

1 Article

## 2 **Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Addictions** 3 **among Homeless People in the Greater Paris Area,** 4 **France**

5 **Anne Laporte** <sup>1,2,\*</sup>, **Stéphanie Vandendorren** <sup>1,2,3</sup>, **Marc-Antoine Détrez** <sup>1</sup>, **Caroline Douay** <sup>1</sup>, **Yann Le**  
6 **Strat** <sup>2</sup>, **Erwan le Méner** <sup>1</sup>, **Pierre Chauvin** <sup>3</sup> and the **Samenta** research group <sup>4</sup>

7 <sup>1</sup> Observatoire du Samusocial de Paris, 75012 Paris, France

8 <sup>2</sup> Santé publique France, French National Public Health Agency, 94410 Saint-Maurice, France

9 <sup>3</sup> INSERM, Sorbonne Universités, UPMC Univ Paris 06, Institut Pierre Louis d'épidémiologie et de Santé  
10 Publique (IPLESPI UMR 1136), Department of Social Epidemiology, 75012 Paris, France

11 <sup>4</sup> The Samenta research group: François Beck, Christine Chan-Chee, Jean-Marie Firdion, Marie-Jeanne Guedj,  
12 Marie Jauffret-Roustide, Stéphane Legleye, Valérie Le Masson, Alain Mercuel, Sylvie Zucca.

13 \* Correspondence: Anne.LAPORTE@santepubliquefrance.fr

14 **Abstract:** The Samenta study was conducted in 2009 in the Greater Paris area to estimate the  
15 prevalence of psychiatric disorders in homeless people. A cross-sectional survey was performed  
16 with a three-stage random sample of homeless people (n=859), including users of day services,  
17 emergency shelters, hot meal distribution, long-term rehabilitation centres and social hotels.  
18 Information was collected by a lay interviewer, using the *Mini International Neuropsychiatric  
19 Interview*, and completed by a psychologist through an open clinical interview. In the end, a  
20 psychiatrist assessed the psychiatric diagnosis according to the ICD10. One third of homeless  
21 people in the Paris area had at least one severe psychiatric disorder (SPD): psychotic disorders  
22 (13%), anxiety disorders (12%) or severe mood disorders (7%). One in five was alcohol dependent  
23 and 18% were drug users. Homeless women had significantly higher prevalence of anxiety  
24 disorders and depression compared to men, who were more likely to suffer from psychotic  
25 disorders. Homeless people of French origin were at higher risk of SPD, as well as people who  
26 experienced various adverse life events before the age of 18 (running away, sexual violence,  
27 parental disputes, and/or addictions) and those who experienced homelessness for the first time  
28 before the age of 26. The prevalence rates of main psychiatric disorders within the homeless  
29 population of our study are consistent with those reported in other Western cities. Our results  
30 advocate for an improvement in detection, housing and care of psychiatric homeless.

31 **Keywords:** homeless; mental health; epidemiology; psychotic disorders; anxiety; mood disorders;  
32 alcohol

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### 33 1. Introduction

34 The homelessness phenomenon is more important than ever in Western Europe and North  
35 America in this period of economic constraints on welfare budgets and increased social inequalities.  
36 Homelessness is the result of complex interactions among structural factors such as decreased  
37 availability of low-cost housing, unemployment, lack of social welfare policies, or immigration, and  
38 individual factors of social vulnerability such as physical and mental illness, addiction, loneliness,  
39 loss of social support, or some accumulation of other adverse life events [1,2,3]. Surveys showed that  
40 homelessness cannot be considered as a distinct social category, but as the extremity of a social  
41 gradient which shares a social proximity with other people living in conditions of poverty and  
42 economic insecurity [1]. Nevertheless, stigmatized and excluded groups are more likely to become  
43 homeless, in particular those with minority racial or ethnic status or those with previous experience  
44 of mental illness [4,5,6]; these groups are currently overrepresented among homeless people in

46 Europe and the US [2,7,8,9,10]. The relationship between homelessness and mental illness has  
47 already been discussed. More often, mental illness occurs before the onset of homelessness, and  
48 more rarely during homelessness [11]. These observations raise the question between the social  
49 causation or social selection hypotheses to explain this relation [12]. The social causation hypothesis,  
50 arguing that a less favourable socio-economic position leads to an increase risk of psychopathology  
51 [13], is well-demonstrated in the general population for depression and anxiety disorders, whereas  
52 the social selection hypothesis, arguing deterioration in mental health leads to less favourable social  
53 and economic conditions [14], is retained by many authors for psychotic disorders. Given these  
54 observations and some empirical results of research in homelessness, the observed temporal  
55 relationships between mental illness and the onset of homelessness are more in favour of the social  
56 selection hypothesis [2]; for mentally ill people already at the bottom of the social gradient  
57 previously mentioned, any social exclusion of income, wealth, or housing, or any adverse life event  
58 (such as a divorce, a separation or an imprisonment) may lead them to homelessness.

