one has ever raised a hand against me, ever. No one ever. They always appreciated me, always respected me, they never demanded anything from me.* (Nataša, late thirties)

This example shows how important it is for Nataša to have a group in which she feels more protected. Given her long stay on the streets in the past and her knowledge of the context and company that often gathers there, she enjoys a certain level of protection – she attributes this to her personality and attitude: she is benevolent, does no harm to anyone, does not ask for much, is not prone to conflict. In other words, she has mastered certain skills that enable her to navigate very challenging conditions. Furthermore, her ex-partner is known among the group which gathers around the Main Station, which also ensures her a certain status and protection.

Tina, on the other hand, stays on the streets with her current partner, so she feels safer. Like Nataša, who found a partner in the carriages in the past, they find safety in partnerships with men, who help them and sometimes provide them with accommodation. Thus, during the first interview, Tina lived on the streets, but later moved with her partner into his brother's apartment. However, like Nataša, Tina suggested during the interview that she suffers physical violence at the hands of the partner she is with on the streets.

Jasminka mentioned a strategy that she noticed is used by many, especially younger women who find themselves on the streets, which is to find a partner who

will help them and with whom they can eventually extricate themselves from that situation. She emphasises how rare it is to see women in these carriages:

> *Well, for the most part, these women are older and they get hold of those older drug addicts and drunkards and they stay with them and get themselves covered like that. And there used to be younger women as well, there used to be a few, but they come and go.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

9.3. Distancing from unwanted identities

The participants were aware of the stigma and prejudice surrounding them as women on the streets. Almost all participants would spontaneously refer to sex work during the interview, aware of the fact that they are often equated with prostitutes, with the intention of distancing themselves from that identity. At that point, many would emphasise their strength, self-belief and pride, arguing that they did not agree to certain activities such as begging, stealing, or the consumption of drugs and alcohol, which are often associated with homelessness, and they would mention their numerous work experiences in life. They would often express pride in themselves because, despite their hardship, they did not indulge in vices or prostitution. One participant stressed the importance of self-belief and a positive attitude:

> *You've got to believe in yourself. Because if you don't believe in yourself, if you lose that self-confidence or if someone knocks it down, you give up everything, you simply give up.* (...) *But I don't. Not me.* (Nataša, late thirties)

The literature recognises these strategies as distancing from a "broken identity" or what Snow and Mulachy (2001) call "salvaging the self". By doing so, research participants retained a positive self-image in difficult situations. Each participant talked about the emotional and mental health consequences of homelessness, mentioning various ways in which they coped with their circumstances, including reading, being in nature, listening to music, talking and spending time with other people, religion and prayer.

As argued by Casey et al. (2008), for many homeless women it is important to keep hobbies from their previous lives, which allows them to maintain a positive self-image and an identity that is not exclusively based on the current situation. Jasminka talked about the role of music and animals:

> *With a song, I can't do without headphones and a song. It has saved me a couple of times already. I wanted to save myself some trouble and, damn it, a song saved everything. So, that's why I say dogs, music and horses, that's my greatest love and possession. These are my psychiatrists.* (Jasminka, mid-twenties)

They often mention the role of spirituality, which helps in coping with the situation.

> *I'm telling you, first thing in the morning when I wake up, God, thank you for this morning. God, I thank you for my existence. God, thank you for keeping me alive. And, God, keep me safe.* (Nataša, late thirties)

Natalija, on the other hand, emphasised her own strength and readiness to defend herself:

> *I have experience, I practised boxing a little bit. I mean, I didn't beat or kill anyone, but I'm not that easy to scare, I have the balls to at least try to fight back at a man, you know in that sense... and that's how I defended myself, it came to me, like, I stand up and kick his ass.* (Natalija, early fifties)

This strategy is recognised in the literature: women on the streets often want to appear dangerous in order to deter potential attackers (Casey et al., 2008). Thus, our participant said:

> *That's why I always exercise, that's why I brought my sports pants, that's why I carry my backpack, on purpose, so that I gain some muscle, so that I can defend myself against men, to have some force here and there...* (Natalija, early fifties)

Spaces in which they felt safe and where they could relax were extremely important for them to endure the stress caused by the situation.

10. DISCUSSION

In the absence of other opportunities, the participants of our study ended up on the streets, facing so-called visible homelessness. Reasons they ended up on the streets included housing and financial crises, health issues, addiction problems, death of a spouse accompanied by health issues, relationship breakdown due to partner violence, growing up in the welfare system. The participants' attitudes towards services indicate frequent inaccessibility and administrative barriers, a sense of mistrust and disappointment in the system, and a feeling of discomfort regarding the shelter environment. For this reason, some participants preferred to stay on the streets, even when shelter accommodation was available to them.

