Homelessness and Unemployment During the Economic Recession: The Case of the City of Girona

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Abstract

Although the research suggests that the main causes of homelessness are classified in individual and structural factors, there are few scientific articles which evaluate the impact of structural factors such as unemployment during periods of economic recession. The objective of this study is to compare the evolution of the total rate of homelessness with the total rate of unemployment in the city of Girona (Catalonia) during the economical recession (2006-2016) and to determine if unemployment is a predictive factor of homelessness. This is the first study with a Catalan sample comparing unemployment and homelessness. The design was longitudinal, retrospective and observational. The correlation tests between unemployment and homelessness indicated strong connections in the combination of the sample ($r = .914$, $p < .001$), men ($r = .924$, $p < .001$), and women ($r = .716$, $p = 0.013$). The results of the different models of simple linear regression used to determine the predictor variables of homelessness indicate that the rise of global unemployment is a predictor variable of the rise of global homelessness ($ß = 2.17$, $p = .002$) and male homelessness ($ß = .82$, $p < .001$). However, it does not predict specific female homelessness ($ß = .88$, $p = .68$).

Keywords: Homelessness; unemployment; social and economic justice; systems of care

The main causes of homelessness are classified in two kinds of factors: individual and structural. The individual factors include severe mental disorders, drug addictions, and issues suffered during childhood such as severe neglect, maltreatment, sexual abuse and/or an environment of poverty or delinquency in the family (Shelton, Taylor, Bonner, & van den Bree, 2009).

The structural factors include insufficient investment in mental health and addiction resources, an exiguous social assistance system (Elliott & Krivo, 1991), inadequate policies of access to housing, poverty, unemployment, (Burt, 1991), and in connection with the latter, limitations in the access to work (Cabrera & Rubio, 2008).

Although both positions are assumed to be complementary, there has always existed a debate on whether the emphasis of the mentioned causes should be included in some factors or others, and, consequently, whether efforts to diminish and even eradicate homelessness must focus more on structural causes rather than individual causes, or vice versa (Main, 1998).

In the case of Spain, this debate has taken place in a very changeable historical period, between a dictatorship which lasted 40 years, a tumultuous transition to democracy and a subsequent period of severe economic crisis (Pérez & Salom, 2013). Thus, a moralising vision in force at the end of the 20th century which stated that homelessness was a self-imposed or chosen option by *"vagos y maleantes"* (lazy and miscreant people), who roamed the streets to live off the rest of the people exonerated from a system which could not assume their own responsibilities (Santolaria-Sierra, 1997). Since the 1990s the country has tried to adapt to European and international criteria for studying the situation and intervening in it (Cabrera, 2009).

The last 20 years of Spanish history are highly marked by the economic situation. From the mid 1990s until 2006, the Spanish economy did not cease to grow. In 2007, the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), slowed down. In 2008, despite the fact that the Spanish economy grew 1.1%, many workplaces were destroyed. And a year later the GNP decreased 3.6%, initialising a period of great economic recession and destruction of work: the unemployment rate rose from 8.6% in 2008, to 26.9% in the first trimester of 2013.

From being the a country in the European Union with one of the highest growth rates, Spain became the country with the highest unemployment rates (Iglesias-García et al., 2017). The economy was highly dependent on the service sector (tourism, commerce, hotels, etc.) and from 2000-2006 it was boosted by construction and private services (Inchausti & Guindo, 2008), greatly supported by speculation and unregulated mortgage policies. However, the economy collapsed with the housing bubble (Fernandez-Carbajal, Ruiz Gómez, & Rodríguez-Fernández, 2016). This situation made it impossible to reconduct the housing market workforce to other sectors, on the grounds of budgets based on austerity, which meant that social protection services had a lower capacity to deal with the needs of the most vulnerable groups and a significant increase of poverty (Houston, Day, de Lago, & Zarocostas, 2011). Highly important changes took place in the job market as a consequence of the economic crisis. During the period of

economic growth, the Spanish job market failed to generate strategies to create employment and to reintegrate people experiencing homelessness (Cabrera & Rubio, 2008). Once the prosperity period was over, coinciding with the height of the crisis, job loss focused principally on the jobs with the lowest qualification requirements (Rocha & Aragón, 2012), affecting people with the highest vulnerability, such as individuals experiencing homelessness (IEH), who were the first to face exclusion from the labour market.

