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Diagnosis of the situation and needs of people working with street children in Poland using the streetworking method. Research report

Abstract: The article presents the results of research aimed at diagnosing the situation and needs of individuals working with street children using the method of street work in Poland. To achieve this goal, non-governmental organizations collaborating with the Federation of Streetworking Organizations for Children and Youth (F.O.S.) were invited to participate in the research. The members of these organizations are actively involved in working with street children and use the method of street work. In the end, the research covered 15 organizations and 30 active streetworkers. The research followed a multi-stage process within the framework of qualitative research strategy, utilizing various research methods, including: diagnostic survey during the pilot phase, partially structured individual in-depth interviews, focused group interviews, and elements of action research. The research tool was a questionnaire of interview predisposition constructed by the project team. The research procedure as well as the development of the results followed the rigors of accepted research methodology and led to surprising conclusions. The article concludes with research findings, research conclusions, and recommendations for practice. The article presents an overview of selected approaches to the problem of outreach methods including streetworking, defines the phenomenon of street children and presents the applied methodology of qualitative research. The main problem takes the form of a question, which was sought to be answered during the course of the research process: What is the situation and what are the needs of streetworkers working with street children in Poland?

Key words: streetworking, outreach methods, street children.

Introduction

The phenomenon of street children has existed for a long time in many regions of the world. Currently, it appears in places where it has never been before or changes its characteristics. An example of this is Poland, where the phenomenon of street children, formerly referred to as vagrant children, has existed for a long time (e.g., Kuchta, 1936; Homicki, 2007, 2011, 2018). However, it seems to have a different characteristic nowadays. Experts remain divided on how to identify and define these children, especially since they seem to belong to many subcategories, and their exact number is difficult to determine. Street children worldwide are an extreme manifestation of deteriorating social capital and social exclusion. In Poland, their situation is additionally a result of current crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated isolation from education, economic crisis, and the war in Ukraine¹. The direct factors responsible for the situation in which a child is forced to spend the majority of their life's activities on the street are individual for each case and depend on the family context and the specific characteristics of each country, including its climate. Generally, however, they are a combination of such environmental variables as: Low family income, lack of housing, academic failures, neglect and abuse by a family member, armed conflicts, natural disasters, and epidemics are some of the direct factors that contribute to the situation in which a child is forced to spend the majority of their life's activities on the street (Volpi, 2002). The issue of street children is connected with the matter of individuals who work with them. Throughout the world, these include both volunteers and professionally trained individuals who are prepared to work under the specific conditions presented by the street. They are streetworkers. In Poland, their situation is peculiar. First of all, there is no profession of streetworker. Secondly, the specificity of street children differs slightly from what we typically associate with this phenomenon worldwide and significantly deviates from the stereotype that portrays street children as those who are born, live, work, and die on the streets. This kind of approach is a simplification of the complicated situation in which some children find themselves and a shallow reflection on the issue of street children. The first issue raises the question, for which we are still seeking an answer: who should work with the child in the street environment? Indeed, it seems natural that if we want to professionalize and formalize work with children on the street, it should be done by a professionally trained pedagogue specialized in such activities.

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¹ After February 24, 2022, children fleeing the war in Ukraine arrived in the space of Polish streets and backyards. This fact is signaled by street educators, and the children themselves are involved in the activities of non-governmental organizations working for street children in Poland.

The rationale for this thesis is simple. Considering the etymology of the word, a pedagogue (“paidagogos” in Greek) means “servant leading a child,” that is, a person professionally trained to work precisely with this age group. In Poland, the issue is complicated because streetworking is considered a method of social rather than pedagogical work. In legal documents, the term “backyard educator” is used, assuming that it can refer not only to pedagogues but also to social workers or psychologists. Only one national legal act regulates work with street children in Poland. We are talking about the Act of June 9, 2011, on family support and foster care system (Journal of Laws from 2011, No. 149, item 997), the article 24, section 1. item 3 of which informs that a day care center can be run in the form of yard work implemented by an educator, and *a day care center run in the form of yard work implements animation and sociotherapeutic activities*. Under this act, people to work on the streets and in backyards are employed not as pedagogues but as backyard educators. There is no mention of streetworking at any point in the act. Further in the quoted legal document, in Article 26 we can read that:

“a person working with children in a day care center can be a person with the following qualifications:

1) in the case of an educator:

a) higher education:

- majoring in pedagogy, special pedagogy, psychology, sociology, social work, family science, or any other field of study whose program includes re-socialization, social work, care and educational pedagogy, or
- in any field of study, supplemented by postgraduate studies in psychology, pedagogy, family sciences, re-socialization, or a qualification course in care and educational pedagogy.

b) at least secondary or vocational education and provide documented evidence of at least 3 years of work experience with children or families.

It is interesting to note that among the listed completed fields of study, there is no mention of social-cultural animation, although animational activities are listed as the first in the specifics of the functioning of a daily support facility in the form of a courtyard.

Working in the street environment, due to its specific nature and the characteristics of the recipients, requires certain specific competencies and skills. It is vastly different from working in an organized institution that is part of the local support system. However, an important aspect is that street children have their own specificities not only based on age but also in terms of their characteristics and functioning. The above complicates the situation both for streetworkers and street children, and it is also the subject of the author’s considerations supported by research findings. The content of the article, like the conducted research, focuses not on street children themselves but on the individuals working in urban spaces with these children. From this perspective, presenting research results related to

diagnosing the needs and problems of individuals working with street children in Poland becomes significant. If we are to answer questions about who should work with street children, what qualifications they should have, and what studies they should complete, we must understand the specific nature of this work in the context of the encountered problems and the needs of those with experience in such activities.

Review of selected literature

In the literature on the subject, there are multiple approaches both to defining street children and to categorizing them. Various terms are used to describe them, such as “lost, stolen, and vanished children” (Stephens, 1995, pp. 8–9) or children “robbed” of their childhood, home, and rights (Hecht, 1998, pp. 72–73). The author of the text often uses the term “invisible children.” Usually, street children are considered to be individuals under the age of 18 who live, work, play, and sleep on the streets (Hai, 2014). Street children are children deprived of basic rights (ARISE, 1999). They can be divided into children living on the streets, children working on the streets, and children at risk of ending up on the streets (Ferguson, 2012). The United Nations defines street children as boys and girls for whom the street (including places of residence other than a traditional home, abandoned buildings, crisis intervention centers, etc.) has become their home and/or source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults (Volpi, 2002 cited in: Black, 1993; Gomes da Costa, 1997). This definition suggests that a child on the street can be a working child, a school dropout, experiencing a homelessness crisis, a boy, or a girl. Not all working children and school dropouts spend most of their time on the streets. Many street children have homes, and some of them still attend school (Volpi, 2002). Therefore, some argue that the term “street children” is inappropriate as it creates an artificial category and diverts attention from the mutually interconnected dimensions of children’s vulnerability to risks. Despite these doubts, what is certain is that when we refer to street children, we mean individuals under the age of 18 who concentrate their main activities in the street space. At the same time, as is the case in Poland, due to factors like climate, street children usually have a place of residence and a roof over their heads. However, the specific way we treat them stems from the fact that they spend most of their activities on the streets and satisfy their basic needs there. Therefore, when considering the issue of street children, we must always take into account the personal, family, and local context.

Life on the streets is associated with specific types of problems. These include harmful use of psychoactive substances and addictions, risky sexual behaviors, and other abuses, being exploited for labor, involvement in criminal activities, violence from the police and other adults or rival gangs. On the other hand, the

street offers attractions such as adventure, freedom, and peer solidarity. Some of these behaviors require immediate interventions, while others call for professional actions based on a specific methodology of work. No term has yet been coined that captures both the specific nature of life and activities of street children and their interconnections with other aspects of vulnerability to risks. Therefore, with full awareness of the dilemmas and limitations in this study, the term “street children” is used.