The challenges and dangers they face on the streets reflect their difficult position: challenges mentioned by the research participants include experiences of violence, sexual harassment and abuse, constant feelings of fear and uncertainty, difficulties in maintaining hygiene, stigmatisation, health issues specific to women and direct and indirect exclusion from public spaces. These findings are also confirmed by research conducted in an international context. As has been stated, homeless women are more likely to experience physical and sexual violence than

men, are more exposed to health risks, and feel more fear and precariousness (Meanwell, 2012).

Regarding the possibility of using public spaces, the participants mostly focused on the city centre, which made it easier for them to survive, but at the same time, these spaces were often unavailable to them or only available at certain times of the day and under certain conditions. In general, this study shows that street homelessness in Zagreb is extremely regulated and, in many ways, criminalised.[9] As I was present in the ethnographic field, I can conclude that homeless people are often repressed, chased away and monitored by the police. Reports of women who stayed in public spaces, include statements about the fear of being repelled by the police and, in the case of one participant, of police violence. Therefore, these findings suggest that homeless people are unwanted and excluded from public spaces in Zagreb, which is a trend in European cities as reported in the literature (Doherty et al., 2008).

In this sense, homeless women face the same difficulties as homeless men, but the testimonies indicate that women are additionally threatened/excluded because of their gender. As mentioned in the literature, women's homelessness is framed by norms regarding gender roles and certain categorisations, such as associating women with home or "household". When they fail to adhere to these norms, they are perceived as "deviant" (O'Sullivan, 2016). This is reflected in the conceptualisations of homelessness and the general failure to recognise the issue of women's homelessness (which is not included in the statistics), which consequently affects the available support services, exercise of rights, access to housing, etc.

When forced into street homelessness, as shown in the literature (Reeve, Casey, and Goudie, 2007; Reeve, 2018), women live in public spaces differently than men, which is also associated with greater gender-related vulnerability. This was also confirmed in this study, which has shown that the strategies used by our participants during their life on the streets are related to what is recognised in the literature as hiding or invisibility strategies (Casey et al., 2008; Reeve, 2018): using public toilets at night, maintaining their physical appearance so as not to stand out and give the impression of "normality", spending time in parks to avoid attracting attention, sleeping in trams at a time when they are less noticeable, changing the daily routine so that they could be on guard during the night. When forced to sleep in particularly dangerous places, women looked for company or a group among

[9] While this is not the subject of this paper, several laws directly or indirectly criminalise homeless people in the Republic of Croatia. First of all, non-residents cannot obtain an identity card, which often puts them in a position of illegality and prevents them from accessing the social welfare system. Furthermore, Article 11 of the Offences Against Public Order Act states: "Whoever indulges in vagrancy or begging shall be fined the equivalent of DEM 50 to 200 in the local currency or imprisoned for up to 30 days." According to this act, which the police often apply arbitrarily, many homeless people are fined or imprisoned. Article 2 of the same act provides for the possibility that, in the event of violating public order, a person may be removed from the area of the municipality where they committed the offence.

which they would feel safer, or they stayed by the side of a male partner on the streets, even if they endured some form of violence at his hands. Some participants hid their homelessness, even among people who were homeless themselves, and preferred being hungry over going to a soup kitchen. During the interviews, many respondents, aware of the fact that they are often considered prostitutes, spontaneously referred to sex work with the intention of distancing themselves from that identity. At that point, many would emphasise their strength, self-belief and pride, as well as numerous work experiences, arguing that they did not agree to certain activities such as begging, stealing, nor did they turn to the consumption of drugs and alcohol, which is often associated with homelessness. Using these strategies, they would demonstrate their own autonomy, construct their own identity and explain what it means to be a woman and homeless. Each participant talked about the emotional and mental health consequences of homelessness, mentioning various ways in which they coped with the circumstances, including reading, being in nature, listening to music, talking and spending time with other people, religion and prayer. Spaces in which they felt safe and where they could relax were the most helpful for them in those stressful circumstances.

These findings suggest that the participants who are forced to live on the streets do not passively accept the imposed rules and norms that exclude them and regulate their use of public spaces, but deftly cope with various restrictions. They often use these spaces very ingeniously, adapting them to meet their needs and survive. While the women's strategies in this paper mainly concern invisibility and hiding, this does not diminish their agency and resistance by claiming the right to stay in those spaces. Casey and associates (2008) reached similar findings, showing that women in public spaces do not accept the regulation and rules of their use, but rather resist exclusion and the perception that renders them undesirable. The present study has also shown that, apart from hiding, women also sometimes use strategies that make them directly visible on the streets, such as grouping with other homeless people and staying in places known for the gathering of the homeless. Sometimes they confront the police, which the literature more often associates with the survival strategies of men affected by street homelessness.