As we commented, poverty, the increase of social inequality and the cutbacks in social protection services are among homelessness' structural determinants (Elliott & Krivo, 1991). Even though the scientific literature and the mass media often establish a relationship between the recession, unemployment and homelessness, studies which provide quantitative data on the relationship between the evolution of unemployment and homelessness in Spain are scarce.

One of the only two governmental reports on homelessness conducted by the Spanish government indicates that one third of the homeless people had been in that situation of homelessness for under a year in 2012, and that almost half of them claimed that unemployment was the main reason for their homelessness (INE, 2012). The lack of analysis of structural factors in Spain'sscientific literature and the priority to identify the individual causes of homelessness could contribute to reinforcing the stereotypes of IEH (Shinn & Weitzman, 1990) and display a partial conceptualisation of the phenomenon which does not contemplate the integrating model of both kinds of factors (O'Flaherty, 2004).

Regarding the gender differences in homelessness, we could state that homelessness is a phenomenon which is more prevalent among men than women (Sundin & Baguley, 2015), though the consequences are worse among women (Fries, Fedock, & Kubiak, 2014). In fact, despite being less prone to being homeless, women display more structural economic causes (Richards, Garland, Bumphus, & Thompson, 2010), all this in a historical period during which poverty, homelessness and their consequences tend to feminise (Chant, 2016).

For these reasons, the first aim of this study is to analyse the evaluation of homelessness in the city of Girona (Catalonia), comparing it to the evolution of local unemployment, from 2006 until 2016. The second aim is to figure out whether unemployment is a predictor of homelessness, and if there exist gender differences when comparing these variables.

Method
Participants
The participants were all the IEH assigned to operational categories 1 and 2 of the Roofless concept (living in the public space, sleeping at a hostel

and forced to spend all day on the streets), category 3 of the Houseless concept (short stay at municipal hostel), and operational categories 11 and 12 of the Inadequate Housing concept (mobile homes, non-conventional building, temporal structures and occupied dwellings unfit for habitation), all the above classified according to the definitions by ETHOS - European Typology of Homeless and Housing Exclusion - proposed by the European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA, 2005). Other typologies of IEH such as individuals living in temporary accommodation for women, immigrants, asylum seekers, and other supported accommodation, or in institutions such as hospitals prisons, health centres, individuals with nowhere to go, were not included due to access restrictions and a lack of published data. Other groups not included feature individuals living temporarily with relatives or friends due to the fact that they did not have a house of their own, people facing eviction, living in overcrowded dwellings or under threat from the family or partners and who have nowhere else to go.

In order to provide the annual homelessness number, a criterion of territory connection was used to discriminate, thus avoiding the bias of itinerant IEH whose presence in the city is transitory and with little connection to local unemployment. For this reason, only the IEH seen throughout the year, at least three times each trimester, and those who were known to be sleeping at hostels or using services of social assistance and/or health services in the territory, were included.

Procedure

Girona is a city of 98,255 inhabitants (Official Statistics Website of Catalonia, 2017) with only one specific attention service for IEH with different models of temporary accommodation, feeding and social attention depending on the established work plan. The mental health and addiction services of the city depend on a sole public institution which provides hospital, outpatients clinic, residential and communal services. Two social educators, one from the shelter and the other one from the mental health network make up the social-educative streetwork team which is in charge of monitoring the individuals whose contact with social and health services is non-existent, minimal or insufficient. The group of services working directly with the IEH provide data of their prevalence to a yearly list with which the data of prevalence of local homelessness is made.

