Precariousness and Marginality of People Experiencing Homelessness in Athens: Pathways In and Through the Street

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Abstract_ *The study examines visible homelessness in post-crisis Athens using a distinctive pathways method—applied here for the first time in the Greek context. Drawing on 74 case studies of people living on the streets or in shelters, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, centred around the temporal dimensions of homelessness, integrating biographical interviews, ethnographic observation, and quantitative analysis. The analysis identified nine pathways, along with critical transitions into and through homelessness. Two broader processes of marginalisation also emerged: psychoactive substance users tend to "drift along" homelessness, while the majority of non-users "drop into" it suddenly. The findings highlight how prolonged exposure to violence and suffering, alongside the unique interaction of other key drivers, with transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, creates conditions where a habitus of precariousness evolves into a habitus of marginality. This study provides insights that hint at the limitations of short-term intervention strategies and the need for more comprehensive, long-term policy approaches.*

Keywords_ *Homelessness, pathways, mixed methods, precariousness, marginality, social suffering*

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Introduction

This study examines the pathways into and through visible homelessness in post-crisis Athens, under the consideration of precariousness and marginality. This marks the first application of a comprehensive pathways approach to homelessness research in Greece, enriching the limited body of knowledge on this topic in the Southern European context. In order to detect and reflect upon the ways that precariousness and marginality shape the life trajectories and experiences of the homeless, this article proposes a distinctive pathways approach (see Sommerville, 2013; Clapham, 2003; Anderson and Tulloch, 2000).

This research examines how individuals experience and navigate homelessness, revealing distinct patterns of marginalisation and the critical role of prolonged violence and suffering in shaping these pathways. The research advances understanding of contemporary urban homelessness through three primary contributions. First, it develops a distinctive methodological framework that integrates temporal dimensions with processes of social marginalisation. Through the synthesis of life trajectories, focusing on housing trajectories, utilising biographical research and ethnographic methods, the study initially employs quantitative and then mixed analysis to identify patterns of pathways and critical transitions in homeless experiences. Second, it empirically documents how transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, particularly its neoliberalisation and precarisation, and accompanying changes in homeless support services, produce key drivers that shape these pathways. Third, it reveals two distinct processes of marginalisation: a gradual descent among substance users and rapid push toward the streets and the margins for non-users and thus shows how a habitus of precariousness, moulded by economic crisis and welfare state reform, can grow into a more established habitus of marginality through extended exposure to violence and suffering.

In this attempt to link the interactive processes between reaching a state of homelessness and the actual experience of it, the essence of the research rests on the premise that homelessness should be regarded as a temporal process instead of a static condition (Clapham, 2003; Somerville, 2013; Mayock et. al., 2021). This temporal perspective recognises that homelessness is intricately connected to broader social, cultural, and economic processes that connect past and present experiences (Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016, p.269). Therefore, its comprehensive understanding necessitates its contextualisation (Pleace, 2016 p.36).

Through this lens, homelessness emerges as a dynamic, multidimensional, and at times long-term process of precarisation, produced within the context of broader economic and social transformations and affecting, beyond housing, all realms of

human existence. This framework allows for an examination of both the conditions that lead to homelessness and the meanings, views, and practices that individuals develop in response to their circumstances.

Greece: Economic Crisis and Its Lasting Impact on the Homeless

The Southern European welfare model has historically been distinguished by some key characteristics. In these countries social cohesion was built primarily on family networks rather than wage labour (Paugam, 2016), and high rates of (often self-built) homeownership (Allen et al., 2004, p.20). This distinctive model shaped both the nature of housing precarity and homelessness prior to the 2008 financial crisis.

The economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures marked a fundamental rupture in this social protection system, turning Greece's welfare regime from one of relative security to one marked by constant precariousness and vulnerability (Spyridakis, 2018, p.10). This transformation manifested in heightened social inequalities, an increase in poverty, and restricted housing access, particularly affecting low-wage renters (Maloutas et al., 2020). Beyond these material effects, the process of precarisation also intensified social discomfort and suffering, evidenced by declining physical and mental health outcomes (Kentikelenis et al., 2011; Economou et al., 2013), increased substance use and risky injection practices (Nikolopoulos et al., 2015), and widespread professional burnout among care service workers (Rachiotis et al., 2021).

This landscape was compounded by a sharp increase in refugee flows, which peaked in 2015 and brought thousands of people, often from war-torn areas. This dual crisis created what Cabot (2019) terms a 'precarity continuum', encompassing both newly arrived refugees and Greek citizens who became 'internal refugees', estranged not from their homeland but from social connections and basic rights. Within this context, both visible and, predominately, invisible homelessness have proliferated. While reliable longitudinal data on homelessness in Athens is unavailable, some signs point to an extension and modification of the phenomenon. Since 2010, service providers report a 40% increase in the use of housing services (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017), while broader socioeconomic indicators—such as rising poverty rates, increased social exclusion, and persistent long-term unemployment—indicate an expanding population at risk of housing loss (Kourachanis, 2015, p.183). The demographic composition has also shifted, with the homeless population now including a large number of native citizens from the lower middle class, as well as families with children and newly arriving migrants. The issue has since attracted international and local media attention, resulting in a related public discourse and an increase in research.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that relevant research remains in its early stages, presenting a paradox in the conduct of qualitative and ethnographic studies without a prior comprehensive and systematic mapping of the homeless population. However, existing studies have already shed light on significant aspects of the phenomenon.

