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Cooperation of mothers in the homelessness crisis with the school in the opinion of a schoolteacher

Współpraca kobiet-matek w kryzysie bezdomności ze szkołą w opinii pedagoga szkolnego

Abstract

Aim. Due to the fact that the issue of school-family cooperation has been of interest among scientists and practitioners for a number of years, the literature on the subject includes numerous and multidimensional publications in this field. In this article, this thread refers to women-mothers in the crisis of homelessness, which opens a new research space, because the aspect of cooperation in the title has not been addressed in Polish research on the subject. The aim of the study was to assess the quality of school-family cooperation from the perspective of a schoolteacher.

Methods and materials. The study was conducted using qualitative methods, employing an instrumental case study; the research technique was an individual interview.

Results and conclusion. The analysis of the research participant's statements indicates

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that there is a clear predominance of those components of the cooperation in question that limit its effectiveness. Based on the collected research material, the following three categories of cooperation can be formulated. Category I takes into account the temporal dimension of experiencing homelessness (the longer the duration of the homelessness crisis, the more difficult is cooperation assessed). Category II covers the specificity of the psychosocial functioning of women in the homelessness crisis (demanding nature, instrumental nature of cooperation, low parental competences, lack or insufficient involvement). Category III concerns the past of women in the homelessness crisis (biographical experiences throughout their lives). There is no doubt that the results of this study only take into account a certain aspect of the phenomenon under study, and therefore they may constitute an introduction to broader, in-depth research in this area, especially since the issues discussed in the article are omitted in the literature on the subject.

Keywords: homelessness, homeless mothers, women, cooperation, schoolteacher, teacher, school, family, women

Abstrakt

Cel. W związku z tym, że problematyka obejmująca zagadnienie współpracy szkoły z rodziną od lat znajduje zainteresowanie wśród naukowców i praktyków, w literaturze przedmiotu można znaleźć liczne i wielowymiarowe publikacje w tym zakresie. W niniejszym artykule wątek ten odnosi się do kobiet-matek w kryzysie bezdomności, co otwiera nową przestrzeń badawczą, bowiem aspekt tytułowej współpracy nie został podjęty w polskich badaniach przedmiotu. Celem badania jest ocena jakości współpracy szkoły z rodziną z perspektywy pedagoga szkolnego.

Metody i materiały. Przeprowadzone badanie ma charakter jakościowy. Posłużono się instrumentalnym studium przypadku, techniką badawczą natomiast był wywiad indywidualny.

Wyniki i wnioski. Analiza wypowiedzi uczestniczki badania wskazuje na wyraźną przewagę tych komponentów tytułowej współpracy, które ograniczają jej efektywność. W oparciu o zgromadzony materiał badawczy można sformułować następujące trzy kategorie współpracy: I kategoria uwzględnia temporalny wymiar doświadczania bezdomności (im dłuższy czas kryzysu bezdomności, tym współpraca oceniana jest jako trudniejsza), II kategoria obejmuje specyfikę psychospołecznego funkcjonowania kobiet w kryzysie bezdomności (roszczeniowość, instrumentalny charakter współpracy, niskie kompetencje rodzicielskie, brak lub niewystarczające zaangażowanie), III kategoria dotyczy przeszłości kobiet w kryzysie bezdomności (doświadczenia biograficzne w toku życia). Nie ulega wątpliwości, że wyniki niniejszego badania uwzględniają jedynie pewny aspekt tego zjawiska, w związku z czym mogą one stanowić wstęp do szerszych, pogłębionych badań w tym zakresie, zwłaszcza że problematyka podjęta w artykule jest pomijana w literaturze przedmiotu.

Słowa kluczowe: bezdomność, matki w kryzysie bezdomności, współpraca, pedagog szkolny, szkoła, rodzina, kobiety.

Introduction

Homelessness is an extreme form of social exclusion. There is no doubt that a mother and child staying in a shelter for people in a homeless crisis is associated with the deprivation of various needs, both individual and concerning the whole family. The environment in which a child finds itself can stimulate its development, but it can also be a source of unfavourable factors disrupting its socialisation. One institution that deals with the elimination of family dysfunctions is the school. There is no doubt that the main goal of cooperation between these two environments is the comprehensive development of children and young people.

The study aimed to explore the specific nature of cooperation between schools and homeless mothers from the point of view of a school pedagogue. Based on this objective, the following research question was formulated: how does the cooperation between schools and mothers in a homelessness crisis proceed?