The absolute unemployment data and the economically active population rates were obtained from official sources and were differed by genders (Diputació de Girona, 2017). Three groups of data were used: a) absolute data; b) rates calculated on the total of the general population; c) rates calculated on the population who were over 18 years old (Diputació de Girona, 2017). Two criteria were used to calculate the rate of homelessness: one rate

calculated on the general population and the other rate calculated on the population of legal age.

To estimate the number of homeless individuals which could be put down to the growth of unemployment, a male and female Annual unemployment rate variation (AUV) rate which evaluates the employment loss in comparison to previous years and distinguishes long term unemployment and unemployment associated to economic recession (Iglesias-García et al., 2017) was used and correlated with the Annual homelessness rate variation (AHV) of the population of legal age.

Statistical analysis

The normality of the data was checked with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and a p for Pearson correlation analysis of both absolute numbers and the rate of unemployment and homelessness, and also the AUV and AHV. Different models of simple linear regression were adjusted to define whether AUV was a variable which was a predictor of AHV. A dummy variable was included in the regression model in which the period of economic recession was categorized in a dichotomous manner, according to the economic growth data of the government of Spain (INE, 2018). The significance level from all the tests was 05 (IC 95%).

Results

The average of homelessness was 164.4 IEH a year (SD = 64.4), established at 142.6 (SD = 52.0), in the case of men and 21.8 (SD = 15.6) in the case of women. The annual average homelessness rate compared to the general population was 0.17% (SD = 0.06), with 0.30% (SD = 0.10) corresponding to men and 0.04% (SD = 0.03) to women. The annual average rate with respect to the population of legal age was 0.21% (SD = 0.08) (men = 0.38%; SD = 0.14, women = 0.05%; SD = 0.04).

The average rate of annual homelessness in relation to the general population was 0.17%. as can be observed in table 1, the number of IEH in the territory did not stop growing from the beginning of the period (2006, n = 69) until its peak in 2012 (n = 278), when there was a tendency to decrease. This peak in growth was seen for both genders. From the beginning of the analysis until the present, homelessness amongst men has grown 88.4% and amongst women 200%.

Table 1 Absolute prevalence and rate of homelessness in Girona

Year	Homeless (n)			Rate on population >18 years(%)			Rate on general population (%)		
	Total	Man	Woman	Total[a]	Man[b]	Woman[c]	Total[a]	Man[b]	Woman[c]
2006	69	62	7	.09	.18	.02	.08	.14	.02
2007	88	79	9	.11	.22	.02	.10	.8	.02
2008	105	95	10	.14	.25	.03	.11	.20	.02
2009	166	152	14	.21	.40	.03	.17	.32	.03
2010	182	167	15	.23	.45	.04	.19	.36	.03
2011	189	174	15	.24	.47	.04	.20	.37	.03
2012	252	194	58	.32	.53	.14	.26	.41	.12
2013	278	235	43	.36	.64	.10	.29	.50	.09
2014	182	157	25	.23	.43	.06	.19	.34	.05
2015	168	145	23	.22	.40	.05	.17	.31	.05
2016	130	109	21	.17	.30	.05	.13	.23	.04

[a] rate of total population

[b] Rate of total male population.

[c] Rate of total female population.

The correlation tests between unemployment and homelessness indicated a strong connection in the total sample ($r = .914$, $p < .001$) and for men ($r = .924$, $p < .001$). In the case of women this relationship was weaker ($r = .716$, $p = .013$). The rates of both variables presented a similar relationship both in the rate of homelessness calculated from the total general population (Global: $r = .909$, $p < .001$; Men: $r = .927$, $p < .001$; Women: $r = .695$, $p = .018$) and also in the calculation from the data of the legal age population (Global: $r = .919$, $p < .001$; Men: $r = .931$, $p < .001$; Women: $r = .712$, $p = .014$). We can see the graphic representation of the evolution of AUV and AHV of the total sample and differenced by gender in Figures 1-3.