For example, Kourachanis (2016; 2018) used semi-structured biographical interviews to investigate the reasons for homelessness, initially focusing on 12 productive-age men experiencing homelessness and later on 12 single families experiencing homelessness. He identified five types of structural and relational factors that lead to homelessness: lack of income due to long-term unemployment, residual family and housing policies, absence of supportive family environment, the economic crisis preventing broader family networks from providing support to their most vulnerable members, and cultural norms involved around family aid, which are characterised by patriarchal and religious beliefs.

Two polytropic ethnographic studies offer valuable insights into the construction of homelessness within care and support spaces.

Bourlessas (2018a; b; 2020) highlights the dynamic process of shaping geographies of homelessness in crisis-stricken Athens, alongside overall poverty management and welfare restructuring. The metaphor of a 'machinic archipelago' illustrates how the interplay of place and mobility shapes the othering of individuals experiencing homelessness. Within the city's institutional and material context, specific patterns of mobility emerge, such as the forced mobility of the hosts of a night shelter— imposed to them by the administration as a form of treatment toward 'self-mobilisation'— as well as the frequent purposeful movement of street-based sleepers aiming to avoid stigmatisation. Thus, the geographies of homelessness in central Athens, Greece, are composed by an archipelago of spaces in the city, wherein the homeless stigma is hidden from the public eye, accepted, manifested, managed, reproduced, embodied, negotiated, and contested (Bourlessas, 2018a, p.11).

Complementing this, Vogkli's (2021) ethnographic work redefines homelessness as a state of 'ontological insecurity', exacerbated by the financial difficulties faced by support organisations, inadequate staffing, and employee burnout. These factors further marginalise the homeless both psychologically and materially, resulting in a growing divide between workers and the homeless and leaving care provision in limbo. Vogkli shows how adverse conditions, lack of coordination between shelter and service providers, and insufficient resources undermine the care workers' efforts to provide tailored support, leading to the misrecognition of experiences of the homeless. Her work offers a valuable stand to further explore marginality among the people experiencing homelessness in Athens.

While studies conducted in Greece have highlighted significant aspects of homelessness, critical dimensions remain underexplored or require more in-depth investigation. Firstly, the biographical and housing pathways of the general homeless population demand further study. Although existing research has identified important factors involved in the formation of homeless pathways, and depicted the homelessness landscape during the economic crisis, the processes through which individuals become homeless and how these processes lead to marginalisation and loss of agency need deeper exploration. Additionally, certain populations, such as substance users, who are prominently represented among the visibly homeless, remain largely overlooked in research. Since its emergence during the recession, and in line with societal developments, domestic research has mainly focused on the population of the 'new homeless' (see Theodorikakou et al., 2013). Thus, although the multifaceted crises have significantly exacerbated the situation for the persistent 'undeserving' poor, such as drug users (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017), the diversity of pathways leading to homelessness and the various dimensions of the phenomenon have not been fully acknowledged.

Addressing these gaps could help develop a more systematic understanding of the diverse needs of the homeless in the post-crisis Athenian context, contributing to the limited body of knowledge on homelessness in Southern Europe. In doing so, the article intends to pursue this direction, employing a distinctive pathways approach, framed within the concepts of precariousness and marginality.

A Pathways Approach to Studying Precariousness and Marginality

Pathways research and longitudinal studies have consistently identified overlapping drivers that contribute to homelessness, despite the varied and complex nature of individual trajectories (Barker, 2016). These recurring drivers include economic precarity and poverty (Fitzpatrick, 2000; McNaughton, 2008a; b), substance use and addiction (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011; McNaughton, 2008a; b; Mayock et al., 2008), institutional factors, particularly the availability and structure of support services (McNaughton, 2008a; Ravenhill, 2008; Mayock et al., 2008), and experiences of violence and trauma (McNaughton, 2008a; b; Mayock et al, 2021). These drivers consistently recur across most studies, regardless of the emphasis placed on each.

However, what often remains unexplored is the manner or the "particular social process" (Farrugia, 2010, p.71) through which these drivers influence the homeless trajectories and how they interrelate over time. Thus, the nuanced interplay between structural forces and individual agency in this context is not fully understood. As

Farrugia and Gerrard (2016, p.275) note, this gap is linked to homelessness research's ability to "develop an understanding of the social and political conditions surrounding homelessness", as well as to how structural causes are perceived, operationalised, and connected to the lives of the homeless.