59 Factors found associated with homelessness by one's social environment and/or adverse life  
60 events [15] are also risk factors for severe psychiatric disorders. A growing body of evidence  
61 suggests that adverse early circumstances, discrimination, experiences of social defeat,  
62 powerlessness, and lack of social support could be an important risk of severe psychiatric disorders  
63 [16]. More specifically, family relationships, as well as disrupted attachment relations, separation  
64 from parents in early life, adverse relationships with parents or parental communication deviance,  
65 have been reported in association with serious psychopathological disorders [17]. Sexual abuse has  
66 been specifically investigated, and a history of sexual abuse has been linked with psychosis [18].

67 Statistical research on homelessness started in France in the 1990s, addressing methodological  
68 issues and providing insights into the living conditions and trajectories of the homeless people [1]. In  
69 1996, a study conducted in Paris city shelters showed a high prevalence of severe psychiatric  
70 disorders and addictions [8]. Thirteen years later, the current study has been conducted in a larger,  
71 more representative sample, including the whole Greater Paris area, and a greater variety of types of  
72 structures and services dedicated to homeless people. It originated from the observation of an  
73 increasing number of people living on the streets in the Greater Paris area who refused any kind of  
74 aid, which was then interpreted by social workers and local authorities as a consequence of their  
75 mental and behavioural disorders. Our main objectives were to estimate the prevalence of severe  
76 psychiatric disorders and addictions among the homeless population in the Greater Paris area, to  
77 compare their prevalence between men and women, and to explore some biographic factors  
78 associated with severe psychiatric disorders.

## 79 **2. Materials and Methods**

### 80 *2.1. Population and sampling*

81 The study's population includes French-speaking adults who had slept at least once in a place  
82 not intended for human habitation (street, squat, train station, etc.) or who had been taken in by an  
83 organization providing free or low-cost housing services within the five days preceding the survey,  
84 as well as those encountered in day-centres and those frequenting hot meal distribution points in the  
85 Greater Paris area in 2009.

86 First, we constituted an exhaustive sampling frame of all the homeless aid services in the  
87 Parisian region using different sources provided by public and private bodies. This frame contained  
88 797 different housing services (short-stay centres, long-stay centres, hotels, and parent-child centres),  
89 89 day-centres and 20 hot meal distribution points.

90 Then, we employed a three-stage random sampling following the Time Location Sampling  
91 method [15]. In the first stage, we carried out a randomized, unequal probabilities sampling in each  
92 of 15 strata that took into account the type of service, a binary geographic variable (Paris  
93 inner-city/suburbs) and, when warranted, the sex of the people sheltered. The probability that  
94 services would be included was proportional to the capacities of each service. Parisian services,  
95 those services dedicated to women, and those dedicated to people less than 25 years of age were

96 overrepresented to improve the strength of the analyses. In the second stage, we randomly selected  
97 half-days from the operating hours of each selected service. In the third stage, for every selected  
98 half-day, a researcher selected homeless individuals by simple random sampling.

99 The number of subjects needed to estimate a prevalence of severe psychiatric disorders or  
100 addictions of 30% [8,10], was estimated at 800 for an expected precision of 3%. With a response rate  
101 of 71%, 859 people were interviewed between February and April 2009, and of those, 840 with  
102 complete data were retained in the analysis.

### 103 2.2. Data Collection

104 A pair of specifically trained investigators (a professional lay interviewer and a clinical  
105 psychologist) interviewed each person for an average time of one hour. First, a detailed  
106 questionnaire about personal and family history, past and present social situation, housing and  
107 living conditions, and health and use of healthcare services at the time of the survey was  
108 administered.

109 A section on addictions (alcohol, drugs, medications abuse) used the Alcohol Use Disorders  
110 Identification Test (AUDIT) [19] and the Assessment and Screening of Assistance Needs (ASAN)-  
111 Drugs questionnaire [20], followed by questions on intake methods in the absence of housing.

