CHANGES IN THE SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR HOMELESS PERSONS IN SPAIN: 2012-2022

CAMBIOS EN LAS REDES DE APOYO EN LA POBLACIÓN EN SITUACIÓN DE SINHOGARISMO EN ESPAÑA: 2012-2022

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RESUMEN

En los últimos años se ha producido un aumento del interés por el estudio sobre cómo las personas en situación de sinhogarismo se relacionan con sus redes sociales y sistemas de apoyo.

En la presente investigación se profundiza en los cambios en las redes de apoyo social e institucional de la población en situación de sinhogarismo en España a lo largo de una década. Para ello, se han analizado los datos publicados por el Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) en las encuestas de personas sin hogar de los años 2012 (N=3433) y 2022 (N=3650).

Los resultados muestran diferencias estadísticamente significativas en el perfil sociodemográfico y en la red de apoyo social e institucional entre ambas poblaciones. De forma general, se observa cómo las redes tanto sociales como institucionales han aumentado a lo largo de una década, pudiendo este hecho haberse visto influenciado por los cambios en las estructuras familiares, el avance de las políticas sociales y el desarrollo y la accesibilidad a las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación y la información.

ABSTRACT

In recent years the interest in the homeless population and their social networks and support systems has increased.

This research delves into the changes in the social and institutional support networks of the homeless population in Spain over a decade. To this end, we have analyzed the data published by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in the homeless surveys of the years 2012 (N=3433) and 2022 (N=3650).

The results show statistically significant differences in the sociodemographic profile and the social and institutional support network between both populations. In general, social, and institutional networks have increased in ten years. This fact may have been influenced by changes in family structures, the new social policies, and the development and accessibility of new communication and information technologies.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Sinhogarismo; redes sociales; redes institucionales; sistemas de apoyo.

KEYWORDS

Homelessness; social networks; institutional networks; support systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a multi-causal phenomenon and is the ultimate expression of social exclusion processes. It is the most visible situation of residential exclusion in particular and social exclusion in general (Cabrera, 2022). In 2008, FEANTSA defined homeless persons as "all those persons who cannot access or maintain adequate accommodation, adapted to their personal situation, which is permanent and provides a stable framework for living in society, either for economic reasons or other social barriers, or because they have personal difficulties in leading an auto-nomous life".

In this paper, the focus of analysis is on how, in this changing context, there have been trans-formations in the social and institutional support networks used by people experiencing home-lessness.

1.2. SOCIAL SUPPORT

Since the 1980s, the progressive weakening of social bonds and the tendency towards indi-vidualism in today's societies has become evident. Robert Castel (1995) used the term "social disaffiliation" to refer to social exclusion and the loss of bonds with institutions and social net-works that provide support and a sense of belonging in society. Bauman (2000) refers to the "liquid society", by which he means the accelerated changes in today's societies, which do not allow stable and lasting structures to be established, and in which there has been a weakening of social bonds. Authors such as Putnam (1995, 2000), Fukuyama (1995) and Bourdieu (1979) speak of the erosion of social capital in contemporary societies in which there have been chan-ges in participation and social cohesion. This weakening of social bonds directly affects the functioning of our societies in a way that has a direct impact on social support.

According to Paugam and Clémençon (2002), there are three kinds of social bond and therefore three types of rupture: 1) the bond of filiation, related to the family and its context; 2) the bond of integration, where secondary socialisation agents such as the school, peer groups or work play a major role; and 3) the bond of citizenship, from which both the rights and duties of the population derive.

In relation to the first bond, filiation, the fact that the family appears in first place is due to the fact that it is the most important primary group, as well as the first agent of socialisation. In the case of Spain and the Mediterranean countries, the family is one of the most highly valued institu-tions, above all because of its capacity to cushion against crisis situations such as illness (mental or physical), accidents, prolonged unemployment, etc. In fact, the Spanish welfare model has been called "familist" or "familiarist"; this refers to a co-responsibility with the public authorities to minimise the negative effects of risk situations. However, family networks are weakening in today's societies and there is an increasing tendency towards a lax family type where interests are fragmented. The process of change in family structures is related to the declining fertility rate (the propensity to have only one child), the increase of single-person households, the ageing of the population (the increase in the number of "dependents" within the family) or the increase in the rate of divorce and separation, which in many cases leads to single-parent/single-mother

households, (Beck et al., 2001). These elements, together with times of economic crisis, increase and prolong situations of poverty and exclusion.