In attempts to address these limitations, recent studies suggest that incorporating Bourdieu's socioanalysis (2001, p.3), through the concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Bourdieu, 1977), offers a valuable tool of both theorising and contextualising homelessness. This line of research aims to synthesise the complexity of intertwined factors (Ross-Brown and Leavey, 2021), effectively bridging the divide between external objective structures and the subjective dispositions, practices, and perceptions generated within particular conditions of existence. Often focusing on the personal, embodied experiences of the homeless (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009), it illuminates how structural conditions permeate various aspects of people's lives through the formation of habitus. It provides insights into how instability, isolation (Barker, 2016), and violence (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009) are formed and enacted both before and during homelessness. In this direction, researchers have underscored issues such as the symbolic burden of homelessness (Farrugia, 2010), the role of class origin in the formation of different forms of habitus, and thus homelessness (Hodgetts et al., 2012), and how the above shape a specific form of agency, leading to the reproduction of social inequality (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009). Specifically, Hodgetts et al. (2012) develop a typology for explaining the divergence between middle and lower class habitus among the homeless, with the former 'dropping into' and the later 'drifting along' homelessness.

Building on this direction, and advancing further, this article proposes the theoretical framing of the pathways approach with specific considerations of the discussion on precariousness and key concepts from Bourdieu's socioanalysis. Here precariousness is understood primarily as a form of social rupture and suffering (Bourdieu, 1963/1979; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964/2020), and secondarily as disaffiliation (Castel, 2000) and the weakening of social bonds (Paugam, 2009). This perspective emphasises the need to understand homelessness not merely as an individual experience, but as phenomena deeply rooted in and shaped by broader socio-political and economic structures, and the ways through which they are "retranslated into lived realities" (Wacquant, 2014, p.284). At the same time it highlights the complex interplay between economic and material instability and social relationships, and the importance of integrating the disparate experiences that make up a biography (Bourdieu, 1986).

Precariousness as a social rupture first emerged in Bourdieu's studies on Algeria (Bourdieu, 1963/1979; Bourdieu and Sayad, 1964/2020). Bourdieu used the term to describe the consequences of replacing pre-capitalist agricultural structures with

urban-capitalist ones, that lead rural populations to an inability to reproduce, and shape their dispositions for the future and their incapacity to plan it. In this context, precarity is associated to the discordance and lag between the individuals consciousness and economic structures. To grasp the collapsing world of colonial Algeria, Bourdieu (re)introduced the concept of habitus (Wacquant, 2016). Habitus could be seen as "a multilayered and dynamic set of schemata that records, stores, and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments successively traversed during one's existence, […] subject to 'permanent revision' in practice" (Wacquant, 2016, p.68). In his later works, he revisited the concepts of social rupture and suffering within the social spaces of metropolitan France and the USA (Bourdieu et al., 1999). There, social suffering refers to the difficulty of accessing material and symbolic resources which are unevenly distributed in social space, arising from the process of neoliberalisation and the contradictions of public policies, where repression undermines state care.

The pathways are complex, whether involving the 'fall' and disillusionment of petty-bourgeois aspirations (where capital and field, strategies, and reproduction mechanisms are incompatible) or the entrapment in a perpetual state of poverty and marginalisation. The latter process would later be described by Wacquant (1993; 2008) as 'advanced marginality'. Wacquant (2008) identifies the effects of these processes on both the primary incorporation and the transformation of habitus, which can be shaped as "structurally unstable" (Wacquant, 2004, p.105) or even "broken/splintered" (Wacquant, 2016, p.69). He emphasises the need to examine the expansion of urban marginality in both its material and symbolic dimensions, within a state that is liberal for those at the top and punitive toward the ones at the lower tiers of the social hierarchy. However, these interpretations should consider the varying pathways among countries, which result from the variations in welfare regimes (Wacquant, 2009, p.175).

Similarly, Paugam (2009; 2016) refers to precarisation as a process of 'social disqualification', meaning a condition of chronic employment instability and accumulation of disadvantages. This can lead to the weakening of social bonds that offer individuals the necessary social protection as well as material, symbolic, and emotional recognition. While precarisation originates from structural economic changes, it permeates, distributes, and reproduces through social relations. In this context, Castel (2000) discusses a relational impoverishment, which he calls 'social disaffiliation'. Through the process of disaffiliation, "economic insecurity leads to destitution, and the fragility of social relations to isolation" (Castel, 2000 p.520). The aforementioned approaches of precariousness and marginality, complemented with Bourdieu's socioanalysis, could inform us on the pathways into and through homelessness, particularly in the context of Southern Europe, with a specific focus on Athens. In this study, precariousness is defined as a condition of ontological

insecurity, primarily shaped within the family environment, while marginality, is a well-established and entrenched condition, shaped secondarily through interactions with life on the streets, involvement with the criminal justice system, and engagement with social services.