11. CONCLUSION

A large body of literature points to how geographical boundaries preserve social differences, ensuring that those who are seen as a threat to moral, social or urban order are spatially marginalised (Snow and Mulcahy, 2001). When occupying public spaces, homeless men are perceived as "misplaced", and homeless women even more so: a homeless woman who performs daily activities in a non-domestic space is considered particularly disturbing and transgressive (Casey et al., 2008). Therefore, it is very important to observe how women use public spaces and deal with exclusion from them because this contributes to understanding the relation-

ship towards marginalised people in the city and depicts the patterns of power that exclude and marginalise certain groups.

Considering the examples stated in this paper, my conclusion is that homeless women are truly in a position of double marginalisation during their life on the streets (which sometimes turns into multiple marginalisation due to age, ethnicity, etc.). As suggested in the literature (Reeve et al., 2007, Reeve, 2018), their strategies in public spaces often lean towards hiding; in terms of physical invisibility and hiding the status of homelessness.

However, in this paper, our participants were largely visible on the streets: they fought back when they were attacked, they slept in places known for the gathering of homeless people, and they visited day care centres and soup kitchens that associated them with the identity of homelessness. In that respect, their strategies may also be interpreted as resistance practices: they challenged and violated the rules and norms that excluded them.

This paper points to the necessity of more extensive and detailed research on homelessness, especially women's experience of homelessness. Homeless women are often stigmatised, marginalised and alienated. They experience multiple forms of vulnerability that put them at particular risk of exploitation and abuse. Only by finding out about the experiences of homeless people from their perspective can we learn about their needs and shed light on the numerous challenges and inequalities they face. As Reeve (2018) states, despite the increased number of studies dealing with homeless women in the last fifteen years, policies have still not included this aspect and taken measures to establish social services and assistance that would be sensitive to the specifics of women's experience and additional gender discrimination and inequality of homeless women. Mayock, Sheridan and Parker (2015) also suggest that policies need to focus on gender-sensitive approaches that take into account the diverse and complicated situations of women. This is especially noticeable in Croatia, because despite the growing number of homeless women, there is neither enough research nor recognition of the seriousness of the situation with homelessness in general, let alone its gender dimension. As this paper clearly demonstrates, the gender dimension is often key to the experience of homelessness, so it is necessary to understand its consequences and implications and consider them thoroughly in public policies.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval was issued by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar.

DATA ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

Partial access to analytical materials is available upon request to the author.

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Iskustva i strategije žena u uličnom beskućništvu u Zagrebu

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SAŽETAK

Civilne udruge i osobe koje rade s osobama u beskućništvu često sugeriraju da je beskućništvo kod žena manje često nego kod muškaraca, što potvrđuju i postojeće dostupne statistike. U literaturi je pokazano kako su žene osobito ranjive kad je riječ o beskućništvu, osobito u kontekstu brojnih strukturalnih i društvenih barijera koje pogađaju žene u društvu. Iskustva žena u beskućništvu razlikuju se od iskustava muškaraca te preslikavaju šire rodne nejednakosti. Život na cesti prožet je opasnostima i stalnim izazovima da se zadovolje osnovne potrebe. Korištenje javnih prostora osobito je izazovno za žene u beskućništvu, zbog njihova statusa beskućništva, ali i zbog toga što su žene. Stoga, cilj je rada analizirati žensko iskustvo uličnog beskućništva u Zagrebu, pokazati njegove specifičnosti te identificirati strategije u situacijama različitih oblika isključivanja. U tu svrhu analizirano je deset intervjua provedenih sa šest žena s iskustvom uličnog beskućništva u Zagrebu te terenske bilješke koje su dio šireg kvalitativnog istraživanja. U radu se prikazuju iskustva i izazovi života na cesti, koji uključuju osjećaje nesigurnosti i straha, nezadovoljene zdravstvene potrebe, nasilje i seksualno uznemiravanje te isključivanja iz javnih prostora te strategije povezane sa skrivanjem, pronalaskom partnera/grupiranjem i distanciranjem od neželjenih identiteta. Rad ukazuje na važnost prepoznavanja ozbiljnosti i opsega problema beskućništva, osobito ženskoga, te nužnost daljnjeg istraživanja koje uključuje rodne dimenzije i specifičnosti problema.

Ključne riječi: ulično beskućništvo, žene, nevidljivost, strategije