112 Psychiatric disorders were investigated through a structured clinical interview (MINI plus v 5.0  
113 [21]) integrated into the questionnaire, which generated DSM IV diagnoses. The design of the study,  
114 tested on 45 people during a preliminary survey, took into account the risk of under- or  
115 over-diagnosis with this type of tool in the absence of a clinician [22,23,24]. Therefore, once the lay  
116 interviewer had completed the questionnaire, the psychologist who had observed the  
117 subject/interviewer interaction conducted an open clinical interview to support an eventual  
118 diagnosis. Finally, all the questionnaires and clinical reports had been systematically reviewed by a  
119 psychiatrist, out of the subject's presence, in order to get a final "diagnosis" based on the 10th  
120 International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) [25]. In order to make a differential diagnosis of  
121 dementia or neurological damage for people 50 and older, the Mini Mental Status Examination [26]  
122 was also integrated into the questionnaire.

123 This study has been approved by 2 ethics committees (the Comité pour la protection des  
124 personnes of the Necker University Hospital in Paris, and the national Comité consultatif sur le  
125 traitement de l'information en matière de recherche) and by the Commission Nationale de  
126 l'Informatique et des Libertés, in charge of the citizens' data protection.

### 127 2.3. Statistical analysis

128 For each person surveyed, we calculated a sampling weight using the inverse of the product of  
129 the inclusion probabilities calculated at each stage of the sampling design. This weight was modified  
130 to take into account the heterogeneous use of services by means of the Generalized Weight Share  
131 Method [27]. All the statistical analyses and the estimates presented here took into account the  
132 complex sampling design, using Stata 10® (StataCorp, Texas, USA).

133 In our analysis, severe psychiatric disorders included non-mood psychotic disorders (ICD-10:  
134 F20-29), severe mood disorders (ICD-10: F30-39 except F32.0 and F32.1, mild or moderate mood  
135 disorders), and anxiety disorders (ICD-10: F40-48).

136 To analyse the factors associated with severe psychiatric disorders, we compared the people  
137 who presented these disorders to those who did not (excluding people presenting a personality  
138 disorder: F60-F69) to some characteristics associated with psychiatric disorders found in the  
139 literature: demographics (age, sex, family status, country of birth), adverse life events in childhood  
140 and adolescence (running away, sexual violence), and variables associated with homelessness: level  
141 of education, social origin (parents' employment at 12 years), parents' difficulties (fights and/or  
142 addictions), as well as age, housing conditions and problematic use of alcohol and/or marijuana  
143 before the first experience of homelessness. These factors were identified using an age and sex  
144 adjusted multivariate Poisson model with robust variance, which was more suited to the  
145 cross-sectional design of the survey than logistic regression [28].

146 **3. Results**147 *3.1. Prevalence of psychiatric disorders and addictions*

148 The estimated size of the French-speaking adult population using housing services or  
149 frequenting day-centres or hot meal distribution points for an average week during the study period  
150 was 21,176 people (95%CI: 17,582-24,770). We estimated the proportion of homeless people with at  
151 least one severe psychiatric disorder at 31.5% (Table 1). These disorders consisted of psychotic  
152 disorders (13.2%, mostly schizophrenia: 8.4%), anxiety disorders (12.3%, including post-traumatic  
153 syndromes: 4.2%) and severe mood disorders (6.7%, including depression: 4.5%). Non-severe mood  
154 disorders (mainly mild to moderate depressions) were found in 15.8% of people. With regard to  
155 addictions, more than a quarter of the population presented a regular consummation of  
156 psychoactive substances (28.6%). Alcohol dependence was found in 21.0% of people and a daily or  
157 almost daily consumption of marijuana in 16.1%.

158 Almost half of the homeless people with psychotic disorders presented an addiction to at least  
159 one psychoactive substance (49.3%); they were alcohol dependent in 30.1% of cases and regular  
160 users of marijuana in 30.9%. Accordingly, when compared to people not suffering from psychotic  
161 disorders, their risk of having at least one addiction was significantly higher (OR=2.9; p<0.05). On the  
162 contrary, people with severe mood disorders and those with anxiety disorders had lower risks of  
163 addiction than people not suffering from these disorders (respectively OR=0.5; p<0.05 and OR=0.3;  
164 p<0.05). The global prevalence estimates masked significant disparities according to gender and  
165 origin while 52.1% of the population were female (of which, 77.2% were born abroad) and 47.9%  
166 were male (of which 62.1% were born in France, p<0.05).