Figure 1. Evolution of rate of homelessness and unemployment (global data) (%).
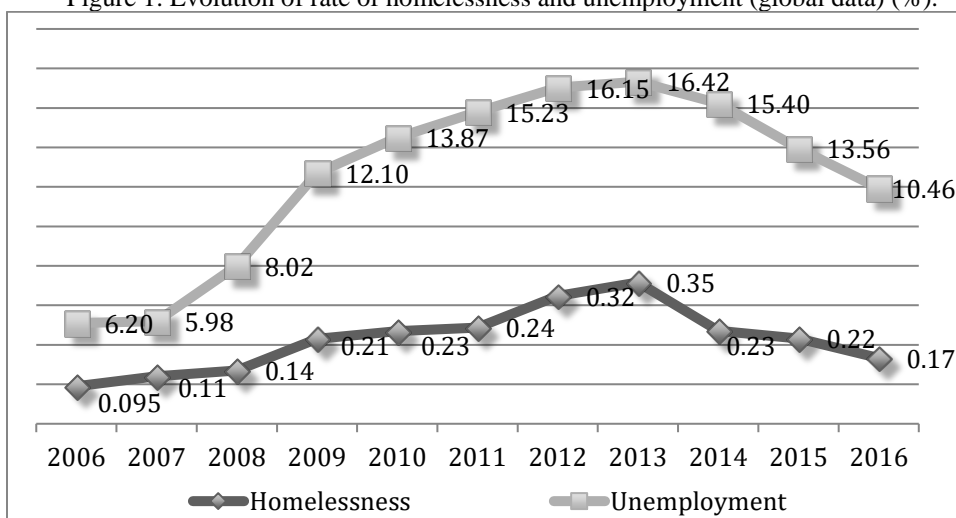
In order to improve the visualisation of the curve of evolution for both variables, the ordinate axis values, Y, have been adapted in graphics 1-3, being reduced in central values, which did not display any values.