After the family, the second bond is related to peers at school, at work, in religious institutions, in sports, etc. These are the people who contribute to the integration of the person in the community (Paugam & Clémençon, 2002). In this context, friendships, in particular, are one of the most important support groups (Allan & Adams, 2007; Hruschka, 2010; Rawlins, 2008).

The last type of bond, citizenship, refers not so much to the personal relationships that may be established, but rather to the connections between individuals and the social structures that organise a particular society. This is the bond that guarantees access to goods and services through the recognition of a set of rights.

Given that social systems and relationships significantly affect homeless persons, in the 1980s and 1990s several papers began to study it in depth (Calsyn, 2004; Green et al., 2013). Although prior to this literature, it is possible to find important research on the subject of social bonds such as The Hobo (Anderson, 1923), Homelessness, affiliation, and occupational mobility (Bahr & Caplow, 1968) or Skid row: An introduction to disaffiliation (Bahr, 1973), some authors maintain that from the 1980s onwards there was a substantial change in the homeless population (La Gory et al., 1991; Shlay & Rossi, 1992) and, therefore, more studies were needed to address this issue.

Studies in the European and North American context contributed to the analysis of social support networks both in their structure (Mitchell, 1987), as a source of resources for personal benefit (La Gory et al., 1991) and how these could have a determining influence on physical and mental health, quality of life, etc. (Calsyn et al., 1998), as well as on levels of happiness (Cabrera et al., 2023). In the Spanish context, the first studies on homelessness focused on the analysis of the services offered to this sector of the population and the type of social intervention from the social work perspective (Cabrera, 2002) but, by the mid-1990s, research began to appear with a social science approach in which, among other aspects, social networks and the type of relationships arising from them appeared as study variables to be taken into account (Cabrera, 1998; Escudero Carretero, 2003; Sánchez Morales & Tezanos Vázquez, 1999).

Traditionally, homelessness has been related to the process of social breakdown and lack of social relations (social isolation), and this discourse has been dominant in studies prior to the 1980s (La Gory et al., 1991). However, new approaches suggest that the homeless population is not completely isolated and that social networks are configured and reconfigured on the street (Bachiller, 2009b, 2009a). Thus, family, friends, neighbours and social action professionals form part of the social life of homeless persons. In this way, without denying that there are ruptures throughout the processes of social exclusion, when delving deeper into their life trajectories, multiple social relationships can be observed. However, although in general terms isolation is relative, studies on social support up to the beginning of the 20th century observe that the longer the street situation is prolonged, the smaller and less supportive social networks become (Calsyn, 2004).

1.3. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Agulles Martos (2019) identifies a paradigm shift in the field of public policies addressing the phenomenon of homelessness in Spain, and that shift is in line with public policies in Europe, although more traditional approaches that have not been replaced by new working methodologies are still in place (Marbán Gallego & Rodríguez Cabrero, 2020). Some of the aspects that highlight this change in trend are:

1. The traditional shelter model attends to emergency situations, low demands and a short-term vision, and therefore does not generate long-term changes or avoid chronification.

2. The Housing First methodology is being promoted in different Spanish regions. It considers housing to be the most appropriate access route for social inclusion, combined with support in accessing the labour market.

3. The promotion of the person-centred model, based on principles such as self-determination, unconditionality and deinstitutionalisation.

Since 2006, there has been an increase in the number of resources offering attention to homeless persons. The resources that have increased the most are shelters and soup kitchens (Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, 2023). According to the INE's Survey of Centres and Services for the Care of the Homeless in 2006, in which there were 13,490 places, this provision rose to 20,191 in 2020, "of the total number of places available, almost two thirds are located in shelters, residences or reception centres, the rest being located in flats or apartments and, to a much lesser extent, in guesthouses or hotels".