167 *3.2. Prevalence of psychiatric disorders by gender*

168 Comparatively with homeless men (Table 1), homeless women had significantly higher  
169 prevalence of anxiety disorders (21.0%, i.e. more than double the prevalence in men) and depression  
170 (6.2%). Conversely, homeless men had higher prevalence of delusional disorders (5.0%, i.e. more  
171 than 5 times greater than female prevalence) and addictions. Prevalence of addictions in men  
172 generally exceeded that in women by about three times, whether considering a global prevalence  
173 (37.5% versus 11.9%, p<0.0001) or specifically alcohol dependence (24.8% versus 4.1%, p<0.0001), the  
174 regular consumption of illegal drug(s) and/or the misuse of prescription drug(s) (22.6% versus 8.0%,  
175 p<0.01), and the regular consumption of marijuana (21.4% versus 6.1%, p<0.0001).

176 *3.2. Biographic factors associated with severe psychiatric disorders*

177 The analysis of factors associated with severe psychiatric disorders (SPD) among the homeless  
178 population in the Ile-de-France (Table 2) shows that homeless people of French origin, people who  
179 experienced some adverse life events before the age of 18 (running away, sexual violence, parents  
180 fights and/or addictions) and those who experienced homelessness for the first time before the age of  
181 26 were at a higher risk of SPD. Compared to people who lived with their parents when they first  
182 experienced homelessness, those who had lost their own home were twice as likely to have SPD. A  
183 Neither the level of education nor the parental employment status was associated with SPD. A  
184 problematic use of alcohol and/or marijuana before homelessness was significantly more often  
185 reported by homeless with SPD (40.8%) than by homeless without SPD (19.9%). This association was  
186 no more significant in the final model (p=0.127) but it was solely due to the introduction of the  
187 country of birth (being or not born in France) with a PR reduced by less than 20% (from 1.58 to 1.28).  
188 Indeed, it remained significant in a final model that did not take into account the country of birth  
189 (PR=1.35, 95%CI=(1.03-1.77), p=0.028).

190

**Table 1.** Prevalence of psychiatric disorders and addictions in the entire homeless population and by gender, Greater Paris (France), 2009.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>p</b>
	N=840	n=402	n=438	
	<b>% (95%CI)</b>	<b>% (95%CI)</b>	<b>% (95%CI)</b>	
<b>Severe psychiatric disorder</b>	31.5 (25.4-38.3)	29.1 (21.4 - 38.4)	35.8 (25.9 - 47.2)	0.33
Psychotic disorders	13.2 (8.6-19.8)	15.4 (9.3 – 24.6)	9.1 (4.6 – 17.2)	0.19
<i>including schizophrenia</i>	8.4 (4.9-13.9)	8.7 (4.4-16.4)	7.7 (3.6-15.8)	0.10
<i>delusional disorders</i>	3.5 (1.8-6.6)	5.0 (2.6-9.6)	0.6 (0.2-2.0)	<0.01
Anxiety disorders	12.3 (8.7-17.0)	7.5 (4.0 – 13.7)	21.0 (13.5 – 31.2)	<0.01
<i>including post-traumatic stress disorder</i>	4.2 (2.1-7.9)	3.6 (1.2-10.4)	5.1 (2.7-9.6)	0.27
Severe mood disorders	6.7 (3.8-12.2)	6.6 (2.7 – 14.8)	6.9 (3.8 – 12.1)	0.92
<i>including depression</i>	4.5 (2.8-7.01)	3.6 (2.0-6.2)	6.2 (3.2-11.7)	<0.05
<b>Non severe mood disorders</b>	15.8 (8.9-26.3)	12.8 (5.2-28.3)	21.3 (15.4-28.7)	0.20
<b>Addictions</b>	28.6 (21.7-36.6)	37.5 (29.3-46.5)	11.9 (6.5-20.9)	<0.05
Alcohol dependence	21.0 (15.8-27.4)	24.8 (17.5 – 33.8)	4.1 (2.1 – 7.9)	<0.0001
Regular consumption of at least an illegal drug*	17.5 (12.6-23.9)	22.6 (16.1-30.8)	8.0 (3.7-16.4)	<0.01
<i>including marijuana</i>	16.1 (11.4-22.3)	21.4 (15.1 – 29.6)	6.1 (2.5 – 14.1)	<0.0001

191

**Table 2.** Factors associated with severe psychiatric disorders (SPD) among the homeless people, Greater Paris (France), 2009.