Figure 2. Evolution of rate of homelessness and unemployment (men data) (%).
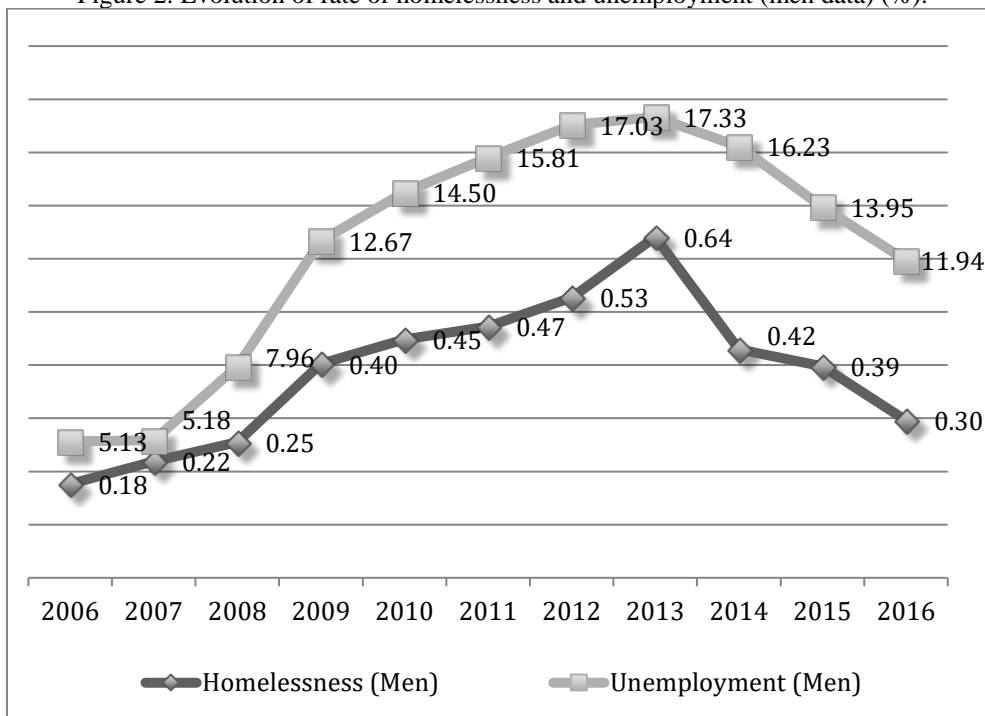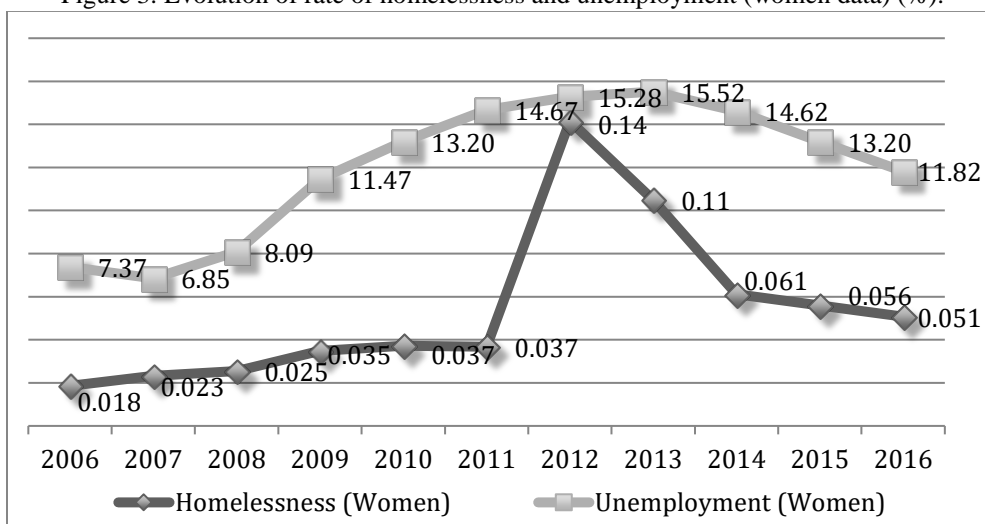

Figure 3. Evolution of rate of homelessness and unemployment (women data) (%).

In Table 2 the correlations between AUV and AHV are displayed. It can be observed how unemployment increases in a similar way to

homelessness in the entire sample and also in the case of unemployment and homelessness amongst men. In the case of women this significant correlation does not appear.

Table 2 Correlations (r) of the AUV and the AHV (global and differenced by sexes).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) AUV	1					
(2) AUV men	983***	1				
(3) AUV women	975***	919***	1			
(4) AHV	736*	710*	725*	1		
(5) AHV men	774**	753*	755*	951***	1	
(6) AHV women	121	111	116	511	229	1

*p <.05, **p <.01, ***p<.001

Finally, Table 3 displays the results of the different models of simple linear regression used to determine the predictor variables of homelessness. It can be observed that the rise of global unemployment is a predictor variable of the rise of global and male homelessness. Contrarily it does not predict specific female unemployment. As regards male unemployment, it is a predictive variable in the rise of male homelessness, but female unemployment is not related to female homelessness.

