

# **Social diagnosis and characterization of homeless people in Spain: Analysis from a gender perspective**

Amalia Reina<sup>1\*</sup>, Carmen Cruz<sup>2</sup>, Eduardo García<sup>3</sup>, Belén Donoso<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Cordoba, Spain

Department of Psychology

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3916-9017>

<sup>2</sup> University of Cordoba, Spain

Department of Education

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9133-1117>

<sup>3</sup> Prolibertas Foundation, Spain

Delegation of Cordoba

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3889-1836>

<sup>4</sup> University of Cordoba, Spain

Postdoctoral research Margarita Salas

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4921-4283>

\*Corresponding author

Amalia Reina

University of Cordoba, Spain

Faculty of Education Sciences

Department of Psychology

Avenue San Alberto Magno, s/n.

14071 Cordoba (Spain)

## **ABSTRACT**

Homelessness represents the most extreme social exclusion and vulnerability conditions. It is urgent to perform a social diagnosis that explores the sociodemographic and descriptive characteristics of homeless people who make a living in Spain in order to identify their specific needs, particularities of the situation of women and strategies to improve their quality of life.

Through a sample of 215 homeless people (Córdoba city, Spain) a structured interview using a guided questionnaire was conducted.

A descriptive statistics analysis was performed. The results show that although there are similar characteristics in terms of mean age and level of education, there are also striking differences between men and women. More women report to be mothers, have a partner in an attempt, among other things, to seek protection in such extreme conditions, and a lower presence of women on public roads is the result of their avoiding sleeping in the open or in places where they may be exposed to violent situations. The knowledge of the different trajectories and characteristics of homeless people and, more specifically, the group of women, may be considered when designing public policies and allocating social resources.

**Keywords: homelessness; occult homelessness; social exclusion; gender; mobile phone and internet usage**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Homelessness represents the most extreme level of exclusion and vulnerability. Although there is a tendency to identify homelessness with sleeping in the open, there is consensus at the European level for a broader and more diverse characterization of this phenomenon, in which residential exclusion is considered in any of its situations (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless [FEANTSA], 2001). In general, homelessness experiences have been classified since 2005 in the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion's (ETHOS; FEANTSA, 2013). This European typology encompasses a range of homelessness situations, from restricted homelessness (i.e., individuals who sleep in the open or shelters) to extensive homelessness, which includes not only the lack of a roof but also situations where accommodations fail to meet the minimum conditions for adequate human and social development. The spectrum is divided into four

categories, which further yield 13 specific subcategories that define the variability of homelessness situations. They include (1) Roofless, which refers to those who do not have a space to live; (2) Houseless, which refers to those who do not have their own houses and sleep in social entities; (3) Insecure housing, which refers to those who do not have a legal title to their home (i.e., eviction order, precarious lease); and (4) Inadequate housing, or those who live in places with temporary structures such as slums or illegal housing.

Since the acknowledgment of homelessness in the 1980s, these conditions of extreme vulnerability have been changing depending on the evolution of society itself (Cabrera, 2009; Sánchez, 2012). It is expected that the situation caused by COVID-19 will further worsen this reality of social exclusion (Matulic et al., 2021; Sales, 2020). Likewise, the complexity involved in accessing people under these categories, and the fact that the focus on those who sleep on the street or use social resources, make it difficult to quantify and characterize homelessness according to reality and defined by a wide range of variables (i.e., sex, age, origin, studies, housing situation, illness, disability, employment situation, affective ties,). The knowledge of all these factors helps us understand that homelessness is not caused by a single factor but is a multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon. Hence, *structural, institutional, relationship, or personal factors* may converge and increase the likelihood that a person becomes homeless (Edgar, 2009). Above all, it helps us think about strategies aimed at solving this problem (Cabrera, 2009), a requirement that is (or should be) a priority in the political agenda to comply with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, Goals 1 and 11 present the challenge to eradicate poverty and make cities more inclusive and point directly to the need to face this harsh reality.