It should be noted that issues concerning the cooperation between schools and families are very popular and recognised among researchers, which is why numerous and multifaceted publications on this subject can be found in the literature. The *novum* presented in the article is the reference of this thread to people (mothers) in the crisis of homelessness because this research area has not been included in Polish scientific publications. Therefore, it was assumed that the issues raised in the text – apart from the cognitive value – may become an invitation to reflect on this extremely important but neglected topic.

Women experiencing homelessness in Poland – an outline of the problem

It should be emphasised that the issue of homelessness is still being researched and described primarily by men. The latest data on the demographics of the issue indicate that there are over 6,000 women experiencing homelessness in Poland, which represents about 20% of the total homeless population. The worrying fact is that the number of women experiencing homelessness is growing (*Wyniki* [Results]..., 2024).

In the view of Polish literature on the subject (Dębski, 2008; Fyda, Jonik, Bremer, & Zygierewicz, 2023; Góra, 2022; Mąkosza, 2001; Mikołajczyk, 2018; Przymeński, 2006; Szluz, 2010; Szluz, 2013; Szluz, Klonowska, 2011) the psychosocial profile of women experiencing homelessness can be described as follows:

- they come from families with pathological symptoms, especially in the area of educational dysfunction and psychoactive substance addiction;
- the reasons for women becoming homeless are most often related to their husband's (partner's) alcoholism, violence from their partner, violence from their parents (guardians), as well as being evicted or thrown out of their house (apartment);
- female homelessness is institutionalised, as women rarely “live on the street,” but use the support of shelters much more often than men;
- the social functioning of women experiencing homelessness is related to the lack of competencies that allow them to properly fulfil their social roles. They are characterised by learned helplessness, a low level of resourcefulness in life, as well as a lack of responsibility. In addition, they become dependent on their partners (husbands) both mentally and financially;
- the situation of women in the labour market who are experiencing homelessness is very difficult, due to the accumulation of factors such as low level of education, insufficient professional competencies and single parenthood.

It is worth emphasising that the factors mentioned above very often coexist, and the consequences of this can significantly hinder the proper fulfilment of social roles.

Cooperation between school and family – selected aspects and current challenges

The family and school are the two basic institutions that should be responsible for both the child's education and their all-round development and fulfilment of bio-psycho-socio-cultural needs (Mikler-Chwastek, 2020; Młynek, 2021). There is no doubt that the family is the primary environment for a child – it is here that they can gain their first experiences, that behaviour patterns, habits, norms and values are formed, and that the competencies necessary for functioning in society are developed (Matyjas, 2020; Trzcńska-Król, 2019). Jan Nikołajew and Grażyna Leśniewska (2012) explain that “[...] the family is an intermediary structure situated between the individual and the broader social system” (p. 146), and therefore the family context accompanies a person throughout their life. It is particularly important during adolescence because it takes into account both the course and the quality of the processes of upbringing and socialisation. Besides the family, the second most important educational environment is school. It should be emphasised that from a psycho-pedagogical perspective, one of the most important roles that school plays is socialisation, which is why the smooth and harmonious cooperation of this institution with the family is essential for the proper development

of the child (Nadolnik, 2016). One of the conditions for successful cooperation between these environments is that both parties accept the assumption that they are working for the good of the child. Cooperation and partnership should take place in four basic areas, which are: educational partnership, joint action, mutual assistance, and efficient exchange of information (Szczepkowska, 2019). Cooperation is particularly important when difficulties are part of the upbringing and educational situation (Mikler-Chwastek, 2020; Młynek, 2021).

The literature on the subject draws attention to the undeniable connection between the effects of education and the cooperation between school and family (Mendel, 2007). Research shows that the optimal relationship between family and school should be based on partnership (Gulczyńska, Rybińska, & Segiet, 2020; Kołodziejczyk, Walczak, 2021; Wiatr, 2024). An educational partnership is defined as “[...] equal relationships between two entities characterised by a common goal, voluntary nature, and defined responsibilities and rules of cooperation. In the educational partnership of parents and school, a common platform of activities is created, which also constitutes a goal and a jointly recognised value” (Gulczyńska, Rybińska, & Segiet, 2020, p. 351). Joyce Epstein’s concept is a well-established partnership model in the literature on the subject. According to this author, educational partnership is a kind of alliance between parents, the school and the local community. According to this assumption, the more activities and communication there is between these entities, the greater the benefits for both the child’s education and psychosocial development. J. Epstein defines the cooperation of parents concerning school activities using the following types of involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, homeschooling, co-management, and cooperation with the local community (as cited in Banasiak, 2012).