The Housing First model of intervention with people experiencing homelessness emerged in the United States in the 1990s as a response to the traditional "care ladder" model in force at the time (Llobet Estany et al., 2016). The classic Housing First model is aimed at persons of legal age who are chronically homeless and who also have addictions, severe mental health disorders or disabilities, and is based on access to stable housing as a primary element from which to work while respecting the process of each person (FEANTSA, 2008; Polvere et al., 2014; Tsemberis et al., 2004).

For its part, the Housing Led intervention model offers temporary shared or individual accommodation to people living on the streets or in specific resources for homeless persons, regardless of the length of time they have been homeless. They may or may not present other exclusion factors, but they need accommodation and social support so that, in the medium term, they can achieve autonomy. It coincides with Housing First in putting the person at the centre, promoting and respecting their autonomy and working on social integration pathways through access to housing (Guevara Dorado, 2019).

In addition to the change in intervention methodology, the use of new technologies is a new reality that needs to be taken into account in the care of homeless persons (Bure, 2005). Early studies on the Internet indicated that this means of communication had an isolating effect (Kraut et al., 1998; Nie & Erbring, 2002), but this effect has recently been questioned, with claims that the Internet, far from isolating, improves bonds and communication between regular users (DiMaggio et al., 2001). In this regard, facilitating the use of new technologies in homeless care

resources favours, on the one hand, the reduction of the digital divide in the group (Cabrera et al., 2005) and, on the other, an increase in interest and motivation (Vázquez et al., 2015).

1.4. OBJECTIVES

The main objective is to examine changes in the profile and in the social and institutional support networks of the homeless population in Spain over the last decade using two nationally representative samples in 2012 and 2022.

2. DESIGN AND METHOD

This paper presents the results of a descriptive research study based on the analysis of the social and institutional support networks of homeless persons in Spain. For this purpose, different variables of the socio-demographic profile were analysed, together with the social support provided by their family relationships, the usual company they keep and institutional support through the support they receive from social services and third-sector organisations.

2.1. HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis is that changes in family structures, social policies and the expansion of new technologies in Spain over the last decade have had a positive influence on the homeless population, increasing their social and institutional support networks.

2.2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY AND SAMPLE

When it comes to quantifying the number of homeless persons in Spain, the data differ from one source to another. While the 2022 Homelessness Survey published by the INE estimates that there are a total of 28,552 people who use accommodation and catering assistance centres, the Comprehensive National Strategy for Homeless Persons 2015-2020 states that there were a total of 33,275 homeless persons in Spain. For its part, Caritas Spain, in the press release published for its 2021 "Nadie sin hogar" ("No one without a Home") campaign, puts the number of people assisted through its 420 centres and its own resources at 37,207, a figure that roughly coincides with that published by Hogar Sí in its 2020 Report, which puts the number of homeless persons at 33,000. The figures vary depending on whether the phenomenon is addressed in its entirety or whether only the people who make use of the network of care resources are taken into account.

The INE surveys (EPSH) on homeless persons are aimed at homeless persons of legal age who make use of accommodation and/or catering services aimed at this sector of the population in municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants in Spain.

In the case of the two selected surveys (INE, 2012 and 2022), data collection took place in the winter period during the first months of the year (February to March) over approximately six weeks.

From the data provided by the INE, a total of 3,433 valid surveys were obtained out of a total universe of 22,938 for the year 2012, and 3,650 surveys out of a total of 28,552 persons for

the year 2022. This represents 15% (2012) and 13% (2022) of the total homeless population using accommodation and/or catering services in the years selected.