Research Design

The methodological design of this research includes the integration of multiple methodological perspectives in the collection and analysis of data, with a central focus on the temporal dimension. Namely, timing and sequencing (Elder and O'Rand, 1995) were significant elements in this process. Through a combination of life trajectory approach with an emphasis on housing trajectory, biographical research, and ethnographic methods, the study facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and highlights its multifaceted aspects. The data collection methods included a biographical trajectory questionnaire, biographical narrative interviews, which served as the primary data collection tool, and ethnographic observation.

Participants

The 74 key participants in this study were either native citizens or long-term migrant residents, all falling within the ETHOS typology—subcategories 1 to 3—(FEANTSA, 2005). The decision to include only natives or long-term residents and to exclude newly arrived refugees was based on a language criterion. In the biographical narrative interview process, participants' speech is central to the quality of the data. The involvement of interpreters could risk distorting the data or hindering the establishment of a trust-based relationship between the researcher and participant.

Of the 74 participants, 55 were male, 17 were female, and two were transgender. Their ages ranged from 21 to 80 years, with an average age of 47.9. Ten participants were from countries within or outside the EU, and three were Greek Roma. In terms of living conditions, 27 participants were residing in homeless shelters or reintegration hostels as part of addiction treatment programs (22 in shelters and five in hostels). The remaining 47 participants had no form of shelter and were living 'on the street'.

In engaging with the participants, I collaborated with four different organisations. My 20-month fieldwork journey began with volunteering in a street outreach group that addresses the general homeless population. This group operates a mobile soup kitchen, making evening rounds in areas of the city with a high concentration of homelessness. My subsequent visits to various shelters and facilities allowed me to explore different aspects of the issue. The second organisation was a harm reduction centre offering day services to individuals with substance dependence,

many of whom are homeless. The third was a day centre serving the general homeless population, and the fourth was a transitional shelter operated by the Municipality of Athens. Participant recruitment was predominately initiated through my direct approach, with a smaller proportion facilitated by recommendations from the organisations' staff.

The sampling strategy was not designed to be representative of the overall homeless population in Athens but was focused on individuals experiencing visible forms of homelessness at the time of the research (either on the streets or in shelters). Instead, the sampling was theoretical (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bruman, 2016). A quota was retained with regard to street and sheltered population, gender, and age, similar to the results of the most recent point in time official count of the homeless in Athens during 2018 (Arapoglou et al., 2021). 'Theoretical sampling' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Bryman, 2016) aimed to address the research questions, particularly to compare patterns and processes leading into and through visible homelessness, and to highlight the role of social policies and services in the lives of the homeless, without imposing preconceived categorisations. A distinction between the trajectories of drug users and non-users emerged organically during the data collection process, supported and informed by the official count of the Athenian homeless population in 2018, which revealed that 40% of the street homeless population were drug users (Arapoglou et al., 2021). This finding corroborated by my ethnographic observation and was exacerbated by the exclusion of drug users from homeless shelters during the time of the research. For this reason the participants were initially recruited from services that address the needs of the general homeless population (such as the street outreach group and the day centre) and later on from ones that address the needs of drug users.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent, ensuring the protection of their personal data and safeguarding their anonymity. They took place in various mutually agreed-upon locations, including public spaces and homelessness service facilities. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 27 of the respondents. My voluntary work and enduring presence in the field assisted to establish relationships of trust with all the respondents. A discrete handling of sensitive issues and empathy allowed the disclosure of traumatic events and indeed an emotional relief and restorative encounter of the past was acknowledged in the interviews by many respondents.

Analysis

The research analysis followed a three-tiered approach, focusing on different levels of the phenomenon (macro, meso, and micro). These levels can be viewed as vantage points within the broader landscape of homelessness in Athens. At each stage, the analytical perspective shifts, beginning with a macro-level, external

perspective (quantitative analysis), moving to a meso-level focus on typologies of homelessness pathways, and ultimately progressing to a micro-level understanding, capturing how individuals experience and interpret homelessness (biographical analysis, ethnographic data). This final phase includes detailed case studies that illustrate the typical pathways identified at the meso-level, though these will not be elaborated upon here for brevity. In essence, the analytical process involves a shift in perspective, which, following Bourdieu, is akin to moving "from the space of positions" to "the space of points of view" (Bourdieu, 2000, pp.183-184).