An analysis of the literature on the subject (Gulczyńska, 2020; Tomkiel, 2021; Zalewska-Bujak, 2020) on the cooperation between schools and families in Poland indicates that it is sometimes insufficient. Research in this area proves that the relationship between these two basic environments of the individual is sometimes unsatisfactory, brings disappointment on both sides and is not a significant element of school policy from the perspective of those who manage them. Educators declare that cooperation with parents often comes down to the organisational and financial dimensions. Furthermore, research shows that some parents have a demanding and oppositional attitude towards teachers and question the educational requirements and influences of educators. It should be emphasised here that the models of cooperation between family and school are usually well thought out, but their implementation involves several difficulties (Parafiniuk, Banucha, 2020). Based on the research of Anna Mikler-Chwastek (2020), a profile of the “difficult parent” can be presented. Its characteristic features are aggression towards educators, as well as sexist remarks, use of profanity and other symptoms of a lack of personal culture.

It should therefore be emphasised that socio-cultural-political changes, globalisation processes, the development of virtual space and the intensification of the role of AI in contemporary reality are issues that bring with them not only benefits but also significant challenges for the most important educational environments and their participants. Therefore, this area requires a remodelling of a significant range of preventive, educational and upbringing measures (Cęcelek, 2020; Parafiniuk, Banucha, 2020). These changes are one of the conditions for preparing young people for a prosocial, active and fulfilling functioning in the modern world (Cęcelek, 2020; Parafiniuk, Banucha, 2020). There is no doubt, therefore, that the course, form and shape of cooperation between school and family should be updated so that they can respond to the dynamically changing reality.

Competences of a school instructor – selected aspects

To begin with, it should be emphasised that “[...] education theorists and practitioners generally agree that the harmonious cooperation of school and family is a major factor in a child’s academic success and proper bio-psycho-socio-cultural development” (Smykowska, 2008, p. 20). One of the crucial links in this field is the school counsellor. They play an important role in both the school environment and the child’s family. At the same time, they are responsible for the relationship between these environments and the entities and institutions that deal with the prevention, intervention and rehabilitation of children and young people. The tasks of a school social worker are regulated in the *Rozporządzeniu Ministra Edukacji Narodowej w sprawie zasad organizacji udzielania pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej w publicznych szkołach, przedszkolach i placówkach publicznych* [Regulation of the Minister of National Education on the principles of organising the provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public schools, kindergartens and public institutions] (*Rozporządzenie*, 2017). In the context of this document, the responsibilities of a school counsellor primarily relate to activities such as diagnostics, prevention, mediation and recognising the potential of students. It is worth noting that the specific work model of a pedagogue is based on such variables as: “[...] the pedagogue’s personality, knowledge, experience, organisational efficiency of the school, entities of their influence and educational environment, which can be the source and background of the undertaken activities” (Bobik, 2020, p. 66).

An extremely important issue concerning the work of an educator – apart from formal professional qualifications – are the so-called ‘soft skills’ that this person should be equipped with. Soft skills, also referred to as interpersonal or social skills, are the characteristics of an individual that influence effective interaction with other people (Tomkiel, 2021). In other words, they are a conglomerate of psychosocial skills that en-

able effective communication, relationship building, conflict resolution and adaptation to a variety of situations. They are related to the degree of emotional self-control as well as openness to change. The competencies described above can be categorised according to the social characteristics of the individual and their cognitive functions: social competencies include cooperation, emotional intelligence and entrepreneurship, while cognitive competencies include critical thinking, creativity and solving complex problems (Stanuch, Gorzelany-Dziadkowiec, & Smutek, 2024). It should be emphasised that “[...] soft skills, unlike hard skills, are difficult to develop” (Varkoly, Jędrzejczyk, Kucęba, & Kulej-Dudek, 2019, p. 210). There is no doubt that they determine the proper implementation of tasks and challenges that are part of the work of a school pedagogue. Bogumiła Bobik (2020) emphasises that for a pedagogue to catch up with a constantly changing reality, it is necessary to undergo continuous training, and search for new, effective working methods and problem-solving. The measures mentioned above can determine effective and satisfying cooperation between the school and the family.

