

KU LEUVEN

LUCAS

CARE RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY



Homelessness duration and recurrence in Belgium: An exploratory cluster analysis of administrative data

Laure-lise Robben & prof. dr. Koen Hermans

LUCAS, KU Leuven, Belgium

13/09/2024

intro

- Scarcity of public statistics and under-representation of people experiencing homelessness in Belgium
- Recent point-in-time counts (Hermans et al., 2023): almost 20,000 individuals in the Flemish Region.
- To capture the dynamic nature of homelessness, we need to study homeless spells as a dynamic process (Lee et al., 2021)

The well-known threefold typology

- **Classic threefold typology: transitional (short-term), episodic (recurrent) and chronic (long-term) homelessness** (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998)
- **Mostly based on the duration of shelter stay and rate of readmission** (see Culhane et al, 1994; Aubrey et al, 2013; Rabinovitch et al, 2016; Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Bairéad & Noriss, 2022; Waldron et al, 2019; etc).
- **Transitional spells comprised the largest group, followed by episodic (+- 10%) and chronic homelessness (+- 10%). One single homeless spell is an important predictor of returns** (Dworsky & Piliavin, 2000).
- **Criticism: need for more nuanced patterns of duration and recurrence; observation period of shelter users' studies are limited; under-representation of chronic homelessness; etc.** (McAllister et al., 2010, 2011).

RQ & hypotheses

- We examine the homeless spells in Belgium by conducting an exploratory cluster analysis of administrative data.
- RQ1: Which groups can be distinguished based on the duration and recurrence of their spells?
- RQ2: To what extent do they differ in characteristics?
- RQ3: And what is the potential of administrative data for the categorisation of homelessness?
- We hypothesised that (e.g. based on Caton et al., 2015):
 - we would deduce the same patterns of short-term, episodic and long-term homelessness;
 - a shorter duration associated with younger age, employment, an earned income;
 - a longer duration associated with older age and unemployment

Setting the scene

- Homelessness is defined as those individuals with a reference address at a local welfare agency in Belgium (2010-2018)
→ Specifically designed for people experiencing homelessness who lack a residential address.

- Several countries have such an alternative address for homeless people, whether it is a postal address or an administrative address (Robben, 2024)

→ Cf. Homeless Bill of Rights (FEANTSA & Housing Rights Watch)

- Even though this is a crucial requirement to be entitled to unemployment benefits, health insurance, valid ID card, family allowance, ... recent studies indicated that the reference address is ineffective in reaching its purpose and target group because of its conditionality, ambiguous legal framework, stigma, etc (see Robben et al, 2023; Robben, Peeters & Widlak, 2024).

V. The right to a postal address

People who are homeless often experience restricted access to the labour market and public services because they cannot provide a postal address. People who are homeless have the right to an effective postal address.

Cluster analysis: findings (RQ1)

	First-timers	Re-enterers	Chronic homelessness	Extremely chronic homelessness
Total (n)	18 390	3678	23 928	5130
Total (%)	36.0	7.2	46.8	10.0
Mean total duration homeless spells (in years)	1	4.1	2.5	6.5

		Mean duration	First-timers	Re-enterers	Chronic homelessness	Extremely chronic homelessness
Age	<18	1.7	18.3	8.5	13.2	3.0
	18-27	2.0	21.3	30.5	19.2	7.2
	28-42	2.5	31.4	38.0	34.9	38.1
	43-67	2.7	26.0	17.4	28.5	43.2
	67+	2.9	1.5	0.2	1.5	3.5
	Unknown	3.2	1.5	5.5	2.7	5.0
Sex	Male	2.5	61.3	71.8	66.1	72.4
	Female	2.0	34.3	20.6	27.9	15.8
	Unknown	3.0	4.4	7.7	6.0	11.8
Migration BG	BE	2.4	85.6	92.9	86.3	87.0
	EU	2.3	5.7	3.4	5.7	5.2
	Non-EU	2.8	5.7	2.2	4.4	3.2
	Unknown	2.8	3.0	1.4	3.6	4.6

	Mean duration	First-timers	Re-enterers	Chronic homelessness	Extremely chronic homelessness
Household type					
Single	2.7	44.2	63.4	41.5	51.3
Single parent	1.7	20.6	10.3	16.7	5.7
Couple	2.0	5.5	3.4	6.3	6.1
Couple w/ children	1.7	14.7	8.7	15.6	7.4
Collective hh	2.4	5.8	4.4	6.7	6.3
Other/unknown	2.8	9.2	9.8	14.2	23.3