Table 1 shows that the population analysed saw changes in the socio-demographic profile between 2012 and 2022. There was a significantly higher number of women in 2022 (24.8%), an increase of 3% since 2012. In addition, there was significant ageing in 2022 (42.85 years compared to 41.30 in 2012), although the increase has a small effect size. Similarly, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of foreign homeless persons (54.7%) and dual nationals (2.2%) in 2022, exceeding the number of Spanish nationals in percentage terms. There are also significant differences in the number of years living in Spain, where foreigners had been living in Spain for longer in 2022 (M=8.72) than in 2012 (M=7.53), with a small effect size.

Table 1: Comparison of the demographic profile of homeless persons in 2012 and 2022

	2012 (n =3433)	2022 (n =3650)	χ2 / t	Effect Size
	%/M (DT)	%/M (DT)		
Gender			8.74**	OR = 1.18
Male	78.2%	75.2%		
Female	21.8%	24.8%		
Age	41.30 (13.86)	42.85 (14.99)	-4.54***	d = 0.11
Nationality			27.09***	C = 0.06
Spanish	49%	43.1%		
Foreign	49.5%	54.7%		
Both	1.5%	2.2%		
Years living in Spain	7.53 (8.46)	8.72 (11.42)	-3.77***	d = 0.12
Employment status			68.69***	C = 0.10
Working	4%	6%		
Unemployed	80.5%	74.8%		
Retired or disabled	12%	11.7%		
Refugee or asylum seeker	3.4%	7.4%		
Level of education			1009.18***	C = 0.35
Illiterate	4.5%	10.5%		
Primary education	22%	14.9%		
Secondary education	63%	38.6%		
Higher education / vocational training	3.1%	27.3%		
University studies	7.5%	8.6%		
Marital status			208.27***	C = 0.17
Single	55%	65.3%		
Married	15.6%	10.6%		
Widowed	3.5%	2.5%		
Legally separated	13.9%	5.8%		
Divorced	12%	15.8%		
Children	47.6%	46.7%	0.67	-

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Source: Authors based on INE (2012; 2022)

With regard to employment status, a significantly higher percentage of homeless persons were working part-time or full-time in 2022 (6% compared to 4% in 2012), while the unemployment rate was higher in 2012 (80.5% compared to 74.8% in 2022). In addition, there was a significant increase in the percentage of refugees and asylum seekers, rising to 7.4% in 2022, compared to 3.4% in 2012. The educational attainment of both samples suggests that there was a higher percentage of homeless persons who were illiterate (10.5%) or with vocational education (27.3%) in 2022; however, in 2012 there was a higher percentage of homeless persons with primary (22%) and secondary (63%) education, differences with a medium effect size. There was no difference in the percentage of homeless persons with university education between 2012 and 2022 (around 8%).

In relation to changes in marital status, the data show a significantly higher percentage of single and divorced persons in 2022 (65.3% and 15.8% respectively), while in 2012 a higher percentage of married (15.6%), widowed (3.5%) and legally separated (13.9%) persons were observed. There were no significant differences in the percentage of homeless persons with children in 2012 and 2022, with figures of around 47% in both cases.

3. FIELDWORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

As this was a national study with a 10-year gap between the two samples, data were collected as independent samples. Furthermore, given the sample size of the study (3,433 participants in 2012 and 3,650 in 2022) and the descriptive purpose of the study, all analyses were performed on the complete data, and data imputation was not considered appropriate. SPSS 25 and G*Power 3.1 software were used for statistical analyses.

To compare the two independent samples of 2012 and 2022, chi-squared χ^2 tests[1] (for categorical variables) and Student's t-tests[2] (for quantitative variables) were used, depending on the type of variable analysed. Mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were used as descriptive statistics for quantitative variables and percentage within the year (%) as descriptive statistics for categorical variables. In all analyses: 1) basic assumptions were checked: normality, homoscedasticity and independence in the case of Student's t-tests and the minimum number of cases per cell in the case of chi-square tests (less than 20% of the expected frequencies are less than 5); 2) effect sizes were calculated: Cohen's d[3] in the case of Student's t-tests, Odds Ratio(OR)[4] in the case of Student's t-tests, Odds Ratio(OR)[5] in the case of Student's t-tests, and Odds Ratio(OR)[5] in the case of chi-square tests with dichotomous variables in 2*2 contingency tables, and Pearson's

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[1] χ^2 chi-square: statistical test used to determine whether a significant association exists between two categorical variables, comparing the discrepancy between the observed and expected data in a distribution.