Methodology of own research

To answer the research question formulated in the introduction to this paper, an instrumental case study was used in the sense of Robert Stake (2009), because in this research project the problem, not the case, was the main subject of the investigation. According to this author, this research method allows – in addition to exploring the studied phenomenon – to show its cultural and social context, which is an added value from the perspective of the purpose of this research (Stake, 2009). The research technique used was the individual interview. The purpose of this type of interview is to broaden knowledge on the topic of interest to the researcher (Kvale, 2004). The interview was part of a broader research project on the social roles of women experiencing homelessness. A school teacher working in 2024 in one of the primary schools located in the Pomeranian Voivodeship took part in the study, the results of which are presented in this text. It was assumed that the school teacher is a representative of the school who, out of all the employees of the institution, knows the students attending the school best. They are familiar with both the important educational aspects of their past and are also aware of their current situation. The selection of the study participants was preceded by a survey to identify which primary schools are located closest to homeless women’s shelters (both in terms of distance and regionalisation). After gathering this information, the school was selected for the study if children of women in a homeless crisis who were residents of the homeless shelter had attended it in the past or were currently attending. The school counsellor has been working at the selected school for over 11 years, so it can be assumed that the participant has many years of extensive experience in dealing

with homeless families and shelter staff. Knowledge of the history and specific characteristics of families experiencing homelessness is therefore a valuable resource – the interviewee has information on both former and current students who live in a homeless shelter. After the interview was recorded in audio form, it was transcribed. The next step was open coding, which resulted in the selection of codes that directly related to the studied phenomenon. Based on the analysis of the collected material, areas were identified that allowed for finding answers to the formulated research problems. Since the research topic also touches on sensitive, private issues, great care was taken to ensure the ethical aspects of the study. Firstly, written consent was obtained from the research subject to publish the interview. Secondly, to ensure the anonymity of the children whose stories were included in the interview, their names were replaced with an “X.” Thirdly, at the explicit request of the research participant, the location of the research (school) has been concealed to prevent its identification. For the sake of clarity of the research participant’s statements, in some parts of the text, additional details have been used (e.g., “her” = “mother,” etc.) that do not change the context and meaning of the statements.

Results of own research

The statements of the survey participants reveal a clear disproportion between the positive and negative aspects of the cooperation between women experiencing homelessness and the school. The following statement confirms this conclusion:

If I had to estimate how it looks like over the years since I have been working here, I don’t know... Maybe 10% of me is involved. I don’t even mean, for example, getting involved in the life of the school in any way, but I mean attending meetings [with parents], taking care of the children in general, taking an interest... So, unfortunately, I would rate [the cooperation] negatively.

The school counsellor attributes the factors hindering cooperation to the mothers’ attitudes, and at the same time points out and explains that they are related to a lack of knowledge, e.g., about basic rules of personal hygiene, and to mothers’ inappropriate priorities in this area, which deviate from the standards:

[...] his [pupil’s] mum sometimes doesn’t even bother providing clothes. We had a situation where the class noticed a bad smell and it happened again, but if the mother has not been taught how to do this, how can she teach her child? You know, she won’t take care of her hygiene or her son’s, but she goes to the nail salon because I saw that she had her nails done, so she has her priorities.

According to one participant in the study, the specific attitude of mothers is a major factor hindering effective cooperation, but at the same time, she notes that mothers are not aware that such cooperation is necessary:

[...] our role is, so to speak, to reach out, to level the playing field, i.e., to make up for shortcomings, but the mothers' attitudes are an obstacle. If she doesn't see a problem, she doesn't want to cooperate because she doesn't see any reason for it.

It should be emphasised that the survey participant indicates deficits in parenting skills (lack of knowledge, lack of interest in one's own child, other priorities), which in her opinion hinder efficient cooperation between the school and the parent:

I have been working here for over 10 years and certainly more than a dozen, I think we have had homeless kids here for several decades [...]. This cooperation has practically always been based more on cooperation with the institution than with the mothers. I mean, yes, there were and are mothers who were really interested in their children's education, but it was more the case that they would come to meetings [with the parents] and try their best, but in general, unfortunately, I don't rate it highly.

The following statement illustrates the tendency to shift (disperse, redirect) the responsibility for their child's behaviour to others, while at the same time avoiding the problem:

[...] this cooperation is difficult, mum X is difficult to work with and she has made a name for herself as a person who doesn't see the problem. I mean, she describes X as a naughty child, but she can't really blame her for anything.