Specifically, the focus on the life trajectory initially employed quantitative and then mixed methods analysis to identify patterns. The quantitative data provided an overview of significant variations of aggravating factors and guided further examination of the pathways. At the same time, they offered crucial insights into the partially documented profiles of the homeless in the local count (see Arapoglou et al., 2021). The biographical interview focused on the perspectives, perceptions, and practices of the homeless themselves. It also revealed how the accumulation of multiple aggravating factors—as a process of loss(es) and suffering—led to the initial incident of visible homelessness and how this process was metabolised and in turn influenced the (re)shaping of their dispositions through the interweaving of personal trajectories with the existing institutional framework. These aspects were enriched by the ethnographic method, which acted as a source of feedback on the data obtained from biographical interviews. It provided rich material regarding the geography of homelessness in Athens, highlighting the relationship of the participants with the corresponding support services and simultaneously contributing to the enrichment of limited existing knowledge about the very field of the street, a unique social space where, in part, homelessness is constituted (Bourlessas, 2018a). In this way, pathways of rupture and suffering were formed, along with the potential for theoretical and methodological enrichment of the pathways approach, primarily in the domestic but also in the international literature.

Findings

First level of analysis

The first level of analysis, conducted using quantitative methods with SPSS, revealed a pivotal distinction among the participants, dividing them into two major groups: those who followed a trajectory involving substance use and those who did not engage in the use of psychoactive substances. Significant differences were observed between these groups in terms of their life trajectories and the critical transitions both before and after their first visible homelessness incident.

Table 1. Overall trajectory of substance users and non-users

	Users	Non-users
N	41	33
Demographic characteristics		
Age (years)*[1]	40,1	57,7
Profile and family history		
Working and lower-middle class background	87,2%	76,7%
Adverse childhood experiences/family violence*	82,5%	36,4%
Edgework during adolescence*[2]	67,5%	0%
Low educational level	50,0%	30,3%
Penal system involvement*	58,5%	9,1%
Work trajectory		
Never worked before	12,5%	3,1%
Housing trajectory		
Never participated in household maintenance	26,8%	12,1%
Mean duration of single household maintenance (months)*	34,5	135,7
Mean duration of multi-person household maintenance (months)*	44,2	145,2
Housing/Accommodation trajectory through homelessness		
Age of first visible incident (years)*	29,5	50,8
Episodically homeless	73,2%	21,2%
Mean number of incidents	2,67	1,37
Mean duration of current incident (months)*	14,2	51,4
ETHOS subcategory 1-current incident (%)[3]	82,9%	39,4%
ETHOS subcategories 2 and 3-current incident (%)	17,1%	60,6%
Lifetime duration of stay in ETHOS subcategories 1-3 (months)*	34,4	54,5
Lifetime duration of stay in ETHOS subcategories 1-13 (months)	54,1	73,6
Experience and practices		
Access to state allowance	18,4%	31,1%
Income gaining practices	57,9%	43,7%
Experienced violent attack while homeless	83,8%	53,3%

Specifically, quantitative analysis revealed that substance users generally experience visible forms of homelessness (either on the streets or in shelters) earlier in life, but tend to remain in this condition for a shorter overall duration. The nature of their homelessness is largely episodic, with multiple episodes lasting approximately one year each. This group is younger, has lower educational attainment compared to non-users, and has encountered significantly more adverse or traumatic experiences during childhood. Many began using substances and/or engaging in edgework as teenagers, with the majority having spent time in incarceration. Some participants in this group had never been employed, while those who had worked

1 * $p < 0.05$, indicating statistical significance

2 The term *edgework* was introduced to homelessness pathways research by McNaughton (2008a) and refers to engaging in risk-taking practices. Here, it encompasses practices such as drug use and involvement in delinquent activities, which may have hindered the acquisition of resources that support future social integration.

3 (FEANTSA, 2005)

were primarily engaged in low-level service sector jobs. Their contributions to household maintenance over their lifetimes were notably briefer than those of the non-using group. While homeless, they more frequently lived in outdoor spaces rather than shelters, likely due to their exclusion from shelters up until the time of the research. Lastly, this group reported experiencing significantly higher rates of violence during their homelessness.

By contrast, participants who were not involved in substance use were generally older and encountered visible forms of homelessness at a later stage in life. Their educational levels were slightly higher than those in the substance-using group. Many were born in rural areas or in Balkan countries, and they reported fewer adverse childhood experiences compared to substance users, with little to no interaction with the penal system. All participants in this group had worked at least once in their lives, often as small business owners, unskilled labourers, or in undeclared employment. Regarding their housing trajectories, they had contributed to maintaining a single or multi-person household for extended periods. These individuals typically experienced a single episode of visible homelessness, which began later in life and from which they were unable to recover. The majority resided in transitional shelters.

This first level of analysis laid the foundation for further exploration of the different forms these pathways can take, ultimately evolving into trajectories of marginalisation.

Second level of analysis

The second level of analysis resulted in the identification of nine distinct pathways. Based on the core distinction established in the first level, the first four pathways (1-4) were followed by participants involved in substance use, while the remaining five pathways (5-9) were followed by those who were not:

1. The *"early marginalisation"* pathway, where the first incident of (usually visible) homelessness is experienced during adolescence or early adulthood. This typically occurs as an early escape to the streets or as a consequence of the onset of heavy substance use.