In Poland, street children are a specific group of children at risk of exclusion or living on the margins of social life, who – although they have their places of stay, mostly in physical terms (homes) – spend most of their time in the street space. On the street is where their main activity related to meeting their basic needs is concentrated, and they often also receive their education on the street². Life or extended stay on the street is associated with characteristic physical and emotional problems in children that require specialized programs and specific working methods (Volpi, 2002). This perspective also allows, on the ground of practical implications, to adopt a specific methodology for working with a child on the street. It represents a process of interdisciplinary activities, drawing on the working methods of social pedagogy, cultural animation or rehabilitation pedagogy open to the local environment. The aim of these activities is both to prevent risky behavior and to undertake resocialization activities in open environments, most often concentrated in disadvantaged local communities. The method of working with a street child is called streetworking around the world. Its distinctive feature is that it is a set of activities carried out in the child’s activity space – street or backyard – often outside the official support system. Hence, this method belongs to the so-called outreach methods, which are conducted outside institutions, in the environment where the child resides.

Methodology

The report was prepared based on the design and implementation of a multi-stage research process in Poland among members of non-governmental organizations conducting streetworking activities with street children. All organizations collaborate with the Federation of Streetworking Organizations for Children and Youth (F.O.S.). Seventeen organizations applied for the research (operating in cities such as Warsaw, Krakow, Gdańsk, Bytom, Rybnik, Katowice, Racibórz, Poznań, Wyszków, Giżycko, Gliwice, Bielsko-Biała). Ultimately, 15 organizations met the

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² An example is the network of so-called Mobile Schools, increasingly popular in Poland, a method with its genesis in Belgium, now implemented in more than 20 countries around the world. Specific school boards on wheels with many colorful elements serving as educational tools can now be found on the streets of Polish cities such as Kraków, Warsaw, Bytom, and Racibórz.

criteria and were included in the study, each selecting two members. The main criterion was the length of work in the organization. It was decided that a person who had worked in one organization for a minimum of 2 years could be qualified for the study. During the selection process, the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown time proved to be important. It was considered that individuals who started working with streetworking during the pandemic (in 2021), when activities were mainly conducted online, had very limited opportunities for on-site work to carry out tasks on the street. The goal was to interview individuals who actually spent time working with children in the street environment.

The research methods included a diagnostic survey method used in the pilot study, partially structured in-depth individual interviews, focused group interviews, and elements of action research. The research tool was a questionnaire developed by the research project team for conducting interviews. The report concludes with research findings, research conclusions, and recommendations for practice. Among the recommendations are not only guidelines for streetworkers but also suggestions for community organizations, local institutions, decision-makers, and legislators. In addition to research findings, the report also contains suggestions and recommendations for employees of specific departments of local government units and institutions comprising the local support system in the area of building a support system for children and youth using the streetworking method.

Stages of research and methods of research material development

The first stage of the research utilized the diagnostic survey method for conducting pilot studies. Based on the pilot study results, the research areas focused on the issues related to the development of streetworking in Polish non-governmental organizations were defined. Five individuals with the longest experience in streetworking with children in Poland were invited to this stage. Their task was to outline the most problematic areas in this work. The main research method was a partially open-ended interview, conducted online. The main research method used was a partially open-ended interview conducted online. The identified problem areas were used to create the research tool in the form of a questionnaire for conducting interviews. The pilot study also partially tested the emerging tool. The results from the first stage interviews showed that non-governmental organizations in Poland working with children and youth through streetworking face three main problems: (1) Financial instability, directly affecting the continuity of implemented projects and activities; (2) Staffing issues, mainly related to finding suitable individuals willing to work as streetworkers; (3) Problems related to the overall support of the team, including the lack of appropriate training and limited access to supervision.

The second stage of the research involved the team's development of the research tool, which took the form of a questionnaire for conducting interviews. During the tool's construction, six categories were created: (1) Work organization system; (2) Recipients of actions; (3) Street work methodology; (4) Problems and dilemmas (including moral and legal); (5) Support system for streetworkers; (6) The team. The completed draft questionnaire was then subjected to evaluation by competent judges, who were the most experienced streetworkers from selected organizations. Two streetworkers who met the criteria of a minimum of 10 years of experience working with children and youth on the street, also holding managerial and coordinating positions, were the ones evaluating the questionnaire. After incorporating their feedback, the actual study was conducted.