An important topic that came up in the statements is the role of social services in ensuring a better future for homeless children. One participant believes that decisions to place some pupils in socio-therapy centres or foster families are necessary for their well-being. Her experience in the field of cooperation and diagnosis of the family situation indicates that it is justified to change the educational environment of some pupils.

[...] because even if we were to stand on our heads, mum won't be able to help [the child] with these dysfunctions for sure. And then in a few years, if things go on like this, the child will be similar. We don't want any black scenarios, but it is also possible to expect that, for example, X will go to a youth welfare centre when he is older. Or first to a children's home, because it happens really often.

In general, I believe that a child is best off with a parent. I'm not going to tell you exactly how many – the centre's educator might [know] – but in some cases, it would really be better for these children to be in a different environment. We know how it is in youth education centres, but foster families, usually grandmothers, but not only, are a better solution. Of course, I'm talking about extreme cases here, but unfortunately these are the cases and for the good of the child it is really better to change the educational environment.

The researcher also notes that attempts to initiate conversations about how the children are doing at school are often interpreted as a personal attack rather than as the duty of a teacher to improve the educational and psycho-pedagogical situation of the pupils:

They [mothers] generally have this demanding attitude, for example, one of the mothers even said that when [their daughter] was still in kindergarten, it was okay, but when she went to school, it got worse. However, we know the staff from this kindergarten and we also know, based on the opinions from the counselling centre, that unfortunately X's disability plus negligence have taken their toll. And mum perceives our suggestions or even conversations as an attack. So [...] in my opinion, mum's attitude simply [makes it so that] sometimes our hands are tied.

The topic raised by the survey participant was also the cooperation between the school and the shelter staff. According to her, the cooperation with the institution is an important and useful resource in pedagogical work. The teacher also claims to be familiar with the environment of this institution:

[...] children from the shelter most often come to us because, as you know, it is very close, so we have had really good contact with the local educator and also the social worker for years, especially if there are any problems, so we know a little bit about how these children in homelessness function.

The researcher emphasises that in the case of relationships with mothers who display a high degree of dysfunctional behaviour towards their children, it is best for the quality of pedagogical work to strengthen cooperation with the shelter staff:

I don't know, you may think it's a shortcut, but in cases like this, where the mother, I'm sorry, simply doesn't care about her child or children, I prefer to cooperate with the centre, because it's more realistic to help if, apart from me, that teacher [is also working there]... Then there is no other option but to inform them.

The school counsellor also emphasised the importance of a wide range of cooperation to increase its effectiveness:

You ask about the relationship with the parent, but what you need to do is cooperate with the centre, with their teacher, so that this work, for example with X now, makes sense and is more effective. And then, when this cooperation is [...] from many sides, there are chances. Now, even X's mum didn't realise that X had lice, and you know what that entails. And things like that, hygiene negligence, unwashed hair...

One interesting aspect that a participant in the study highlighted is the life situation of homeless mothers, which determines the nature of the cooperation. Its quality depends on how long these women have been experiencing homelessness:

As I said, I have been working here for a long time and I think that if homelessness is inherited, then this poor cooperation is also kind of inherited. [...] Now we have an example of mum X who is interested, but I know from the centre that she used to rent out a flat, so there might be some kind of dependency. Time spent homeless, time in the centre and limiting this negative impact. And she wasn't an orphanage child, but there was some history in her family.

According to one participant, homelessness is also a factor that prevents effective cooperation, and this is due to the conditions in which the children live. This theme can be found in the following statement:

[...] this lack of a home is [...] the beginning of these problems. It even comes down to the fact that children are ashamed to invite their friends over, and this already excludes them in a way. Maybe it's not [...] about the [...] nature of cooperation itself, but it even blocks cooperation at this stage.

Other examples of dysfunctional attitudes of women can also be found in the statements. The counsellor points to the instrumental nature of the student's mother's cooperation with the school – he emphasises that school events concerning the child are important to mothers insofar as they allow them to reduce the time they spend looking after the child:

They don't remember the regular meetings with parents, but they do remember to sign up for holiday camps and day camps. [...] for example, right now mum X is saying outright that if there are camps or if she can somehow get rid of the children, she can rest because she is tired because she has a lot of children. I guess

every mum is tired, only here it takes on such a [...] pathological form, because then she is reminded that she has an option, and you know – practically for free.