2. The *"penal system involvement*" pathway, where participants experience their first homelessness episode as adults, with at least one incident of incarceration preceding this event.

3. The *"late marginalisation"* pathway, where participants become homeless at an older age without any prior penal system involvement.

4. The "*dual dependency"* pathway, where the experiences of female substance users are shaped by both substance dependence and gender inequalities in a patriarchal society, manifesting in distinct ways while living on the streets.

5. The *"work precariousness and downfall"* pathway, where the collective structural condition of the economic crisis led participants to unemployment or financial ruin.

6. The *"health precariousness and collapse"* pathway, where the first visible incident followed the onset of a serious physical or mental health problem that prevented participants from working.

7. The *"invisible female poverty"* pathway, where participants, often due to gender-defined roles, were not employed for extended periods and contributed through unpaid domestic labour to household maintenance.

8. The *"invisible poverty without family support"* pathway, in which homelessness emerged through a process that started with problems in their family of origin, combined with a lack of employment opportunities that worsened during the economic recession.

9. The *"invisible poverty of the undocumented"* pathway, where homelessness was a direct result of structural exclusion from work and housing due to the absence of legal documents, a situation that worsened during the crisis.

Table 2. Substantial chronological transitions for the nine pathways

	Mean of onset of substance abuse/main substance (years)	**Mean of first visible homeless-ness incident** (years)	**Mean of first incarcera-tion** (years)	**Mean age** (years)
1. Early marginalisation N=14	16,0	16,7	21,1	34,2
2. Penal system involvement N=9	25,3	38,4	27,2	45,2
3. Late marginalisation N=6	24,1	41,3	----	46,5
4. Dual dependency N=12	21,8	32,0	----	39,5
5. Work precariousness and downfall N=13	----	60,6	----	65,6
6. Health precariousness and collapse N=8	----	52,6	-----	57,2
7. Invisible female poverty N=3	----	58,0	-----	62,6
8. Invisible poverty without family support N=6	-----	37,3	-----	43,8
9. Invisible poverty of the undocumented N=3	-----	39,0 Greece 26,5 other countries	-----	47,0

Two processes toward marginalisation

The three-level analysis revealed two distinct processes of marginalisation: "drifting along" and "dropping into" (Hodgetts et al., 2012, p.1).[4]

The first process, **followed by substance users**, typically begins in early life. Their pathways reflect prolonged material deprivation among the working and lower-middle classes, coupled with deficits in cultural, social, and emotional capital—typically transmitted through family relations. In a welfare regime where the family is the primary provider of class position reproduction and informal protection (Papadopoulos and Roumbakis, 2013), these deficits are pivotal.

Within this context, private violence emerged as a crucial aggravating factor that shapes participants' dispositions at a primary level. This finding underscores the connection between childhood experiences, particularly poverty and domestic violence, and homelessness, as highlighted in previous international research (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Ravenhill, 2008; Mayock et al., 2021). This violence is then transferred, through the mediation of social and penal policy, into the field of the street. In this particular field, "the present becomes so uncertain that it devours the future" (Wacquant, 1999, p.156). It represents a social space of disorganisation, where survival depends on the constant readiness to exploit any available material or symbolic resource while also protecting oneself from others. Practices of earning small incomes, combined with a broader shift in penal policy that targets specific populations (Cheliotis and Xenakis, 2010; EKTEPN, 2019; 2020), often resulted in deeper entanglement with the penal system for offences that might otherwise have been redeemable. The challenges faced by women in this environment were excessive. To survive in an environment hostile to the female body, they mobilised a specific form of capital available to them, 'vicarious social capital' (Watson, 2016), through the formation of intimate relationships, which simultaneously served as sources of protection and violence.

The analysis suggests that substance experimentation and addiction are reactions to the material, emotional, and social deprivation experienced by the participants in their youth. However, this reaction was mediated and consolidated by the instillation of a primary habitus of precariousness (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This primary habitus gradually transformed into a secondary habitus of marginality, shaped by early education abandonment and exposure to street and prison violence, entailing the accumulation of forms of capital that are only redeemable in this particular social space, often resulting in repeated incarcerations. Simultaneously, this social space became an arena where the primary habitus of precariousness could be converted into social status and economic benefits

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4 Building on Hodgett's et al. (2012) typology, these terms are reinterpreted here, to fit the empirical data and context dynamics of this research.

(Sandberg, 2008, p.157). Thus, through the mediation of initially residual and subsequently punitive social institutions, the participants were progressively led from poverty to marginalisation.

For the participants in the substance use pathways, the impact of the crisis was indirect yet potent, manifesting through the underfunding of support services, the expansion and intensification of violence in the street environment, the introduction of new, economically affordable but highly harmful drugs, and the inability of family networks to provide support (where they existed).