	% in SPD (n=259)	% in non SPD (n=303)	Initial model		Final model	
			PR (95%CI)	p	PR (95%CI)	p
Age	-	-	1.00 (0.98-1.01)	0.83	1.01 (0.99-1.02)	0.26
Gender = female (versus male)	39.7	40.2	0.98 (0.68-1.43)	0.95	1.13 (0.86-1.48)	0.39
Family status = in couple (versus single )	11.6	21.3	0.67 (0.36 – 1.25)	0.21		
Born in France	54.8	22.6	1.91 (1.41-2.58)	<0.001	1.51 (1.10-2.08)	0.01
History of running away before the age of 18	25.1	6.4	1.78 (1.41-2.27)	<0.001	1.34 (1.35-2.29)	<0.0001
Victim of sexual violence before the age of 18	15.9	0.9	2.04 (1.69-2.46)	<0.001	1.76 (1.35-2.29)	<0.0001
Level of education						
	primary	11.2	12.3	Ref.	0.53	
	secondary	68.6	71.2	0.94 (0.70-1.26)		
	tertiary	20.3	16.5	1.12 (0.84-1.54)		
Parents' employment at 12 years						
	both parents employed	2.1	2.9	Ref.	0.10	
	one of the two parents employed	53.4	64.6	0.80 (0.57-1.12)		
	both parents unemployed	44.5	32.5	0.84 (0.29-2.39)		
Parents fights and/or addictions	37.6	11.9	1.86 (1.40-2.47)	<0.0001	1.69 (1.32-2.17)	<0.0001
Age at the first experience of homelessness over 26 years	55.6	75.0	0.66 (0.50–0.88)	0.005	0.69 (0.51-0.95)	0.05
Housing condition before the first instance of homelessness						
	parents' home	24.1	25.8	Ref.	0.02	0.03
	own home	49.2	31.2	1.44 (0.98–2.09)		1.98 (1.28-3.06)
	precarious housing	15.2	29.2	0.63 (0.39-1.01)		1.21 (0.87-1.68)
	other family members' home	6.7	9.0	0.84 (0.58-1.25)		1.70 (1.11-1.62)
	foster family, institution, young people's home	4.6	1.1	1.64 (1.22–2.22)		1.27 (0.85-1.89)
Problematic use of alcohol or marijuana before homelessness	40.8	19.9	1.58 (1.18-2.11)	0.002		

193 **4. Discussion**

194 The observed prevalence of psychiatric disorders and addictions in our survey reveals the great  
195 differences between men and women in the homeless population, as well as the importance of their  
196 origin and of some biographical factors.

197 The main limitations of our study are due to some choices that must have been made for  
198 organization and financial purposes. First, only French speaking homeless people were included in  
199 our study, which constitutes a strong limitation, especially among homeless women (the majority of  
200 them being immigrants). Another paper in this special issue (see Martin-Fernandez et al.) is based on  
201 a survey performed a few years later in the same Greater Paris area, specifically dedicated to  
202 homeless families but not to mental health, and had the resources needed to do interviews in 17  
203 languages. In this survey, non-French speaking families (a majority of them being single women  
204 with children) accounted for 56% of the total sample [29]. The exclusion of non-French speaking  
205 people in the present study has led to underrepresentation of these homeless women in our analysis.  
206 Therefore, the prevalence of anxiety and mood disorders may have been underestimated (see  
207 below). Concerning non-French speaking, single, homeless men, no source of data exists in the  
208 Greater Paris area for their population size, nor their mental health status, with the exception of  
209 parcel and scattered data on some groups of marginalized immigrants (e.g. the homeless Eastern  
210 European drug users followed in support centres for drug addicts). . Second, some specific housing  
211 shelters have not been included in this survey such as some shelters for victims of domestic violence  
212 or for single mothers, but these exclusions are common in usual French national surveys on  
213 homelessness. On the contrary, the inclusion of hot meal distribution points has allowed us to  
214 capture a population who might have not used housing services for the homeless (e.g. people  
215 sleeping in squats, in their cars, etc.). Indeed, many previous [1,8] or following [30] studies in the  
216 Greater Paris area have shown that almost all the homeless people who do not use housing services,  
217 but live in the streets or in the public space, frequent hot meal distribution points (at least once in the  
218 week before the interview). In other words, the inclusion of hot meal distribution points allowed us  
219 to capture the quasi-entire homeless population who does not use housing services.

