



## Homelessness Lifetime Prevalence and Attitudes to Homeless in Portugal

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### Abstract

The present study intended to estimate the prevalence of population that already was in situation of homeless at some moment of its life, and to accede to one specific dimension of public opinion, attitudes, identifying which characteristics can distinguish the population with different attitudes face to the homeless.

The estimate of the lifetime homelessness prevalence disclosed a global prevalence of 6.5% and a literal prevalence of 2%

It was evident the influence of some demographic characteristics of the respondents on the attitudes factors: Gender was a significant effect on General Compassion and Limit Public Rights; Age on Trustworthy; Education Degree on Trustworthy and Social Isolation; and Income add effect on Social Isolation.

**Key words:** Homelessness; Prevalence; Public Opinion; Attitudes.

I will present the results of the first 200 interviews conducted in the study of Prevalence and Public Opinion on Homelessness in Portugal, which falls in transnational research developed by the Research Group on Homelessness and Poverty from Wayne State University, already described by Professor Paul Toro.

With this study, we intended to calculate the prevalence of Portuguese population that was already in a situation of homeless at some point in their lives, and access to a specific dimension of public opinion, attitudes, but also identify the factors that can distinguish the people with more positive representations about the homeless population with those with more negative ones, and identify the differences and / or similarities in terms of prevalence of situation of homeless in Portugal, compared to the various countries where the study has been carried out.

The instrument “The Public’s Perspective on Homelessness: Portugal Survey”- was applied by telephone to a randomly selected sample of the Portuguese population, composed by a total of 200 people who owned landline telephones.

Being a transnational study, the method followed the procedures of the studies and the original versions already made in other countries.

I will present only de main results.

### RESULTS

The prevalence analysis revealed that:

- 5% of the interviewed say that already gone through a difficult housing situation or were homeless.

- 44.4% of homeless people slept in parks, streets, buildings or abandoned stations.
- 44.4% slept at friends or relatives homes.
- No one slept in shelters or temporary homes.

Regarding the prevalence of homelessness, we found that:

In addition to the 5% of participants who already were in a situation of overall homelessness, plus 1.5% of the participants reported a story of precarious housing along the interview, although they have not responded affirmatively to the question. Thus, you get a prevalence of 6.5% of overall lifetime homelessness and 2% of literal lifetime homelessness.

Regarding the direct causes of homelessness situations, we found that:

- 1% of literal homelessness due to family problems;
- 0.5% to emigration;
- 0.5% to lack of money.
- 2% of precarious housing due to poverty;
- 1.5% to decolonization;
- 0.5% to colonial war;
- And 0.5% due to natural disaster.

The confirmation of the Attitudes Model (figure1) defined by Tompsett et al. (2006) for the United States population showed that this was not in keeping with the quality of our study sample, and there was a need to refine it to obtain acceptable values of quality indicators of adjustment.

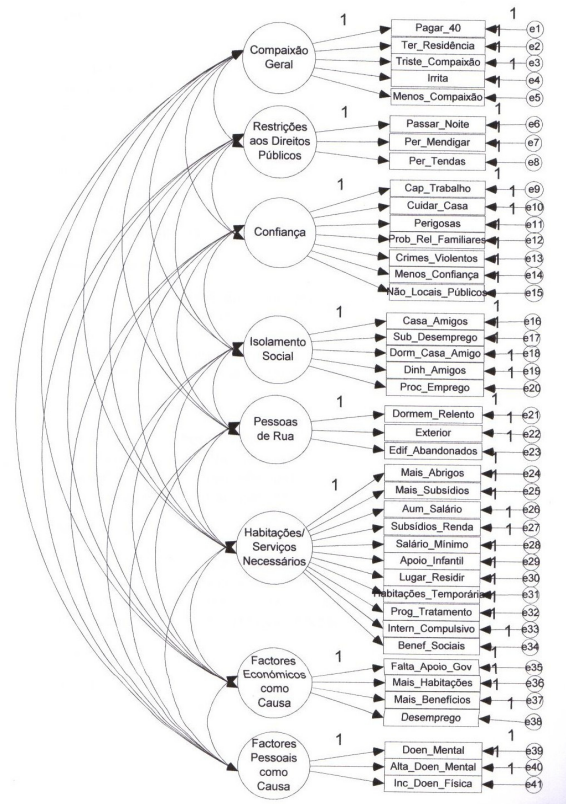


FIG. 1: Original Attitudes Model (Tompsett et al., 2006).

The attitudes factors of the model identified in our sample are the same, but are less the items that define it. Thus, we have that the attitudes towards the homeless are divided in the following eight factors:

- General Compassion
- Limit Public Rights
- Trustworthy
- Social Isolation
- Street People
- Housing/Services needed
- Economic Factors as Cause
- Personal Factors as Cause

Each of the factors is defined by the response to the instrument items described in the figure 2.