Contrary to those who followed the substance use pathways, who gradually 'drift along' marginalisation through a prolonged process, **participants in the non-use pathways—**except those on the 'invisible poverty of the undocumented' pathway—'drop into' it. This occurs through a process of total disintegration of their living conditions, creating tension between objective opportunities and previously formed dispositions (Bourdieu, 2000).

These individuals are older and, despite also coming from impoverished backgrounds, were previously able to effectively mobilise the necessary resources for social participation and integration into mainstream culture. They possessed a primary habitus, either of the traditional lower-middle or working class, where values of hard work, solidarity, and honesty fuelled aspirations for a better life. These values were either nostalgically recalled or used to reject the stigma of homelessness in their narratives. At the same time, their interpersonal and familial relationships maintained a patriarchal structure, fostering different aspirations, practices, and ultimately distinct pathways among men and women experiencing homelessness.

The crisis marked a turning point, disrupting the lower-middle-class habitus and instilling a habitus of precariousness. Through their interaction with the residual state institutions, symbolic violence, and occasional exposure to the street environment, this habitus rapidly transformed into one of marginality, leading to a discrepant integration into the dominant culture, isolation, and entrapment. These people find themselves in a liminal position: distanced from the life of the housed, yet "out of place" from the street environment (Hodgetts et. al, 2012, p.6). Once homeless, they entered a state of resignation and stagnation within this harrowing new condition, lacking the necessary resources to cope. Their stigmatised position resulted in entrapment in a hopeless social order, accompanied by ruptures and upheavals in established social relations, leading to a diminution of familial and social capital since work exclusion had already been preceded.

For them, the impacts of the crisis were more distinct, manifesting in increased unemployment, reduced opportunities for both formal and informal employment, and a recessionary climate in the labour market. This was compounded by the strain on

their physical and mental health due to economic pressures, which coincided with the withdrawal of already insufficient policies for people with mental health difficulties and the reduction in disability benefits. Furthermore, economic hardship directly affected the romantic relationships of some participants, undermined the capacity of family networks to provide support, and intensified existing family dysfunctions. As a result, participants lost forms of capital during the crisis—capital that had previously offered crucial social protection and recognition (Paugam, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986). As renters or dependents from the working or lower-middle class, they were among the first to be impacted (Maloutas et al., 2020).

The aforementioned are interconnected with the retreat of already inadequate state intervention within the expanding precariousness of the 'familistic welfare model' (see Papadopoulos and Roumbakis, 2013). This model has shaped a pluralistic **network of services** aimed at addressing only the emergency needs of those facing multiple challenges (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). However, as revealed by the research data, even these urgent needs are only partially met. The synthesis of analytical approaches shows that interaction with support services leads to the reproduction of the subordinate position of the homeless, ultimately deepening their marginalisation. This occurs through a combination of spatial, institutional, and relational factors that transform individuals from 'housed' to 'homeless'. Thus, through a process in which the "appropriation of one's time and objectives" (Gounis, 1992, p.689) plays a central role, they find themselves trapped in a "specific type of institutionalisation", referred to as "shelterisation" (Arapoglou et al., 2015, p.11; Dear and Wolch, 2014).

However, shelterisation implies different practices for those living on the streets and those residing in shelters. For the former, it involves the need for constant mobility between various services within the urban landscape to meet their urgent needs (food, personal hygiene, medical, and legal coverage). For the latter, it is constituted by the operational framework of shelters, which, through a set of restrictions and controls, remove the possibility of self-determination for the residents. In both cases, contact with these services traps the homeless in a state of "abeyance" (Hopper and Baumohl, 1994, p.528). In this landscape, the operation of closed community drug addiction treatment facilities and the extremely limited "Housing-First" type programmes provide alternative care sites.

From this analysis, it becomes evident that the pathways into homelessness also shape the **experiences** within it through the (re)formation and functions of habitus and corresponding practices. Similarly, the pathways leading to homelessness affect how the homeless interpret both their previous experiences and the experience of homelessness itself. For those marginalised early in life, their suffering is perceived as an inherent part of their existence, with little acknowledgement of the

transformations that led to it. In contrast, for individuals who previously charted an independent trajectory—such as those on the "work precariousness and downfall" and "health precariousness and collapse" pathways—or who were closer to the mainstream culture, the experience of downfall and exclusion conflicts with the previously formed habitus. They may attribute their marginalisation to broader societal transformations or even decisions made at the higher strata of social hierarchy. However, their new subordinate position does not allow for a turn toward political or other claims.

In these circumstances, the only available possibility for negotiating agency is limited to either accepting or rejecting their new stigmatised position. Aware of societal perceptions of homelessness, participants often projected versions of a non-homeless identity, mainly through distinguishing themselves from the characteristics and practices attributed to the homeless by dominant discourses (see Snow and Anderson, 1987). This division was sometimes spatially expressed through the choice of isolated sleeping locations or the avoidance of communal spaces in shelters. In any case, these versions are shaped in relation to the distinct paths they followed into homelessness.