The third stage involved interviews with representatives of non-governmental organizations. The interviews were conducted between June and September 2021. The questions directed to the participants were preceded by an introduction explaining the research purpose, metrics, and instructions. It is worth noting that the metrics, including the organization's name and the interviewee's name and surname, were anonymized in the process. Thus, the data obtained were coded. A research team consisting of four members, prepared by the project manager for online interviews, conducted the actual interviews. Each interview lasted an average of 1.5 hours and was recorded with the consent of the participants. Approximately 60 hours of interviews were conducted in total. After the interviews were completed, transcriptions were made, followed by the authorization process. The research material was then coded, categorized, filtered, and aligned with the generated categories for further presentation. The analysis of the research material was primarily qualitative in nature.

The fourth stage of the research process involved focused group interviews. These interviews took place in November 2021, during a workshop organized by the Federation of Streetworking Organizations for Children and Youth (F.O.S.) for streetworkers working with children. The focused group interview involved individuals who had previously participated in the individual interviews in the third stage. A total of 15 people. The purpose of the focused group interview was to deepen the understanding of the needs of streetworkers regarding the demand for training and workshops providing specialized knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, and specific skills. The procedures for developing and analyzing the material from this research were analogous to those used for individual interviews.

Results and discussion

From the conducted research, it can be inferred that the actions taken and implemented by streetworkers in Poland, aimed at working with street children, are carried out in daily support facilities of the backyard type. The recipients

of these actions are children and adolescents who, in principle, have a place of residence or stay, although often it is not a home in the psycho-physical sense, providing a sense of security and meeting other basic human needs. The research does not indicate the exact proportion of children without a home, understood as lacking a roof over their heads, or children who are in a situation of homelessness crisis, among the recipients of these actions. The report was prepared based on data obtained before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (February 24, 2022), so the situation of Ukrainian refugee children fleeing the war and being active in the streets of Poland (stations, courtyards, city squares, etc.) was also not included. However, we have information that these children are included in the activities of daily support facilities and courtyard groups. The data for the report was collected during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic in Poland, so it does not contain answers to how the situation in the work of streetworkers has changed after the pandemic. Observations and accounts from streetworkers, however, indicate that the situation has returned to the time before the pandemic.

The presented report discusses the research material obtained as a result of a multi-stage research process. A horizontal and vertical-temporal analysis of the collected material was conducted, taking into account the problems generated during the pilot stage and further explored and categorized during the main research stage. In the horizontal analysis, the situation of streetworkers and the situation of children were considered, while the vertical analysis focused on the specificity of streetworkers' work before the Covid-19 pandemic, during the pandemic, and posed an open-ended question: what comes next after the Covid-19 pandemic? Below, the focus will be solely on diagnosing the situation and needs of those working with street children using the streetworking method. Throughout the research process, starting from the preliminary stage and the pilot stage, some uncertainties arose concerning working with children on the streets in Poland, encompassing disciplines, work methodology, as well as formal and legal aspects. One of the main questions pertained to who should work with children in the street space. Other doubts emerged during the nomenclature stage, as well as in implementing actions within certain methodological, ethical, and legal standards, and finally, in professionalizing the streetworker profession.

Each organization with which we spoke to representatives conducts its actions at a high level of expertise. These activities are planned and tailored to the needs of children and adolescents, and often also their parents and caregivers. They are adapted to the possibilities, interests, requirements, developmental level, and social functioning of the children. Streetworkers endeavor, as far as possible, to cooperate with representatives of institutions in the local community. They diagnose and document, have access to hidden knowledge about the child and their immediate environment, which may be a taboo subject both in school and other institutions. Streetworkers implement projects, take on additional tasks, and are present daily on the streets and in the courtyards. They undergo supervision,

meet in teams, and provide psychological, social, and professional support. Some of these actions are carried out on a voluntary basis. During the Covid-19 pandemic, they were the first and sometimes the only ones to maintain contact with the most marginalized children in Poland. Children are treated specifically, unusually, and differently by streetworkers. They deserve full attention and one hundred percent respect. They are the most important, placed at the center of the communication, contact, education, and support process. No behavior is beyond change, but nothing is changed until the child allows it. Those working with children on the streets substitute for teachers in their work, as well as for the roles and tasks of parents and caregivers. Although the child is at the center of streetworkers' interests, attention should also be given to their status and working conditions.