Table 3 Lineal regression analysis models between homelessness and unemployment

Variables	B	Est. Error	Beta	t	p
Dependent variable: Global homelessness (r^2 = 976)					
Economic recession	33.02	11.08	.25	2.98	.025
Global unemployment	.01	.00	2.17	5.19	.002
Dependent variable: Masculine homelessness					
Economic recession	22.23	11.66	.22	1.91	.098
Global unemployment	.00	.00	.82	7.09	<.001
Masculine unemployment	.02	.01	1.23	6.34	.004
Dependent variable: Feminine homelessness					
Economic recession	53.35	82.01	.31	.65	.54
Global unemployment	4.04	9.49	.88	.43	.68
Feminine unemployment	-4.21	11.76	-.73	-.36	.73

Discussion

This study has estimated the prevalence of homelessness in the city of Girona from a method which included the summary of data from all of the communal services, both public and private, involved in the social and sanitary attention of IEH. Subsequently, these data were compared with the evolution of unemployment in the city since 2006, obtaining strong correlations between both variables, especially in global and male homelessness data. The female correlations, albeit existent, were weaker. Finally, the regression models indicated that global and male unemployment are variables which are

predictive of global homelessness and male homelessness respectively, but unemployment is not predictive of female homelessness.

Concerning the method, it must be pointed out that it included the summary of total data from the communal services, both public and private, involved in the social and sanitary attention of the IEH, with a criteria of connection to the city linked to local unemployment. Thus, those individuals whose stay in the city is temporary and with high mobility, also linked to the geographical characteristics of a territory with wide peripheral rural areas and very particular stationary dynamics, were excluded (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2003). For example, the proximity of Girona to the French border makes it a place to consider for immigrants to stay for a short period of time when they cross the Iberian Peninsula in order to arrive in Europe from the north of Africa. A big part of this migratory movement is not representative of the city of Girona, despite being important in number and with a relevant demand for assistance services (Gilleland, Lurie, & Rankin, 2016). Although it is influential it is not representative of homelessness in the city of Girona (Calvo & Carbonell, 2017).

On the other hand, either in the most active moments of pilgrimage for "The Way of Saint James" whilst people pass through the city (when many require shelter services or sleep on the street or in illegally occupied houses and are counted as IEH by the Local Police of Girona) or in response to the increase of tourism in spring and summer which attracts IEH from other neighbouring towns, homelessness can vary significantly and, in any case, could cause a rise in the IEH count at certain moments during the year. Although the transverse counts endeavour to avoid this seasonality (Calvo & Carbonell, 2017) the range of variability of the homelessness numbers, depending on the method used for their count, can be significant (Sales, 2015).

For this reason, our proposal has been carried out using a method of mixed count.;on the one hand, through the indirect count of the different services, and on the other hand, by incorporating a method of observation and re-observation carried out by the open medium intervention team and based on the capture-recapture methods (Berry, 2007) which supervised the lists of services to corroborate them as well.

The decision to use two criteria for the count of the rate of homelessness (one over the total general population registered and the other over the legal age population) is based on the fact that the existence of underage homeless individuals in the analysed categories is inexistent or very limited in time. In these exceptional cases of minors on the streets of Girona, they are mainly immigrants who are not accompanied by adults who take responsibility for them and care for them according to the Resolution of the Council of Europe, June 26 (1997). According to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2016) and what is established

in the national laws of protection of children and teenagers, the state takes care of the guardianship and tutelage of the minors by protecting them and assisting them until they are reunited with their family, or until their coming of age (Bravo & Santos-González, 2017). Despite the fact that in other territories in Spain, for example in certain cities in the south, in which the arrival of immigrants is massive and there are cases of unaccompanied minors on the streets coming from northern Africa (Álvarez, 2003), the daily social-educational practice in the north of Spain indicates that this situation is circumstantial in the north and does not represent homelessness in this zone.

As regards the results obtained, homelessness displayed a very high correlation with the evolution of unemployment, highlighting the importance of economic development of the close context as the most important determinant of homelessness (Byrne, Munley, Fargo, Montgomery, & Culhane, 2013). Also, the correlation obtained between the variation of unemployment and IEH has proved to be coherent with other studies which have analysed both variables (Appelbaum, Dolny, Dreier, & Gilderbloom, 1991; Bohanon, 1991; Burt, 1991; Troutman & Ekelund, 1999).