220 The comparison of the prevalence of psychiatric disorders between the homeless and the  
221 French general population [31] indicated psychotic disorders at a rate of 10 times higher, mild mood  
222 disorders four times higher, and addictions three to five times higher than in the general population.  
223 These results are comparable with other French studies on homelessness, especially that of Kovess et  
224 al [8] which found psychotic disorders in 16% of participants, and that of Fazel [10], which found  
225 psychotic disorders in 12.7%.

226 The nature of the psychiatric disorder differs according to people's gender. Anxiety disorders  
227 and depression were most frequent in women, as it is generally observed in the general population,  
228 particularly in France [31]. Conversely, addictions were more frequent in men, as it is observed in  
229 the general population in France with similar sex ratios for alcohol dependence and the regular  
230 consumption of marijuana [32]. Women were predominantly found in "social hotels" and a majority  
231 of them were immigrant single mothers (which led to the realization of a specific survey, some years  
232 later as mentioned above). The population living in hotels reflects the rise of homeless families in the  
233 Ile-de-France that we have observed over the last several years [33]. The preponderance of anxiety  
234 and depressive disorders that we found within the study population is the same as those found in an  
235 American study [34], where psychotic disorders were also rare, while depressive syndromes were  
236 predominant (2.5 times more depressive syndromes than in the general population). However, it is  
237 worth noting that this prevalence differs only slightly from other poor, but housed, families with the  
238 same profiles [35-37]. Also, people who live with their families, but have no home, more often turn  
239 to addictions than those with family and home, but less often than people without home and family  
240 [35]. The disorders observed among homeless people in families are closer to those found among  
241 immigrants in the general population, for which we find a preponderance of depressive disorders  
242 and anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorders) in the literature [38,39]. The  
243 psychopathology of immigrants is generally attributed to an original aetiology, traumatic migration  
244 conditions, or unstable living conditions in the host country.

245 In our study, the mentally ill homeless did not seem different from other homeless in terms of  
246 level of education or parental social situation (unlike other results found in the literature [11,40,41]),  
247 but this population had been homeless at a younger age. Since we did not know participants'  
248 mental health status previous to homelessness, we cannot exclude that psychotic young adults  
249 might have lost or been thrown out of their homes due to early behavioural problems. However, our  
250 results argue, with others [44-46], for the fastest possible access to homes and/or for a better care of  
251 their mental disorders of the youngest homeless populations before their mental state are  
252 deteriorated.

253 Sullivan showed that mentally ill homeless appear to have more in common with other  
254 homeless than with the mentally ill-housed population [11]. However, in our study, the mentally ill  
255 were distinct in terms of severe life events in childhood. Not only have these events been more often  
256 observed in homeless than in the general population [1,47,48], but they can also be interpreted  
257 within homeless populations as supplementary biographic disadvantages or risk factors of severe  
258 psychiatric disorders [11,42,43]. Thus, mentally ill homeless suffer a triple disadvantage: poverty,  
259 childhood adverse events and mental illness.

## 260 5. Conclusions

261 To conclude, those results advocate for an improvement in detection, housing and care of  
262 psychiatric homeless, not only for the most visible part of the population but also for homeless  
263 families. They also advocate for addressing more pervasive causes of homelessness; that is to say  
264 changes are required in some policies that directly or indirectly affect health, stability and well-being  
265 of the poor households (in terms of income distribution, housing, employment, education, etc.) for  
266 the effective prevention of homelessness starting at child development in healthy and stable  
267 environments as to then become well-functioning adults. Since the general picture on homelessness  
268 keeps changing in the Greater Paris area – and has actually worsened in the recent time with an  
269 endless rise of the number of homeless women, a constant, increasing diversity of homeless peoples'  
270 origin, and the recent observation of homeless, unaccompanied, foreign minors in the context of the  
271 refugees crisis in Europe – such a representative, random sample-based survey deserves to be  
272 replicated soon (almost 10 years after), with a special attention to minors and non-French speaking  
273 people.

274

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282 M.A.D., C.D. and E.L.M. supervised the data collection; the Samenta research group gave its expertise at all the  
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