[2] Student's t-test: statistical test that compares the differences between two independent sample means.

[3] Cohen's D test: a measure of effect size that quantifies and standardises the difference between two independent means.

[4] Odds Ratio (OR): a measure of effect size to assess the strength of the association between two dichotomous variables, comparing the probability of occurrence of an event divided by the probability that it does not happen.

Contingency Coefficient (C)[5] in the case of chi-square tests with categorical variables with more than two levels. Cohen's rules were used to interpret the results of the d statistics (0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium and 0.8 = large) and C (0.1 = small, 0.3 = medium and 0.5 = large); and 3). In the case of the chi-square tests, corrected standardised residuals were used as post-hoc tests to compare the column ratio with Bonferroni correction[6].

4. RESULTS

The changes in the social support networks of homeless persons between 2012 and 2022 can be seen in Table 2. When asked whether they had someone they could count on in case of need, there was a significant increase in the perception of social support in 2022 (44.6% compared to 41% in 2012). Although several studies point towards a more individualistic model of society, the homeless population feels more socially supported.

Looking more closely at contact with different sources of social support, in general there is a significant improvement in contact with various family members (father, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and other relatives). It is worth noting the increase in contact with spouses or partners, from 22.9% in 2012 to 88.2% in 2022, i.e. the probability of having contact with a spouse or partner was 25.14 times higher in 2022 than in 2012. These data confirm that homeless persons are often in contact with some of their family members. Furthermore, there is no significant change in contact with the mother (around 55%) or with their social worker (around 85%).

An interesting addition to the 2022 survey was the question of who they spend most of their day with (which was not collected in 2012 and is impossible to compare). However, the results for this variable in 2022 give the following information: 59.8% spend most of their day alone, followed by 54.8% who spend most of their day with their partner, 47% spend most of their day with other homeless persons, 33.8% with friends and 24.9% with their children. Less than 8% spend the day with family members, work colleagues, pets or neighbours.

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[5] Pearson's Contingency Coefficient (C): a measure of effect size to assess the strength of the relationship between two categorical variables in a contingency table.

[6] Bonferroni correction: adjustment to control for type I error in multiple statistical testing on the same data.

Table 2: Comparison of the social support network of homeless persons in 2012 and 2022

	2012 (n =3433)	2022 (n =3650)	χ2 / t	Effect Size
	%/M (DT)	%/M (DT)		
Someone to count on in case of need	41%	44.6%	9.14**	OR = 1.16
Number of people support network	2.09 (1.51)	2.27 (1.58)	-5.05***	d = 1.14
Has contact with…				
Spouse or partner	22.9%	88.2%	742.79***	OR = 25.14
Father	38.5%	41.9%	6.51*	OR = 1.15
Mother	54.5%	56.3%	1.91	-
Children	72.2%	76.3%	6.72**	OR = 1.24
Siblings	62.6%	68.1%	22.01***	OR = 1.28
Other family members	32%	48.3%	176.05***	OR = 1.98
Social worker	85.9%	84.8%	1.81	-
Spend most of the day with…				-
Alone		59.8%		
Partner		54.8%		
Children		24.9%		
Other homeless persons		47%		
Friends		33.8%		
Work colleagues		4.4%		
Neighbours		2.4%		
Family members		7.2%		
Pets		3.7%		
Others		2,2%		

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Source: Authors based on INE (2012; 2022)

The changes in the accommodation situation of homeless persons between 2012 and 2022 are shown in Table 3. When asked where they planned to sleep that night, it was observed that in 2012 a significantly higher percentage of people were going to sleep on the street (12.8%) or in hostels or shelters (61.2%), while in 2022 there is a greater number of people using flats or guesthouses (28.7%), whether provided by a social entity or rented, and a greater number of people in insecure housing (5.4%), such as squats or places offered by a relative or friend. Data on the length of time spent in these resources show that in 2012 there was a significantly higher percentage of homeless persons who had been using the resources for less than 1 week (8.1%) or less than 1 month (17.1%), while in 2022 there were more people using the resources for 1 to 5 years (21.1%), though these differences have a small effect size. In contrast, no significant differences were observed in the percentage of people using the resources for less than 1 year (around 51%) or more than 5 years (around 7%).