The job loss in Spain during the recession has affected the male population more intensely, whose rate is comparable to women whose rate is traditionally higher (Escribà-Agüir & Fons-Martinez, 2014). This fact, alongside the fact that IEH population are normally male, helps to understand the high correlation between global unemployment and male unemployment in the analysed data. It is also noteworthy that the numbers of male IEH have quadrupled from the beginning of the analysis until its peak in the height of recession. Contrarily, among women it has multiplied by six. That is, during economic recession, the proportional number of women in a situation of homelessness has increased notably when compared against men, although the unemployment data of men has balanced the increase with respect to the rates of female unemployment. It is also worth highlighting the lower reduction of female homelessness compared to the male one after the economic crisis: considering that the Spanish economy displayed positive employment creation rates in 2014, it has been proven that from 2014-2016, the decrease of female homelessness is 16%, as opposed to male homelessness, which was reduced by 30%. These facts correspond to the feminisation of homelessness (Balfour, 2006; Roy, Crocker, Nicholls, Latimer, & Ayllon, 2014) that positions women as much more vulnerable in relation to men and with many more difficulties to access and maintain a home after a period of homelessness (Bertsch, 2014). Being a woman is also one of the most relevant individual poverty determinants, especially in the case of single women or women with no children (Vandecasteele, 2011), who at the same time have less possibilities of work reinsertion after unemployment (Dueñas-Fernández, Iglesias-Fernández, & Llorente-Heras, 2016).

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, in the count some ETHOS categories which would have been important to include, for example women living in special centres of protection against male violence, or in immigrant centres, are not considered. These individuals have not been included due to the difficulty to contact them (i.e., anonymity of protected victims and access to judge registry) and would have offered more data, for instance, about the feminisation of homelessness. Regardless of the limitations of the count, the fact that the number has quadrupled in the highest peak of the economic crisis, and that currently it is still double what it was in 2006, considering that the same counting methods have been used, indicate a dramatic raise in homelessness. There has not been access to the data of mortgage execution and eviction, which could have provided relevant data concerning unemployment and homelessness, taking into consideration the situation of this aspect which has been informed by specialised independent observatories (Colau & Alemany, 2013).

One future research direction could be the differences between homelessness prompted by evictions in different countries, considering the different characteristics of family structures and associations, which in Spain, could be a protection factor (Cano & Etxezarreta, 2014). On the other hand, we do not know whether IEH were unemployed at the time of being included in the registers, which would have allowed for the adjustment of the logistic regression models to determine the impact in the analysed variables. On the other hand, the daily social-educational practice indicates that the possibility of an IEH working is minimal, and if they do work, it is very occasionally, significantly precarious and very often with no control (i.e., fairs or peddling).

Finally, the number of available observations means that prudence is required when observing the results obtained in the regression. Although the regression would improve its predictive capacity with more observations, we think that the correlation has been perfectly captured and it provides Spanish data which is impossible to find in scientific publications. Regarding observations, no previous data are available, as the structure of the communal intervention table with IEH was different in subsequent years. It was in 2006 when the gathering of data of homelessness was systemised.

Despite these limitations, the method used for this count of IEH offers the advantages of communal work, and the coordination in a territory with few companies, either public or private, which offer social and sanitary services, which has improved the possibility of binding together the data and identifying the IEH. This fact, and the presence of open medium intervention teams improves reliability of the count of the ETHOS categories. Secondly, the work has confirmed the positive relationship between unemployment and homelessness, especially among the male population, and how the increase of poverty associated with the lack of employment has an impact in the rise of

extreme social poverty, which is a high risk for the most vulnerable people, among which women are becoming chronic. For this reason, it is necessary to create employment policies which consider this risk of IEH becoming chronic, and its special incidence among women (Hamilton, Williams, & Washington, 2015), primarily assisting single women, with or without children, and with no close family support.

Acknowledgement

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