The conducted pilot study allowed for the identification of three groups of problems, on the basis of which the most important research findings were categorized:

1. The system of organizing the work of a streetworker working with street children in Poland:
 - In Poland, there are no legislative and formal-legal frameworks specifically related to streetworking. Streetworking is not a formally recognized profession, and its name does not exist in official lists of qualifications and professions issued by government ministries.
 - There is a lack of consensus and clarity regarding the terminology used for professionals working with children on the streets. Informal usage of the term “streetworking” is not reflected in legal documents and contractual agreements. Streetworkers are often included under the title of “courtyard educator” when signing an agreement, which aligns with provisions in the Act of 9th June 2011 on supporting families and foster care systems. Additionally, in contracts and statements, other names appear, such as backyard pedagogue, street pedagogue, local animator, street psychologist, and social worker. In some cases, the term “streetworker” may appear in the contract, although without formal legal basis.
 - It happens that people without the required qualifications, as stated in the Act of June 9, 2011, on supporting families and foster care systems, are engaged to work with street children. These individuals include retirees, sole proprietors, people with unspecified sports certifications lacking pedagogical or coaching qualifications, and individuals involved in soft skills and unspecified activities, such as breathwork instructors. While such cases are individual, concerning the professionalization of work and the safety of children with such specific problems as street children, these situations should not occur. We exclude the work of volunteers here, assuming that their actions should be coordinated by a person professionally prepared to work with children on the streets.

- Streetworkers usually work in the afternoons, within a specific and limited timeframe of a project. This project typically falls within the budgetary year of the employing institution, such as a Municipal Social Welfare Center, concluding by the end of that budgetary year, for example, in December. Subsequent projects, subject to application and approval processes, usually commence in March or April. As a result, for three to four months, street children may lack support while streetworkers are between projects. Consequently, those working with street children often simultaneously implement two or three projects or work in several part-time positions in different places (e.g., school, addiction treatment center, psychotherapy office, etc.). The formal requirements for these projects, even if all of them pertain to streetworking, can vary significantly both in terms of content and financing. Thus, there is no uniform standard for the requirements of implemented projects, nor are there guidelines for local government units on how to effectively plan, construct, and execute projects while considering the real needs and rights of street children.
- Streetworkers are typically hired on civil-law contracts, which leads to a range of issues. For instance, some tasks are performed outside the hours specified in the contract, which often considers only the direct contact hours with the child, neglecting the time required for task preparation and documentation (reports, evaluations, etc.). This fact is significant not only from the perspective of caring for the child and the employee but also regarding the organization's expectations regarding results and evaluations. The fact that streetworkers are hired on civil-law contracts deprives them of the rights and benefits associated with labor laws under the Labor Code, such as entitlement to vacation leave, etc. Out of the 15 organizations surveyed, only one employs streetworkers under an employment contract:

When it comes to documentation, because we are the ones who fill it out after our work, we do it in our own private time.

I work three times a week from Monday to Wednesday. I work in the afternoons, I start my work at the foundation at 12:30 and work until the evening. Basically, I work from Monday to Thursday, because working strictly with children is on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and on Thursday I have to complete documentation, report, prepare for classes.

- Respondents point out the lack of constancy of work, its casualness. Streetworking is treated by both policymakers and streetworkers themselves as “making an extra buck,” a hobby, a pleasure, an activity one enjoys doing. If such a person wants to continue working after the end of the project, it is good if they prepare a project themselves and take care of the continuity of their work:

The constancy of employment affects the quality of work done. So looking at us, we could use some stability in this work and at the moment we want to sign a three-year ... make the city an offer for three years. This will normalize activities for us. On the other hand, in order to more easily manage the staff and more easily carry out these activities, if this work was the main work, they could do more things, it would probably also be more efficient.