Overall, the figures indicate that the level of homelessness continues to rise. A recent report (FEANTSA, 2019) warns of a 70% increase in 10 years (there were 410,000 in 2009). Every night, at least 700,000 people sleep on the street or in emergency accommodation in the

European Union (EU). In Spain, more than 40,000 people are homeless according to *Cáritas Española* (FOESSA, 2019), and the number of homeless people in the ETHOS 1 and 2 categories of large cities warn of an increasing number of people who sleep on the street or are welcomed in different resources.

As for sex, it is mainly men who are in the most extreme categories (ETHOS 1 and 2). Meanwhile, the typical form of homelessness among women is called *hidden homelessness* (FEANTSA, 2013). This explains that female homelessness is less visible because it manifests outside the public since women are mostly located in unsafe or inadequate housing (ETHOS 3 and 4), which makes them invisible (Cabrera, 2000) and “takes them out” of most statistics. It is a reality that women avoid spending the night outdoors or in places where they may be exposed to violent situations. In a recent study by Rivas-Rivero et al. (2021), more than a third of women on the streets have experienced sexual violence from their partner at some point in their lives. This special vulnerability causes them to go to inadequate or unsafe shelters so as not to end up on the street (Barrera, 2018; Gamez, 2018; Sales et al., 2015). This experience is shared by inmates in other people’s homes, sex workers in apartments that they do not own, and women who live with their abusers, rent their own houses to overcome economic difficulties, or live in the houses of relatives or acquaintances, taking advantage of the strong social ties they maintain with the family environment and with friends due to the gender roles that they have historically been assigned. These situations or relationships can be considered protection factors against the most extreme forms of residential exclusion, but place them in situations of exploitation and precariousness that also constitute forms of homelessness. They impact their well-being and opportunities structure when it comes to building a dignified life project (Baptista, 2010; Mayock et al., 2012).

Nationally, in Spain, some studies have been conducted that aim to address female homelessness (Alonso et al., 2020; Gamez, 2018; Matulic et al., 2020). They also point out that

the wage gap and occupational segregation drive situations of extreme social vulnerability for women, as well as the direct or indirect role of gender violence in homelessness. Likewise, in the international arena, recent studies such as that of Vázquez et al. (2021a) reinforce the hypothesis that women living without a home, similar to other countries such as Nicaragua, are in a particularly vulnerable position. These similarities can help contribute to addressing female homelessness from a global and international approach and quash pretexts for not considering the dramas derived from female housing exclusion and perpetuate the lack of attention and social protection against homelessness suffered by women (Alonso et al., 2020).

In addition to these data, the relationship of homeless people with their environment and the role played by mobile devices in their lives are of special interest. Today's society is saturated with technologies that make up a new mode of organization of daily and social life. The Internet and mobile phones are almost essential tools in the day-to-day of most people, whether living at home or homeless. They connect them with society and families or increase their protection and security in the streets. Hence, they are fundamental for groups who are homeless. Likewise, it can become a learning or qualification instrument to improve their access to the labor market and a mediating instrument in the processes of social insertion, allowing to recover the relational scope of people who are in a situation of social exclusion (Fernández et al., 2006). Therefore, the lack of a terminal, Wi-Fi, or battery increases isolation, misinformation, disconnection, helplessness and social isolation. Especially concerning is the digital gender divide that leaves women even more marginalized in this technological era (Bonder, 2002). Something that we must assess in this homelessness phenomenon is triple marginalization, which includes their being homeless, gender, and difficulty in accessing the digital world. In this regard, the recent work of Valerio-Ureña, Herrera-Murillo, and Rodríguez-Martínez (2020) analyzed the association between the levels of perceived loneliness and Internet access among homeless people.

Likewise, the review of scientific literature on this matter (Eyrich-Garg, 2010, Eyrich-Garg and Rice, 2012; Redpath et al., 2006) shows that one of the most common stereotypes associated with homeless people is lack of access to information technology. However, this belief is challenged with works such as that of Rhoades et al. (2017) in the United States, in which it is shown that 94% of the homeless people contacted ( $n = 421$ ) own a mobile phone, while more than half (58%) own smart devices.