	Mean duration	First-timers	Re-enterers	Chronic homelessness	Extremely chronic homelessness
Socio-economic status					
Employed	2.1	35.7	27.0	30.7	17.6
Unemployed	2.6	13.6	14.3	15.2	20.3
Social benefits	2.5	43.6	50.4	43.2	41.3
Other/unknown	2.5	7.1	8.3	10.9	20.8
Social assistance					
Yes	2.3	92.9	90.8	85.0	82.1
No	2.4	7.1	9.2	15.0	17.9

Conclusion

- In contrast with prior (shelter users') studies, more representation of long-term spells, the majority experiences chronic homelessness.
- Short-term homelessness is associated with younger age. 'First-timers' consists of a high share of women, families, with children. More likely to quickly find shelter or stable housing
- Re-enterers and chronic homelessness: need for family-specific services, specific attention for single adult males.
- Extremely chronic homelessness: high number of unknowns and unregistered group - represents administrative invisibility and administrative exclusion (Robben, Pierre & Hermans, 2023).

Discussion

- Potential of (integrated) administrative data: diverse and large group of people experiencing homelessness and address-lessness over a wider time span
- More nuanced insights into the duration and recurrence of homeless spells; a critical glance on chronicity, and *extreme* chronicity.
- Need for reducing barriers on alternative addresses such as the reference address in Belgium, to ensure access to rights for people experiencing (chronic) homelessness.

List of references

- Aubry, T., Duhoux, A., Klodawsky, F., Ecker, J., & Hay, E. (2016). A longitudinal study of predictors of housing stability, housing quality, and mental health functioning among single homeless individuals staying in emergency shelters. *American journal of community psychology, 58*(1-2), 123-135.
- Bairéad, C., & Norris, M. (2022). Homelessness duration and stability: A typology of emergency accommodation usage patterns in Dublin. *Cities, 127*, 103735.
- Benjaminsen, L., & Andrade, S. B. (2015). Testing a typology of homelessness across welfare regimes: Shelter use in Denmark and the USA. *Housing Studies, 30*(6), 858-876.
- Caton et al. (2005). Risk factors for long-term homelessness: Findings from a longitudinal study of first-time homeless single adults. *American journal of public health, 95*(10), 1753-1759.
- Culhane, D., Metraux, S., Park, J. M., Schretzman, M., & Valente, J. (2007). Testing a typology of family homelessness based on patterns of public shelter utilization in four US jurisdictions: Implications for policy and program planning. *Housing Policy Debate, 18*(1), 1-28.
- Hermans, K., Wagener, M., Mertens, N., Demaerschalk, E., & De Moor, N. (2024). Telling dak- en thuisloosheid - Globaal rapport 2023. Retrieved from Brussel: <https://kbs-frb.be/nl/telling-dak-en-thuisloosheid-globaal-rapport-2023>
- Kuhn, R., & Culhane, D. (1998). Applying cluster analysis to test a typology of homelessness by pattern of shelter utilization: Results from the analysis of administrative data. *American journal of community psychology, 26*(2), 207-232.

List of references

McAllister, W., Kuang, L., & Lennon, M. C. (2010). Typologizing temporality: time-aggregated and time-patterned approaches to conceptualizing homelessness. *Social Service Review, 84*(2), 225-255.

Robben, L.-L., & Hermans, K. (2021). "Zonder adres heb je geen rechten". 25 jaar het referentieadres bij een OCMW voor dak- en thuislozen in België. *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid, 2021*(4), 545-576.

Robben, L.-L., Pierre, A., & Hermans, K. (2023). 'Without an address, you do not exist': the administrative invisibility of people experiencing homelessness in Belgium. *Citizenship studies, 27*(5), 566-583.
doi:10.1080/13621025.2023.2237418

Robben, L.-L., Roets, G., Wagener, M., Van Lancker, W., & Hermans, K. (2023). Including the Most Excluded? A Qualitative Study on the Address Registration for People Experiencing Homelessness in Belgium. *Administration & Society, 55*(6), 1093-1117.

Robben, L.-L., Peeters, R., & Widlak, A. (2024). Burdens on the Gateway to the State: The Construction of Administrative Burdens in the Registration of People Experiencing Homelessness in Belgium and the Netherlands. . *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.*

Robben, L.-L. (2024). Overcoming the Postal Paradox? A policy discussion paper on the right to an address for people experiencing homelessness. *European Journal of Homelessness, 18*(2), 167-188

Waldron, R., O'Donoghue-Hynes, B., & Redmond, D. (2019). Emergency homeless shelter use in the Dublin region 2012-2016: Utilizing a cluster analysis of administrative data. *Cities, 94*, 143-152.

Contact

M: laurelise.robbe@kuleuven.be