No statistically significant differences were observed in the pattern of people with whom they lived most of the time before the age of 18: in both 2012 and 2022, homeless persons tended to live with their parents and/or brothers and sisters when they were minors (around 87% of cases), followed by 7% of people living in shelters and 6% who lived with other family members. However, statistically significant differences were observed in the percentage of people receiving support from social services and NGOs after a period of institutionalisation (e.g. in prisons, detoxification centres, hospitals, etc.), where the data show a lower perception of support from social services in 2022 (23.2% compared to 28.4% in 2012) and NGOs (13.8% compared to 27.1% in 2012). No significant differences were observed with regard to the perception of support from the family after institutionalisation (around 45% in both years). Similarly, there is a significant change in the means of communication used to contact their support network. In 2012, telephone calls were used more (86.5% compared to 64.9% in 2022), while in 2022 the internet was used much more (75.6% compared to 48.9% in 2012), with no change in the use of postal mail (around 76% in both years).

Table 3: Comparison of the accommodation situation and institutional support for homeless persons in 2012 and 2022

	2012 (n =3433)	2022 (n =3650)	χ2 / t	Effect Size
	%/M (DT)	%/M (DT)		
Place of accommodation			58.01***	C = 0.09
Street or unsuitable place	12.8%	10.4%		
Shelter or reception centre	61.2%	55.6%		
Flat or guesthouse (provided or rented)	22.3%	28.7%		
Insecure housing (e.g. friend's home, squat)	3.7%	5.4%		
Duration of accommodation			41.03***	C = 0.08
Less than 1 week	8.1%	5.5%		
Less than 1 month	17.1%	15.2%		
Less than 1 year	51.4%	51.6%		
Less than 5 years	16.6%	21.1%		
More than 5 years	6.8%	6.6%		
Before the age of 18, they mainly lived with...			4.05	-
Parents and/or siblings	86.8%	88%		
Other family members	5.9%	5.9%		
Foster care (non-relatives and institutions)	7.3%	6.1%		
Support after periods of internment				
Family	46%	43.2%	0.93	
Social services	28.4%	23.2%	4.10*	OR = 0.76
NGO	27.1%	13.8%	30.98***	OR = 0.43
Means of communication used				
Postal mail	76.6%	75.3%	1.05	
Telephone calls	86.5%	64.9%	117.09***	OR = 0.29
Internet	48.9%	75.6%	364.73***	OR = 3.24

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Source: Authors based on INE (2012; 2022)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Until a few years ago, most studies on the support received by homeless persons focused on formal support resources (Mansilla Izquierdo, 1993), leaving aside the analysis of social networks and the type of social support. In more recent research, it can be seen that the relational dimension takes on importance since, in reality, there are other social bonds and relationships that are generated, reproduced and transformed. There are also studies that maintain that homeless persons have suffered such desocialisation that they are referred to as "socially dead" (García Serrano et al., 2000). This approach would place homeless persons in a fixed and immovable position over time (Damon, 2012). The point is not to define the situation in static terms but to give it a sense of process. Bahr and Caplow (1968) came to this conclusion in the late 1960s when they stated that disaffiliation is not definitive, but depends on the context. However, without trying to sugar-coat the reality that there are people who, due to their background and the time they have spent on the street, have lost certain social skills and have reduced their social circle, it does not mean that they live in complete isolation and are alienated from reality. In this regard, this paper found that not only do more than 40% of homeless persons claim to be able to count on someone in case of need, but the trend is upwards, as the percentage has increased over the course of ten years (from 41% in 2012 to 44% in 2022).