This study aims to explore the sociodemographic and descriptive characteristics of homeless people in Spain, in relation to sex, age, nationality, education level, housing situation, health, disability, family, relationship status and/or coexistence, victimization, economic and labor situations, as well as the use of mobile phones and the Internet. These goals are part of a homelessness diagnosis in the city of Córdoba under a specific collaboration agreement between the University of Córdoba and the City Council of Córdoba. Its conclusions will be the starting point of the city's "Comprehensive Strategic Plan for the Eradication of Homelessness," which is currently in the design phase. This dataset intends to go forward with the identification of specific needs, particularities of the situations of women, and strategies for the whole community that are aimed at improving their well-being and quality of life.

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted in Spain and included 215 homeless people, adults, and users of social resources in Córdoba. These offer specialized care for homeless people through a public-private cooperation model (CoHabita Network), in partnership with social entities such as Caritas, the Spanish Red Cross, the Prolibertas Foundation, the Association of Encounter and Shelter for the Drug Addict (ADEAT), *Hogar Sí*, and the City Council of Córdoba.

Most of the sample consisted of men (76.7% men, 23.3% women), mainly of Spanish origin (71.6% Spanish, 28.4% foreigners), aged between 18 and 76 years ( $M=44.51$  years,  $SD=12.88$ ). The total sample represents 66.35% of the homeless in the city of Córdoba ( $n=324$ ),

according to the last count made by the Cohabita Network (2020), in which 84% were men (n=272) and 16% women (n=52).

The exclusion criteria include lack of knowledge of the Spanish language, severe cognitive impairment, incoherent speech, or being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. However, it is important to consider that the exclusion of these groups may result in their experiences and perspectives being underrepresented in the results of this study.

### **Instruments**

The data production technique was the structured interview using a guided questionnaire that allowed the comparison of answers (Hernández and Mendoza, 2018) and solve the comprehension issues of the participants in some questions (Panadero and Vázquez, 2016).

This instrument, which explores sociodemographic and descriptive variables, was constructed using the Delphi method (Gil Gómez and Pascual Ezama, 2012) with the collaboration of technical social resources staff who care for the homeless in Córdoba (CoHabita Network), adapting the questions to their recipients and including the particularities of homeless women. The answers received were dichotomous, multiple-choice, of one or several answers, depending on each question. Filter or key questions were also used, which allowed the conversation to be managed with the participants based on their answers.

### **Design and procedure**

The design had an exploratory and descriptive character. A quantitative methodology was used (Hernández and Mendoza, 2018).

Sample selection was performed through an incidental non-probabilistic sampling. Data collection was carried out through structured interviews that lasted for approximately one hour with every participant for nine months. The study was presented as research of the University of Cordoba that aims to explore the lives of homeless people. An incentive (subscription card

to travel by bus) was offered in exchange for collaboration, which was donated by the municipal sanitation company of the city of Cordoba (SADECO).

The answers were recorded in Google Forms by the interviewing team using an anonymous code assigned to every interview.

### **Data analysis**

All analyses were performed using the SPSS 25 software while applying descriptive statistics through the study of frequencies and means.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Basic sociodemographic characteristics: Sex, age, level of education, and nationality**

Of the 215 homeless people who participated in the study, 76.7% were men (n=165) and 23.3% were women (n=50). The age range of the participants was 18 to 76 years, with 44.51 years (SD=12.88) being the mean age; 44.82 years (SD=12.94) for men and 43.48 for women (SD=12.76). According to the ETHOS category, the mean age is 43.84 (SD=10.91) for people living without a roof, 44.59 (SD=14.48) for houseless people, 43.71 (SD=14.12) for people with insecure housing, and 51.36 (SD=9.79) for people with inadequate housing.

Regarding data analysis according to sex (Table 1), the age ranges of 50-59 (35.2%) and 40-49 years (24.2%) have the highest percentage of homeless men. Most women, on the other hand, are concentrated in the 30-39 (28%), 50-59 (22%), and 40-49 (20%) age groups. The least prevalent percentage, while not negligible, is the age range of more than 70 years in both men and women (approximately 2%).