The participant in the study on the reasons for difficult cooperation associates the lack of knowledge and low self-awareness of mothers, as well as the reproduction of dysfunctional patterns. According to her, the reasons for the lack of competence stem from the life history, past and family environment of women in a homelessness crisis:

[...] because it is obvious that if she did not experience this family warmth, then [...] she does not even know what it should look like. As for meetings [with parents], such responsibilities as a mother are not [...] obvious to them, because they either grew up in orphanages, their mother was not there, and if she was, she was not there. [...] I mean addictions, now and then a new uncle [appears] and unfortunately this is more important than children, and so on. Unfortunately, this happens a lot. [...] if after school a [child] sees what mum says, what she does, or rather what she does not do, then even an army of educators will not help if he [the student] is with her [the mother]. And there's a new uncle now and then, so these are the patterns. In general, it's more about how these mothers approach it all, i.e., they unfortunately lack competence. [...] I won't say all of them, because yes, there are [also those] like Mum X now.

Among the negative comments, she also mentioned positive situations concerning cooperation with mothers, emphasising that they are unique:

When it is holiday time, we will have a day-care centre. Mum X remembers to pay for it herself, she has already taken an interest in it, which is usually the case with her. It seems natural, but believe me, it is usually the school or the centre staff who remind us about such things because mothers have more important things to do. Also, in projects at our school or projects in which our school participates, X is always, or almost always, there: for example, in the photography [club], volunteering and so on, various *events of* this kind [...]. But there are few such situations.

Conclusion

The statements of the participants in the survey reveal a clear advantage of those components of cooperation that have a negative character. These are factors that hinder

proper relations between school and family. The analysis of the collected research material allowed us to formulate conclusions that are included in three categories. The illustration below presents their grouping.

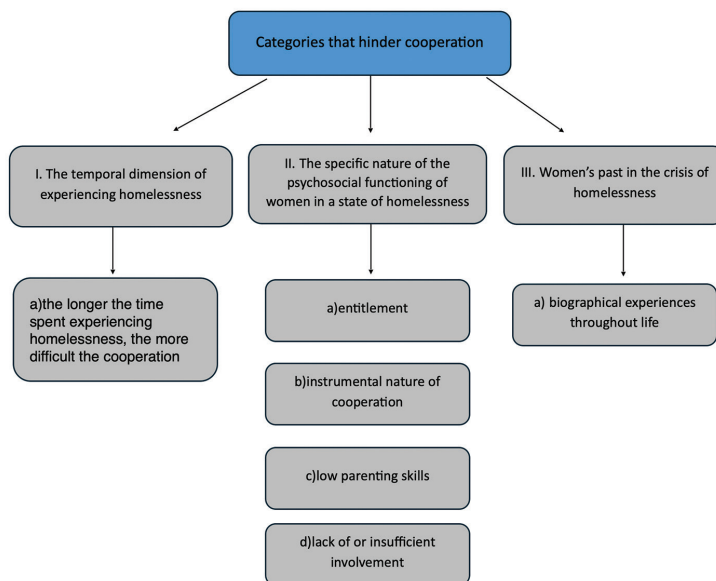


Figure 1. Categories that hinder cooperation between the school and the parent from the point of view of the school counsellor.

Source: Author's own study.

Category I – the temporal dimension of experiencing homelessness (the longer the time spent experiencing homelessness, the more difficult the cooperation). There is no doubt that as homelessness deepens, the negative consequences for the psychosocial and material well-being of individuals increase. Research indicates that the Polish social welfare system perpetuates homelessness instead of emphasising its prevention (Dobrzeńiecki-Łukasiewicz, 2023; Jaskulska et al., 2023; Kostrzyńska, 2017; Kostrzyńska, Wojtczak, 2022), and is also not sufficiently equipped with instruments aimed at helping to overcome homelessness, which creates a paradoxical situation. Therefore, measures aimed at preventing homelessness, reintegrating people experiencing it and limiting the institutional characteristics of the assistance provided to this group should be intensified. At the same time, it is worth noting the positive and growing trend in Poland to reduce institutional homelessness (this is a form of homelessness experienced by people who use the services of 24-hour homeless shelters). This trend is based on the pursuit of deinstitutionalisation and has been included in the ministerial programme for helping the homeless *Pokonać*

bezdomność: Edycja 2023 – obszar pomocy pozainstytucjonalnej [Overcoming homelessness: 2023 edition – the area of non-institutional assistance]. This document shows that

[...] deinstitutionalisation in the context of homelessness includes the process of preventing and overcoming homelessness through the development of services provided in the local community and, at the same time, the gradual reduction of institutional assistance, which, in short, includes: prevention, transformation of institutional services, creation and implementation of social services for people leaving homelessness in local communities, and above all housing services, including according to the Housing First method, social work, streetwork, assistance, care services, specialist consultations and advice, therapy and mediation (*Pokonać bezdomność...*, 2022, p. 26).