- Streetworkers themselves sometimes devalue their work by claiming that they do it out of a sense of mission and that they would continue to do it regardless of their earnings. By defining their activities as a mission, they often treat the work as a volunteer activity, a pastime, a hobby, themselves denying them the chance to be taken seriously as part of the local support system. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that sometimes streetworkers themselves paradoxically do not want to be called streetworkers:

At every step, we emphasize that it is not “street pedagogy” but “unconventional pedagogy” because we do not want to stigmatize, and we emphasize that it is a streetworker group, and we are streetworkers.

- A streetworker usually works with a group of children. The size of this group varies although there is an obligation to comply with the law on which the work of the backyard educator is based, and this is what most organizations follow. Therefore, in a group there is usually one backyard-type day care center educator, or one streetworker, for every 15 children. There are organizations with other limits, where there are only 7 children in a group. Often the number of children in a group is enforced by the specifics of the project:

I happen to have a group of boys aged 11 to 13, I have six people in the group – the maximum in our project is that there can be 7 people in the group. I think this is the maximum for such a group.

We wondered what number of people actually made sense. Because if there are too many of these people in a group, well, it's not that form of work to have 10 or 15 people. If someone can handle 15 with no problem, they probably chose the wrong people for the group. So a little bit based on experience, 7 children is a reasonable number to give everyone the right amount of time, attention, to control it, to make it work – so that there is actually some dynamics and some energy in the group.

2. Recipients of the activities of streetworkers working with street children in Poland:

The aim of the conducted research was not to gather data that would allow for a detailed characterization of the situation of street children in Poland. Therefore, detailed issues related to the situation of street children have been omitted as they go beyond the narrow scope of the article's problem and constitute material

for another study. However, based on the statements of streetworkers, adopting popular definitions concerning street children, one can deduce who the children under the care of the surveyed non-governmental organizations are.

- The age of children under the care of streetworkers ranges from 3 to 12–13 years. The youngest children are usually brought by older siblings and often are not officially enrolled in activities. The older siblings are burdened with taking care of the younger ones.
- Teenagers in the age range of 13–14 to 18 years very rarely participate in the activities proposed by streetworkers. However, there is a need to organize activities specifically targeted at this age group.
- Under the care of streetworkers, not only children but also their guardians and family members can be found. The youngest children are not yet affected by typical teenage problems such as legal conflicts or harmful substance use, but they are involved in complex and dysfunctional family situations. In addition to the whole spectrum of typical problems, such as violence or addictions, there is also an issue of inadequate management of material benefits by the caregivers. Material poverty, due to the amount of benefits, is not in itself a problem, but respondents increasingly point to other types of poverty:

(...) emotional poverty has grown strongly (...). Difficulties in parenting, lack of time, thousands of stimuli – all of these contribute to all sorts of disorders, disturbances and all sorts of difficulties in both the family and the children themselves.

- Families of children participating in streetworker projects are most often multi-problem families and are included in the local network of care of assistance and legal institutions (social welfare centers, family assistants, probation officers, etc.):

First of all, parental inefficiency, helplessness, inadequate parenting methods, unwillingness of the parent to understand the child. I have the impression that some parents don't even know their children, they talk to them very little. Many parents are splitting up, more partners are appearing, which is very difficult for children.

(...) these children are lost (...) there are also aggressive parents. These parents lack parenting skills, so they handle things as they think they can. And these methods are ineffective and hurtful.

Most are large families, often there are four or five siblings, but each has a different dad. Parents are unlikely to work. It seems to me that I don't have such families where there would be a big alcohol problem, although these also happen (...). Most are simply poor families, large families, single mothers with dads in jail or elsewhere.

All my children in the group are from broken families. None of them have a complete family; there is no mother and father as a complete family unit in any of these cases. Except for one boy who is being raised by his dad, all the rest of my children are being raised by their moms.