**TABLE 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample according to sex.

	<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Age</b>			
≤29	14.5% (24)	16.0% (8)	14.9% (32)
30-39	18.2% (30)	28.0% (14)	20.5% (44)
40-49	24.2% (40)	20.0% (10)	23.3% (50)
50-59	35.2% (58)	22.0% (11)	32.1% (69)
60-69	6.1% (10)	12.0% (6)	7.4% (16)



	≥70	1.8% (3)	2.0% (1)	1.9% (4)
<b>Studies</b>	None, I can't read or write	4.3% (7)	0.0% (0)	3.3% (7)
	I only know how to read and write	21.3% (35)	24.0% (12)	22.0% (47)
	Primary education (EGB/ESO, in Spanish)	45.7% (75)	52.0% (26)	47.2% (101)
	Secondary education (BUP, REM, LOGSE, in Spanish)	22.0% (36)	18.0% (9)	21.0% (45)
	University studies	6.7% (11)	6.0% (3)	6.5% (14)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

Regarding educational level, 45.7% (n=75) of surveyed men have gone through primary education, 22% (n=36) have gone through secondary education, while 21.3% (n=35) only know how to read and write. Women also stand at 52% (n=26) in primary education, followed by 24% (n=12) who can only read and write and 18% (n=9) with secondary education. Only 6.7% (n=11) of surveyed men and 6% (n=3) of surveyed women have reached the university level.

Regarding nationality, the percentage of people of Spanish origin among the surveyed men is 66.7% (n=110), while it was 88% (n=44) among surveyed women. Foreign population constituted a much lower proportion in both sexes – 33.3% in men and 12% in women (Table 2). From this group, the highest frequency (56.4% of men and 66.7% of women) is in the range of more than 10 years in Spain and have a regularized legal situation (83.6% of the total).

**TABLE 2.** Time in Spain and legal status according to sex.

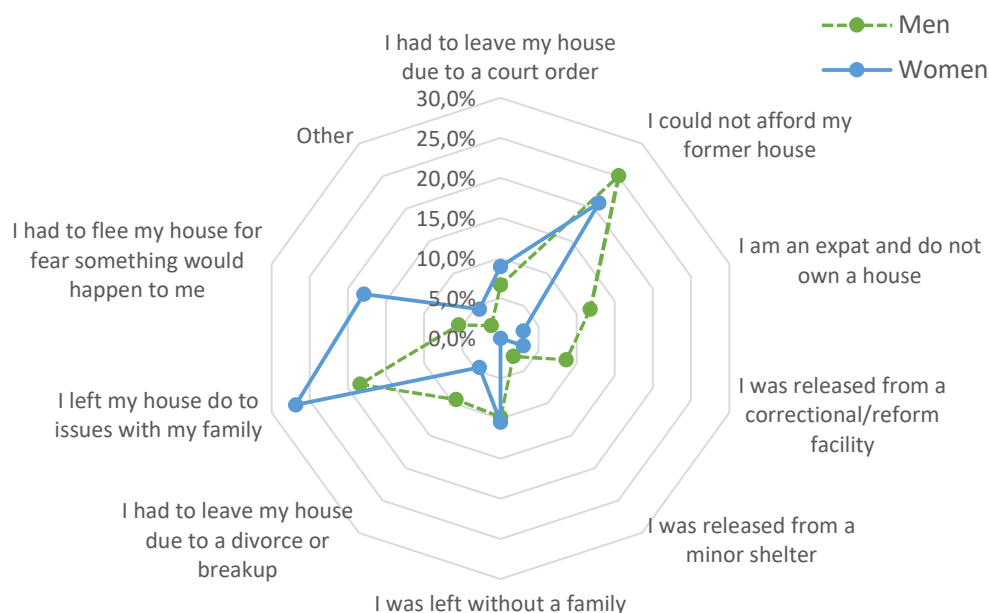
		<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
Nationality	Spaniard	66.7% (110)	88.0% (44)	71.6% (154)
	Other nationality	33.3% (55)	12.0% (6)	28.4% (61)
Time in Spain	< 1 year	12.7% (7)	16.7% (1)	13.1% (8)
	1-5 years	23.6% (13)	0.0% (0)	21.3% (13)
	5–10 years	7.3% (4)	16.7% (1)	8.2% (5)
	> 10 years	56.4% (31)	66.7% (4)	57.4% (35)
Legal status in Spain	Irregular	16.4% (9)	0.0% (0)	14.8% (9)
	Regular	81.8% (45)	100.0% (6)	83.6% (51)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