In the case of the family group, despite the fact that in recent decades there has been talk of a serious crisis in the family that could lead to the breakdown in relationships between family members, in the study carried out on the homeless population, in just one decade, there has been an increase in contact with family members, in which contact with spouses or partners has increased significantly (from 22.9% in 2012 to 88.2% in 2022). Furthermore, a large proportion of those surveyed in 2022 tend to spend the day either with their partner (54.8%) or with their children (24.9%). Thus, as Bachiller (2009a) has already pointed out, homeless persons do not necessarily suffer a total break with their closest circle and many of them continue to maintain relationships with their family. These relationships in particular may be the key to a future exit from homelessness. However, in this study, although it can be seen that the number of contacts has increased, it is not known what kind of contacts they are. Bearing in mind that social support plays a crucial role in exclusion processes, according to Wellman (1981), one might ask whether it is more effective to have one close person (strong bond) or several less close people (weak bonds), as well as whether it is more favourable if the members of the network know each other (high density) or on the contrary it is better if they have no relationship (low density). Depending on the context, one or the other type of social support will be more favourable since, to a large extent, the most important thing is not how much social support is available, but what kind and of what quality it is.

In relation to bonds of integration in the community, in 2022 more than half of homeless persons (59.8%) claimed to spend most of the day alone. This figure is significantly high if one takes into account that a large part of the surveyed population are users of shelters, where all spaces from bedrooms to living rooms are common and shared (Contreras-Montero et al., 2022). However, the idea of total isolation can be dismissed, as many of the respondents to the study shared space and time with other people on a daily basis. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the 33.8% of those who usually spend their daily life with friends but for whom, due to the characteristics

of the survey, it was not possible to determine whether these were friendships existing before or after the situation of homelessness. With regard to the social support that they could receive, friendships existing prior to homelessness could be decisive in cushioning the process of social exclusion. However, even if they can occasionally count on previous friends, once they are in the street, they prefer to turn to other homeless persons for loans and occasional favours. Thus, the fact that 47% of people spend the day with other people in the same situation may be due to a variety of reasons such as a mutual search for security, an exchange of information on resources or a search for a sense of belonging or integration into a group (due to the strong stigmatisation of this population). The relationships that are created, at first, are usually superficial, fragile and unstable, and have the aim of obtaining resources and protection (Contreras-Montero, 2013). However, many people prefer them because they are much more horizontal and egalitarian relationships than those with other people (Bachiller, 2009a).

The relationships established between homeless persons and their pets deserve special mention. According to Bárez Cambronero (2007), many of them take on the responsibility of having dogs to compensate for the lack of affection, companionship and understanding from other human beings. In this study it can be seen that the proportion of people who spend the day with their pet is not very high (3.7%). However, it should be remembered that this figure refers to the population that makes use of accommodation and/or catering services where, on the vast majority of occasions, pets are not allowed and, therefore, it is likely that this figure would be higher if the study had taken into account the homeless population strictly on the streets.

Finally, although citizenship bonds do not refer to social relations per se, one could consider the contact between homeless persons and social action professionals as an intermediate support between social support and institutional support. In this way, sporadic or stable relationships are established with the different professionals in the care network. According to the study by Sánchez Morales and Tezanos Vázquez (1999), sooner or later, a person who ends up on the street will come into contact with a specific care network. After a prolonged period of time on the street, on the one hand, there will be those who decide to move away from the network and refuse the help of Social Services and NGOs and, on the other, there will be those who become dependent on canteens, shelters, etc. If the person in question makes use of basic resources and services, it is possible that in the course of a single day he or she may have contact with more than ten professionals. In the case of the present study, around 85% of the people surveyed have contact with their assigned social worker.