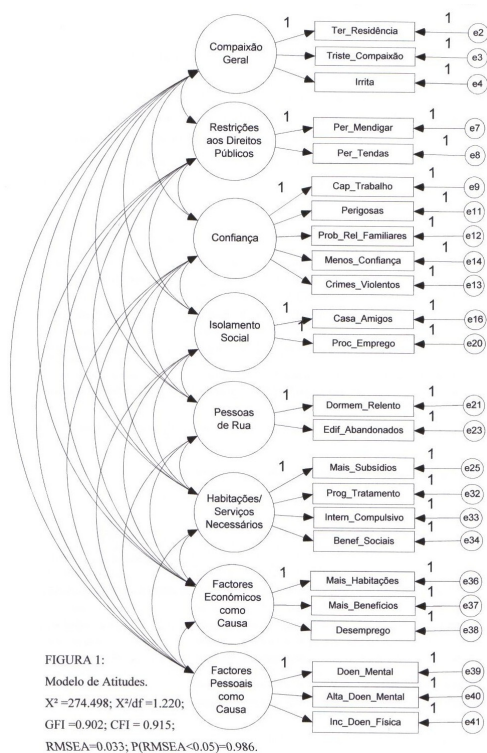


FIG. 2: Final Attitudes Model.

The results of the attitudes factors shows:

**General Compassion:** compassionate attitude towards the homeless.

**Limit Public Rights:** complacent about begging, but not for take old of public spaces for construction of structures for temporary shelter.

**Trustworthy:** moderate attitude of trustworthy (ability to work; trust; crime).

**Social Isolation:** participants tend to see homeless people as socially isolated.

**Street People:** consider them, almost unanimously, people from street.

**Housing/Services needed:** idea of the need for more support of the welfare state, particularly in terms of providing treatment for substance-dependent and mentally ill.

**Economic Factors as Cause:** unemployment is seen by most as a major cause of the existence of homeless people.

**Personal Factors as Cause:** mental illnesses, hospital discharge of people with mental illness and physical

disability or illness are considered factors contributing to homelessness.

Regarding the relationship between demographic characteristics of the participants and their attitudes:

Participants characteristics who didn't reveal significant influence over the attitudes factors face to the homeless were:

- have been panhandler or homeless;
- County and District of residence;
- political party;
- to have homeless family or friends.

Features that showed significant influence on the attitudes factors were:

- GENDER, AGE GROUPS, EDUCATION DEGREE and FAMILY INCOME.

GENDER had influence over:

General Compassion:

The *males* tend to have higher values of General Compassion.

Limit Public Rights:

There is also trend to upwards of Limitations of Public Rights in males.

AGE GROUPS had influence over:

Trustworthy

The age range in which the values of Trustworthy in homeless people are higher is the *30 to 44 years*. As the age increases the Trustworthy go decreasing and there is a more marked decline in the elderly.

EDUCATION DEGREE had influence over:

Trustworthy

The level of education that showed lower levels of Trustworthy was the lowest, that is, without schooling, curiously followed by the more advanced degree.

What showed greater level of Trustworthy was graduation.

Social Isolation

The highest level of Social Isolation occurs in participants that have 1 to 3 years of university frequency, and the lower, without schooling.

FAMILY INCOME had influence over:

#### Social Isolation

The lowest levels of Social Isolation there are in the *higher household income group*, followed by the level of *lower income and those who did not respond*.

#### CONCLUSION

Taking into account the values obtained in studies conducted in other countries, it appears that countries with prevalence rates, whether literal as overall, more similar to those obtained by us are France / Belgium and Germany, which is among the richest and more developed countries of European Union.

Portugal is the country with the lowest prevalence of literal lifetime homeless and the second lowest of overall lifetime homeless, despite being the poorest of the countries mentioned in table 1.

TABLE 1: Prevalência de Sem-abrigo ao Longo da Vida em Diferentes Países.

	E.U.A.	França & Bélgica	Reino Unido	Alemanha	Itália	Portugal
População (milhões de pessoas)	274.0	69.5	54.5	82.2	57.7	<b>10.4</b>
Amostra	435	182	159	250	250	<b>200</b>
Conclusão	12/01	4/00	9/00	5/02	10/02	<b>7/06</b>
Prevalência						
Global ao longo da vida	12,9%	8,3%	13,2%	5,6%	10,5%	<b>6,5%</b>
Literal ao longo da vida	6,2%	2,2%	7,6%	2,4%	4,0%	<b>2%</b>

Still, prevalence rates far exceed the few existing in the country.

The results suggest that family relationships play a key role in homelessness (either as leading or as protective).

We can suppose that the low prevalence is due mainly to family factors, and that many of the people who could be homeless are living with families.

In 1.5% of overall prevalence obtained through stories of precarious housing, while people didn't considered themselves homeless, they were living with relatives.

About half of participants who considered themselves homeless slept at friends or relatives homes during the situation.

The fact that we have verified the impact of colonial war, and the subsequent decolonization, in the prevalence of precarious housing, justifies the need to be attentive to the changes and social phenomena as possible inducers of homelessness situations.

Emerge then the need of a contextual approach, of demand for integration of all factors that determine the context of life of the person affected by homelessness.

The Portuguese public opinion proved to be sympathetic towards the problem of homelessness.

People tend to considered homeless as street people and as being socially isolated, so it can be deduced that they are considered people excluded from society.

There was a high general compassion face to the homeless people, and a sparingly position for limit public rights, but also a moderate trustworthy.

Gender, age, level of education and family income, emerge as demographic predictors of attitudes, but not always in linear ways.

Both the personal and the structural factors are considered important as cause of homelessness, but there is a greater consensus about the importance of structural factors, suggesting a possible support to public interventions in a structural level - national policies.