### **Motives, current situation of homelessness, and time living homeless**

Of the total causal (non-exclusive) attributions of homelessness, the data shows that there are significant differences in the reasons for being homeless according to sex (Figure 1). The total men's responses (255) attribute their situation to the following: they could not afford a house (25.1%); issues with relatives (18.4%); coming from another country and not having a house (11.8%); and being left without a family (9.8%). For women (67), the reasons include: having to leave the house due to family problems (26.9%); not being able to afford the previous house (20.9%); having to flee from home for fear that something would happen to her (17.9%); and leaving without a family (10.4%). It is also noteworthy to point out the great difference between sexes on the motive: "I had to flee my house for fear that something would happen to me" had a higher percentage for women (17.9%) compared to men (5.5%).

**Figure 1.** Reasons for homelessness based on sex.



Regarding the types of current homelessness situation according to ETHOS classification, the data collected by sex in each category showed notable differences between men and women in terms of their representation in the different typologies.

**TABLE 3.** Categories and types of current accommodation according to ETHOS classification according to sex.

	Men (n=165)	Women (n=50)	Total (n=215)
<b>TOTAL ROOFLESS</b>	<b>41.8% (69)</b>	<b>28.0% (14)</b>	<b>38.6% (83)</b>
I live on the street (cashier, parks, arcades...)	35.8% (59)	20.0% (10)	32.1% (69)
I spend the night in a hostel, forced to spend the rest of the day in a public space (cold snap)	6.1% (10)	8.0% (4)	6.5% (14)
<b>TOTAL HOUSELESS</b>	<b>33.3% (55)</b>	<b>36.0% (18)</b>	<b>34.0% (73)</b>
I live in shelters or homeless centers	26.1% (43)	28.0% (14)	26.5% (57)
Living in temporary accommodation	4.8% (8)	6.0% (3)	5.1% (11)
I live in a residential or internment institution with the prospect of having to leave it within a defined period without available foster housing	0.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.5% (1)
I live in an accommodation with sustained support for homeless people (RAIS, Caritas insertion shelter...)	1.8% (3)	2.0% (1)	1.9% (4)
<b>TOTAL INSECURE HOUSING</b>	<b>17.6% (29)</b>	<b>32.0% (16)</b>	<b>20.9% (45)</b>
I live temporarily in the house of relatives, friends	7.9% (13)	2.0% (1)	6.5% (14)
I live in a re-rented home, without legal title	5.5% (9)	12.0% (6)	7.0% (15)
I live in an illegally occupied dwelling (squatting)	4.2% (7)	14.0% (7)	6.5% (14)
I live under threat of eviction	0.0% (0)	2.0% (1)	0.5% (1)

I live under the threat of violence by a family or partner	0.0% (0)	2.0% (1)	0.5% (1)
<b>TOTAL INADEQUATE HOUSING</b>	<b>6.1% (10)</b>	<b>2.0% (1)</b>	<b>5.1% (11)</b>
I live in temporary or unconventional structures (shack, cave, caravans)	3.0% (5)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (5)
I live in a building that is not suitable as housing (in poor condition, does not have the minimum legal conditions)	3.0% (5)	2.0% (1)	2.8% (6)
<b>DK/NA</b>	<b>1.2% (2)</b>	<b>2.0% (1)</b>	<b>1.4% (3)</b>

*Source:* Own elaboration.

In Table 3, the following distribution pattern of the total sample in the ETHOS categories can be observed, from highest to lowest: roofless (38.6%); houseless (34%); insecure housing (20.9%); and inadequate housing (5.1%). However, although there is a coincidence in the representation of men, the order varies among women which are: houseless (36%; specifically, 28% live in shelters or centers); insecure housing (32%); roofless (28%); and inadequate housing (2%). This is related to the idea of “hidden homelessness” that is suffered by women (FEANTSA, 2013) who go to shelters, most of which are inadequate or unsafe, so as not to sleep on the street. Even so, the number of interviewees in the roofless category is very considerable (28%; n=14). On the other hand, the lack of women in care centers where we have collected the data implies a lack of attention and social protection against the homelessness that is suffered by women (Alonso et al., 2020).