3. Street work methodology:

- The surveyed individuals demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the streetworking method. They often employ random approaches, resulting from randomly conducted courses. Consequently, they are not familiar with the methodology of their work, and their actions on the street are often carried out “by instinct” and using methods they remember from their studies or specific to their organization, such as an educational rocket or mobile school. There is a lack of understanding among the streetworkers themselves regarding the standard of streetworking practice.
- None of the surveyed individuals mentioned using the streetworking method in their statements. It can be presumed that these individuals often do not grasp the role of a streetworker, what it entails, their tasks, the purpose of streetworking in the community, and its role in the local support system. The essence of the streetworking method is not understood both among streetworkers and those coordinating the organization’s actions. The surveyed individuals often confuse streetworking methods with other pedagogical approaches, even with psychotherapy, which is a significant professional mistake. According to their statements, streetworking is seen as just “being” with the child on the street, and everyone works as they wish and feel. Streetworking is mistakenly associated with leisure animation. At the same time, streetworkers lack the necessary skills for crisis intervention or unexpected situations requiring actions such as providing first aid or reporting child abuse. This ignorance is also related to the lack of knowledge about the functioning and specifics of the local support system and its constituent institutions.
- There is a significant demand among streetworking organizations working with street children for substantive training. As specified in the focused group interview, this demand includes legal education, particularly regarding the legislative framework governing the individual institutions of the local support system, streetworking know-how, safety training, sexual education, new trends in sexual development, inclusive language workshops, enhancing soft skills, and training on aggression substitution and social skills:

Recently, we have been dealing with a difficult topic, which is the issue of human trafficking or the lack of respect for one’s body. We suspect that some of the girls within our scope of interest might be exposed to such incidents, so it is necessary to

have conversations with them, raise awareness about their various needs, especially those related to adolescence, and also make them aware that they don't have to agree to certain things (...). Another difficult topic is related to family violence and the sexual exploitation of children, as well as violence against them. These are very challenging subjects for us as adults, and in order to be credible to the children, we need to be knowledgeable about the issues we are addressing, if not experts, at least well-informed about the topics we discuss.

4. Problems and dilemmas (including moral and legal ones) experienced by streetworkers working with street children in Poland:

Among the dilemmas mentioned by the respondents, we can distinguish categories of legal, ethical, and moral dilemmas, as well as substantive dilemmas, i.e., those related to cultural-civilizational and linguistic aspects.

- The dilemmas are most often associated with situations where the streetworker witnesses the exploitation or abuse of a child for criminal purposes (drug trafficking, involvement in theft, etc.). They also concern situations involving possible contact with the police and/or reporting a crime of which the child is a witness or participant.
- Another group of dilemmas is related to the streetworker's attempt to protect the child by potentially abusing or breaking the law, or it may arise from an unawareness of legal knowledge, resulting in a lack of skills to handle difficult situations:

I think the biggest difficulty I face is when I see neglected children. When I see parents neglecting their children. It's challenging for me, and I find it difficult to react because I'm not sure what it might entail for me. I've already had one situation where a child was taken away, and it was a difficult situation. I know that with experience, a person develops some sort of shield. But it was tough. I also worried about what would happen afterward, whether the children would still come to my classes, or if their parents would allow them to come.

- Cultural and civilizational dilemmas usually concern children from different cultural backgrounds, most commonly from Roma communities:

This is a dilemma, for example, whether to talk to the girls about early marriage. Sometimes I want to discuss it with them, but I'm not sure if I should touch on the topic. One of the girls once told me that she doesn't want to get married, but it's... It's like this: She didn't directly say she doesn't want to, but her father is there, and he will decide when she gets married. I didn't know whether to delve into the subject because I felt that she was very uncomfortable about it. She knows that I come from a different world, in terms of starting a family and having romantic relationships. So, on one hand, I want to talk about it with them, but on the other hand, I don't want to put them in a situation where they have no control, and they will tell me what they would like. After all, they won't be able to change anything about it. And I will

only awaken sadness and resentment in them because, in reality, it's about dealing with their parents, not with them. What can I say to them? That they are doing it wrong? But it's not their choice.