With regard to institutional support, the results show that homeless persons do not perceive that the support received from Social Services and NGOs has improved in recent years. On the contrary, the responses collected show that the perception of institutional support from the Social Services has decreased by 5.2% (from 28.4% in 2012 to 23.2% in 2022) and by 13.3% in the case of NGOs (from 27.1% in 2012 to 13.8% in 2022). Along these lines, the National Strategy to Combat Homelessness considers care for homeless persons in the field of Social Services to be practically residual (Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, 2023). According to Rubio Martín (2017), this circumstance can be explained by the fact that the Public Social Services System is not sufficiently developed and the phenomenon of homelessness is not yet being comprehensively addressed through public policies, and this has serious repercussions on the care offered to this population. However, the INE's Survey of Services and Care Centres

for the Homeless (INE, 2022) details the significant increase in the number of care places in specialised resources and the National Strategy to Combat Homelessness in Spain (Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, 2023) indicates the importance of providing adequate care and focusing efforts on migrants, people with disabilities, young people, women and the LGTBI population, among others, who find themselves in a situation of homelessness, but no specific care is envisaged after institutionalisation, which is the situation in which these people reported being most neglected.

With regard to the means of communication used, 76% of the replies received indicated that postal mail was the most frequently used means of communication. However, it would be useful to know whether this is the way in which these people communicate or whether it is the way in which official communications are notified to them.

The increase in internet use, from 48.9% in 2012 to 75.6% in 2022, for communication may be due to several reasons. Firstly, it is cheaper to use the internet via a free WiFi network in public places, shopping centres, transport hubs or in the care resources themselves. Secondly, the internet can be used for instant messaging or different interactions through different social networks that are free of charge and that allow fluid and immediate communication, even with several people at the same time. Another reason may be the reduction in the cost of communicating abroad, which makes it possible to maintain contact and relationships with family and social networks in other countries. In 2015, the digital divide was detected as a problem for homeless persons, mainly older Spanish people, with a low level of education; however, the data already showed a medium-low use of internet, computers and email, a relatively widespread use of mobile phones and low use of social networks (Vázquez et al., 2015). However, the new data show changes in the pattern of use of new technologies.

The incipient change in the model of care for homeless persons (Agulles Martos, 2019) may be reflected in the type of place in which they say they plan to sleep that night, with an increase in the number of people who intend to spend the night in rented flats or guesthouses, or accommodation belonging to organisations, which was as much as 28.7%. However, the 5.4% of people who say they are staying in unsafe accommodation, such as squats or offered by relatives or friends, is still a cause for concern. This circumstance is particularly worrying because of its invisibility and the fact that it is not taken into account in relation to the issue of homelessness.

The socio-demographic characteristics of homeless persons who make use of the network of resources has changed with respect to previous years, with a 3% increase in the number of women and the number of people of foreign nationality, who now account for 54.7% of the people who make use of the network of resources. A slight increase in the age of the group has also been detected, with the average age now being 42.85 in 2022, compared to 41.30 in 2012.

In most studies on the social relations of homeless persons until the 1980s, theories of disaffiliation were at the centre of the research. Subsequent research points to a new trend, which is confirmed in this paper, whereby homeless persons are more social, maintain ever more contact with family and friends, and have progressively more social support.

The institutional support perceived by homeless persons has decreased when they find themselves in an extreme situation such as at the end of institutionalisation, while in these same circumstances, they do not verbalise a change in the support offered by the family network.

Although the model of care can be said to be in a moment of transition or change, the more traditional "ladder" model still coexists with new intervention methodologies such as Housing First or Housing Led. Nelson et al. (2015) state that stable housing favours the recovery of social roles and increases the sense of belonging to the community, which would have a positive impact on the perception of social support, reducing the feeling of loneliness.

The comparison between the data collected in the 2012 and 2022 surveys shows an increase in the number of people staying overnight in flats or guesthouses, probably as a result of the aforementioned change of model, while the worrying situation of the number of people sleeping in unsafe housing remains, an aspect that neither the previous model nor, according to the data, the new one manages to reduce.

Likewise, a change in the pattern of use of new technologies was detected, with an increase in the use of the Internet and a decrease in telephone calls, which can be assimilated to the change in the mode of communication seen among the general population.

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