The recent study by the FOESSA Foundation (2019) does not allow an exhaustive analysis of residential exclusion in Spain through the ETHOS classification but helps deepen some indicators’ analysis. According to this report, 18.4% of the Spanish population (8.5 million people) suffers from social exclusion, with 4.1 million people being the most vulnerable group to severe social exclusion, because they do not usually have adequate housing, are unemployed and have hardly any visibility in society. Specifically, the 2018 Survey on social integration and social needs fieldwork of the FOESSA Foundation, which refers to residential exclusion in Spain from the ETHOS 3 and 4 categories, reports that unsafe housing situation affects almost 800,000 households and 2.1 million people. They face housing insecurity, a reality that affects

four out of every 100 households in Spain. Moreover, around 1,300,000 households and 4.6 million people suffer from housing inadequacy which represents seven out of every 100 households in Spain.

Regarding the period of homelessness, it is observed in Table 4 that most homeless people have been in the current situation for less than two years. This translates to 70.9% of men (n = 117) and 60% of women (n = 30) if we consider the total percentage of less than two years compared to two to five years and more than five years. Even so, it is very concerning that 31.6% of the total participants have been in this situation for more than two years (approximately 18% have been in their current situation for more than five years), considering what this implies about chronicity, hopelessness, frustration, strategy loss, and difficulty from getting out (Muñoz et al., 2017). Hence, these people become ill while facing this situation for a period of more than a year, experiencing at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years (12 months at least) or having some type of disability (Roca et al., 2019).

**TABLE 4.** Span of current homelessness by sex.

	<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>&lt; 2 years</b>	70.9% (117)	60.0% (30)	68.4% (147)
< 1 month	23.6% (39)	16.0% (8)	21.9% (47)
1 - 6 months	26.7% (44)	26.0% (13)	26.5% (57)
6 months - 2 years	20.6% (34)	18.0% (9)	20.0% (43)
<b>2-5 years</b>	10.3% (17)	22.0% (11)	13.0% (28)
<b>&gt; 5 years</b>	18.8% (31)	18.0% (9)	18.6% (40)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

In addition, the time dimension can worsen to a greater extent the severity of homelessness, since “it is still an important indicator of the care system effectiveness to respond adequately to the needs of these people and facilitate, therefore, solutions” (RAIS, 2017). In this regard, some

Spanish studies (Panadero and Muñoz, 2014; Roca et al., 2019) show that the existing differences in health, quality of life and substance use depending on the period of homelessness must condition the intervention, and a differentiated response must be offered depending on such duration. This is the reason why “the intervention must be organized according to two main axes: types of main problems and time on the street” (Panadero and Muñoz, 2014, 76).

### **Health and disability**

When analyzing the health condition perceived by the homeless people who were interviewed, it is observed that the mean level is 3.49 (SD=1.02) out of 5 and 3.58 (SD=1.00) in the case of men and 3.18 (SD=1.04) in women, which are distributed as follows within the sample: very good (17.7%); good (31.6%); regular (36.3%); bad (10.7%); and very bad (3.7%).

Suffering from a serious or important illness, consuming alcohol or suffering from a disability can affect the incidence of repeated homelessness episodes, even if an independent house is accessed (Roca et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to know these data among the population studied. Thirty-eight percent of the people interviewed (n=82) claim to suffer from a serious or significant disease as diagnosed by a professional. This is the case for 33.9% of men (n=56) compared to 52% of women (n=26). Regarding alcohol and drug use, a minority of the homeless people interviewed stated that they consume alcohol daily (16.7%) and in the last month have consumed: marijuana (28.8%); cocaine (9.3%); and heroin (6.5%), with no differences based on sex (Table 5). However, 53.9% of men drink alcohol from time to time and only 34% of women do so.

**TABLE 5.** Alcohol and drug use according to sex.

	<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Drink alcohol from time to time</b>	53.9% (89)	34.0% (17)	49.3% (106)
<b>Drink alcohol usually (daily or almost daily)</b>	17.6% (29)	14.0% (7)	16.7% (36)
<b>Has used joints during the last month (hashish/marijuana)</b>	29.1% (48)	28.0% (14)	28.8% (62)
<b>Has used cocaine during the last month</b>	10.3% (17)	6.0% (3)	9.3% (20)
<b>Has used heroin during the last month</b>	7.9% (13)	2.0% (1)	6.5% (14)

<b>Has used other drugs during the last month</b>	5.5% (9)	2.0% (1)	4.7% (19)
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*Source:* Own elaboration.