Yet, the research reveals that at the heart of personal histories, **trauma and suffering** have long accumulated behind stigmatising categorisations, particularly for those from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds living in precarious conditions for years. The study sheds light on a continuous and porous universe of violence that shifts between the private and public spheres, alternating between symbolic and physical forms. The violence mediates the instillation of a habitus of marginality, whether primary or secondary.

Simultaneously, many homeless narratives suggest a process of incorporating dominant values, where the body becomes both a shell for inscribing stigma and a means of self-replicating violence, while also serving as the ultimate boundary of protection. Various forms of violence often remain unseen—just as poverty does—either because individuals attempt to protect themselves from further stigmatisation or because care providers recognise only its most pronounced manifestations. The violence reflected in the stories of the homeless in this research points to misrecognition of varying intensity. It is manifested through class and gender practices in both family life (labour and care division, marital strategies, neglect, abuse) and public life (in schools, streets, shelters, and prisons). Its repetitiveness forms multiple layers of suffering, accumulating both in the psyche and within the body.

Conclusions

The study employs a distinctive pathways method identifying nine distinct patterns into and through visible homelessness. While aligning with profiles documented in prior international research, this investigation goes further by detailing the specific sequence of events and critical transitions along each pathway. Crucially, it examines how a combination of key drivers interplay to shape these pathways.

These key drivers interplay with broader transformations in the Southern European welfare regime, which, through the economic crisis, have contributed to transforming a habitus of precariousness into a habitus of marginality. Specifically, the study highlights the central role of prolonged violence and suffering, alongside the unique interactions among poverty, substance use, patriarchal gender relations, and the prevalence of punitive policies and inadequate support services. These drivers translated into interconnected experiences that shaped the participants' dispositions, functioning as "matrices of perceptions, thoughts, and actions" (Bourdieu, 2001, p.33). Thus, the designation of these critical areas could serve as fields for support and intervention at a policy level.

Moreover, the pathways revealed two overarching processes of marginalisation: substance users 'drift along' marginalisation, while non-users 'drop into' it. The two processes reflect procedures of "fall" and poverty reproduction (Paugam, 2009, p.4) which follow the features of the familistic model and are distributed through social relations. They also underscore that dispositions shaped over time imply different perspectives on the experience of homelessness and, consequently, different pathways toward rehousing.

The concept of habitus proved to be a valuable tool in capturing this complex relationship between macro-social transformations and micro-social interactions that shape individual pathways. By penetrating the structural level, it allows multiple perspectives, offering a deep exploration of the individual level over time, which leads to distinct forms of agency. This approach shows that factors often cited as individual factors in homelessness research, such as drug use, are in fact products of a set of structural and institutional conditions.

The data reveal that the condition of visible homelessness serves as a threshold—a conceptual boundary beyond which stable rehousing becomes increasingly challenging. This state does not emerge from individuals' adaptation to a homeless way of life; rather, it is shaped by a constellation of structural, institutional, and relational factors, including the network of support services, which ultimately contribute to entrapment and further disempowerment.

Therefore, this article offers proposals for further developing the theoretical and methodological foundations of the pathways approach, within the Greek and international contexts, through a systematic dialogue with Bourdieu's socioanalysis. Moreover, it illuminates social processes and aspects of the phenomenon that have remained unexplored in the domestic literature, such as the variety of pathways and transitions into and through the street and the multitudinous yet underexplored population of street homeless drug users.

Finally, the research demonstrates that homelessness is a process of precarisation, social rupture, and marginalisation, primarily affecting the most deprived members of the working class and, secondarily, the traditional lower-middle class. This process is mediated by violence and suffering. For some, it threatens their very biological survival, while for others, it results in "social death" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.372). However, for all, it involves significant devaluation and humiliation. Within this framework, the pursuit of temporary 'solutions' that ignore the profound processes of suffering and social disconnection—through which individuals find themselves homeless—can only serve to "suspend the most extreme effects of poverty and sustain, without hope, the lives of the most vulnerable, masking the extent of precariousness that now affects an expanding segment of the population" (Arapoglou et al., 2015, p.12).

The study acknowledges certain limitations. Typologies, such as the one presented in this article, are valuable tools for identifying different pathways into and through homelessness, offering a basis for targeted policy interventions. However, they also function as idealised frameworks that may limit the uniqueness of individual experiences of homelessness. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on visible homelessness, leaving room for future research to explore the trajectories of individuals experiencing hidden forms of homelessness. Gendered roles and practices, evident in the forms of capital and the formation of habitus, briefly mentioned in the main text, are worthy of further analysis and detailed exposition, through the lens of intersectionality, since they are not confined to the trajectories of 'dual dependency' and 'invisible female poverty', but permeate the relationship of all the people experiencing homelessness interviewed. Furthermore, issues related to ethnicity and migration status are not comprehensively addressed here, highlighting the need for further investigation on how migration identities shape the experience of homelessness within the Athenian context.

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