It should be emphasised that the implementation of the model described above has an extremely important advantage, especially for women with children experiencing homelessness. It happens that from birth, through adolescence, until they reach the age of majority, children in a homelessness crisis benefit from institutional support. Therefore, a homeless shelter is the only home they know, as they have not experienced any other reality – any changes in this regard were only temporary.

Category II – the specific nature of the psychosocial functioning of women in a state of homelessness (entitlement, instrumental nature of cooperation, low parenting skills, lack of or insufficient involvement). Because of the above category, it is extremely important to draw attention to the need to educate parents. Working to improve the quality of parental upbringing of their children and encouraging reflection on the parenting methods already practised contribute to the development of parenting skills. Another very important aspect is the deepening of the relationship between the school and the shelter staff. The people working in the shelter (especially the educators) are with the women and their children on a daily basis, which makes them a very important source of information for the school educator in terms of diagnosing many aspects of upbringing, education and prevention. It is worth mentioning that the *Ustawa o pomocy społecznej* [Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Support] (2004) guarantees access to specialist counselling (psychological, family and legal), but it seems that this assistance has significant deficits. Practitioners working with people in the crisis of homelessness point out that the real support they are given focuses primarily on the intervention and material-social aspects, while psychopedagogical influences have not received sufficient attention from those responsible for shaping social policy in Poland.

It should be noted here that the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to some extent reduce the deficits mentioned above through the implementation of various types of projects (e.g., so-called “schools for parents” and training in social, professional and hygiene skills, etc.). However, the concepts on which they are based are often very general.

Category III – women’s past in the crisis of homelessness (biographical experiences throughout life). It should be emphasised that women in shelters often have negative and sometimes traumatic past experiences over which they had no influence. Their families of origin did not equip them with basic social skills. As a result, the specific nature of the functioning of their families of origin did not allow them to develop correct patterns, norms and values. There is no doubt that such experiences affect their psychosocial functioning and, therefore, their parenting.

Marek Michalak (*Bezdomność dzieci*, 2016) draws attention to situations in which women living in homeless shelters become pregnant and give birth to children who later grow up in these centres. These situations cause the inheritance of homelessness, which can result from two, often coexisting aspects: the psychosocial functioning of mothers and the specificity of institutional culture. The second of these factors has negative consequences such as: “[...] lack of individual treatment, limited decision-making power, lack of personal space, prevention of independence and autonomy” (Jaskulska et al., 2023, p. 29). There is no doubt that this can be the cause of learned helplessness. Research by Małgorzata Kostrzyńska (Kostrzyńska, Wojtczak, 2022) shows that even those who experience homelessness themselves declare that such an attitude results, i.e., from the specific nature of the activities of social services. The author describes this situation as “learned helplessness tactics.” The research referred to earlier in the article proves that learned helplessness is a characteristic feature of people experiencing homelessness who use institutional forms of support, i.e., who stay in 24-hour centres. It can be assumed that the factors creating this attitude are internalised by the children of women in the crisis of homelessness in the course of socialisation, which can lead to the reproduction of unfavourable patterns of functioning in adult life and, as a consequence, to the inability to carry out life tasks. In this way, the psychosocial development of children can be disrupted due to dysfunctional mechanisms that are inherent in the functioning of their mothers. It is worth noting that children, among other things due to their not-yet-formed personalities, are not equipped with the competencies that allow them to cope sufficiently with problematic situations.

At this point, it should be emphasised that the research presented in the paper and the conclusion formulated based on it are only a narrow slice of the problem in question and therefore do not allow for broader generalisations. There is no doubt, therefore, that the considerations made here do not fully reflect the complexity of this reality, but only reveal certain aspects of it. Triangulation is a worthwhile approach that would not only improve the quality of the study but also help to gain a broader perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the content of this article can be treated as an introduction to in-depth research on the cooperation between the school and mothers in the crisis of homelessness, especially since this topic is neglected in the literature on the subject.

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