- Language dilemmas involve concerns about using exclusionary or discriminatory language that might inadvertently offend children from diverse cultural or religious backgrounds. Language dilemmas have also arisen concerning LGBTQA+ children and their sexual orientations.
5. The support system of streetworkers working with street children in Poland in the context of the local support system:
- The low status of street educators and streetworkers in the local support system is evident. This translates into the quality of the functioning of the local system and the underappreciation of the streetworkers' work as an important part of the local support system.
 - Locally, streetworkers are often perceived by representatives of other aid and educational institutions, as well as local government officials, as passionate individuals with a mission, playing and spending time with children on the street. Persons working with street children are often simply not taken seriously. Representatives of the local support system usually do not utilize the experience and knowledge of streetworkers, marginalizing their significance in the local aid system and not benefiting from their experiences, even though streetworkers are often the closest to the children and families.
 - The individuals surveyed frequently pointed out that collaboration between representatives of local schools (pedagogues and psychologists) and streetworkers is rare. However, it is essential to remember that schools are just one of the partners in the local structure, although crucial in terms of the children's age and their obligation to attend school.
 - Officials and decision-makers lack knowledge about the specifics of streetworking methodology, which leads to misunderstandings when announcing competitions and setting requirements for streetworkers. The proposed training is often inconsistent with streetworking methods. On the other hand, there were cases among those surveyed where individuals fit excellently into the local cooperation network. Most often, these are people who carry out several tasks assigned in a small local community, such as social workers, streetworkers, and supervisors in community centers.
6. The team that includes streetworkers working for street children in Poland:
- By design, streetworking should be done as a team, including members of the organization. However, in practice, it varies significantly. The opinions of those surveyed are divided on whether it is better and safer to work

with a group of children on the street alone or as a team. Nevertheless, most organizations strive for team integration, and regular integration meetings or supervisory sessions are organized.

- Supervision, when implemented, is most often conducted by individuals who are not directly involved in working with street children, not streetworkers themselves, and often lacking sufficient knowledge about the specifics of working with street children and streetworkers. Supervisors can be psychotherapists, addiction therapists, or psychiatrists. This leads to supervising the streetworker's own work, self-development, and therapeutic aspects of their interactions with street children. However, the specific aspects of working in the street with a particular group of children are not supervised.
- The problem lies in the fact that streetworkers often do not know the members of the organization's management, and they do not have direct contact and relationships with them. The management consists of enigmatic leaders, coordinators who write projects, supervise them, and manage the organization's budget. They are also the ones expected to have ready solutions in crisis situations. Often, they are responsible for contacting decision-makers, officials, and representatives of the local support system institutions.

Recommendations and summary

The presented research results aimed to provide a real, data-based insight into the situation of street workers working with street children in Poland, as conveyed through interviews with the street workers themselves. The presented research results aimed to answer the main question: what is the situation and what are the needs of street workers working with street children in Poland? The details of their work, condensed in the presented form, reveal barriers that directly translate into difficulties in carrying out tasks and actions in the field of street work focused on children and youth. Even a superficial review of the results leads to the not very optimistic conclusion that the actions of street workers working with children in the street are not always consistent with the methodology of this approach. A significant number of street workers were not trained for street work before and gained experience while working, literally being with children in the street. The problems also concern the lack of supervision or its substantive scope, as well as the principles of conducting evaluations of the undertaken actions. The general conclusion, developed after analyzing and discussing the research results, points to the need for the development of a Nationwide Standard for Street Work, focused on children and youth. It would constitute a valuable, clearly and precisely defined framework for substantive, organizational, and formal-legal

actions, helpful for both non-governmental organizations and local government units. It would also contribute to the professionalization of the work of those working with children and youth using the street work approach. This standard is the first step leading to the professionalization and formalization of street work. Only when the requirements for the education and preparation of street workers for work with street children are clearly outlined can they be enforced, monitored, and evaluated. The following recommendations should be included in this standard:

- There is a need to professionalize the work of street workers with street children; otherwise, we are dealing with a profession that does not officially exist but is de facto performed in relation to invisible children. This sounds absurd.
- Supervision should be an obligatory element of street work and should be conducted both individually and as a team by supervisors who have experience working with children in the street.
- A streetworker should not only work with a child but also be aware of the local system, know the competencies of other representatives of the system, know their own competencies, and the competencies of others.

Streetworkers are an important link connecting the most marginalized social environments with local support system institutions. They are sometimes the only people a child trusts and interacts with. They are also an important local resource that should not be overlooked in multi-sector and interdisciplinary local networks.

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