Regarding disability, approximately one third (30.2%, n=65) has a recognized disability (33%), 12.1% of whom were men (n=20) and 16% women (n=8), which is distributed in the 33 to 64% range. A higher percentage of women declare having a disability of 65% onwards: 24% (n=12) versus 15.2% (n=25) of men.

### **Family, relationship status and/or coexistence and victimization due to aggression**

One of the most relevant variables in defining the quality of life of homeless people relates to their family, relationship status and/or coexistence they have with their children.

Motherhood or paternity is one of the aspects highlighted in this group of homeless people (Table 6). About 72% of women report to be mothers (52.8% minor offspring) with coexistence being found only in 11.1% of cases. As for men, only 50.3% acknowledge their paternity, although the data on the age of their offspring and coexistence are very similar (42.2% minor offspring and 92.8% without coexistence).

**TABLE 6.** Declared maternity or paternity among homeless interviewees.

		<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Maternity/paternity</b>	No	49.7% (82)	28.0% (14)	44.7% (96)
	Yes	50.3% (83)	72.0% (36)	55.3% (119)
<b>Age</b>	≤17years	42.2% (35)	52.8% (19)	45.4% (54)
	≥18years	57.8% (48)	47.2% (17)	54.6% (65)
<b>Cohabitation</b>	Non-cohabitants	92.8% (77)	88.9% (32)	91.6% (109)
	Cohabitants	7.2% (6)	11.1% (4)	8.4% (10)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

With respect to women, studies show that their homelessness could be aggravated by their condition as mothers (Piqueras et al., 2020; Warburton, Papić & Whittaker, 2022), as compared to women who do not have children. It would be necessary to continue investigating how this differentiates the reality of homeless women who practice motherhood. According to a recent study, these women suffer high levels of stigma and significant intersectional discrimination

(Vázquez et al., 2021b) as they are at continuous risk of violence (sexual, physical or verbal), need safe places to stay, with reduced chances of finding work and increased dependence on sex work to make money.

In addition, relationship status and coexistence offer a range of very different possibilities around the different ETHOS categories. Table 7 shows the notable differences between both sexes, with women being those who mainly have a partner in the ETHOS typology Roofless (64.3%) compared to men (24.6%). Of these people, 50% of women live with their partners, compared to 13% of men. On the other hand, in the ETHOS categories Houseless and Insecure housing, the differences are less pronounced: 38.9% of women have a partner and so do 18.5% of men without housing, while 43.8% of women have a partner and so do 31% of men with insecure housing.

**TABLE 7.** Relationship status and cohabitation according to sex.

		<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Roofless (n=69)</b>	No partner	75.4% (52)	35.7% (5)	68.7% (57)
	With a partner	24.6% (17)	64.3% (9)	31.3% (26)
	Non-cohabitants	11.6% (8)	14.3% (2)	12.0% (10)
	Cohabitants	13.0% (9)	50.0% (7)	19.3% (16)
<b>Houseless (n=55)</b>	No partner	81.5% (44)	61.1% (11)	76.4% (55)
	With a partner	18.5% (10)	38.9% (7)	23.6% (17)
	Non-cohabitants	11.1% (6)	16.7% (3)	12.5% (9)
	Cohabitants	7.4% (4)	22.2% (4)	11.1% (8)
<b>Insecure housing (n=29)</b>	No partner	69.0% (20)	56.3% (9)	64.4% (29)
	With a partner	31.0% (9)	43.8% (7)	35.6% (16)
	Non-cohabitants	13.8% (4)	6.3% (1)	11.1% (5)
	Cohabitants	17.2% (5)	37.5% (6)	24.4% (11)
<b>Inadequate housing (n=10)</b>	No partner	90.0% (9)	0.0% (0)	81.8% (9)
	With a partner	10.0% (1)	100.0% (1)	18.2% (2)
	Non-cohabitants	10.0%	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)
	Cohabitants	0.0%	100.0% (1)	9.1% (1)
<b>DK/NA (n=2)</b>				

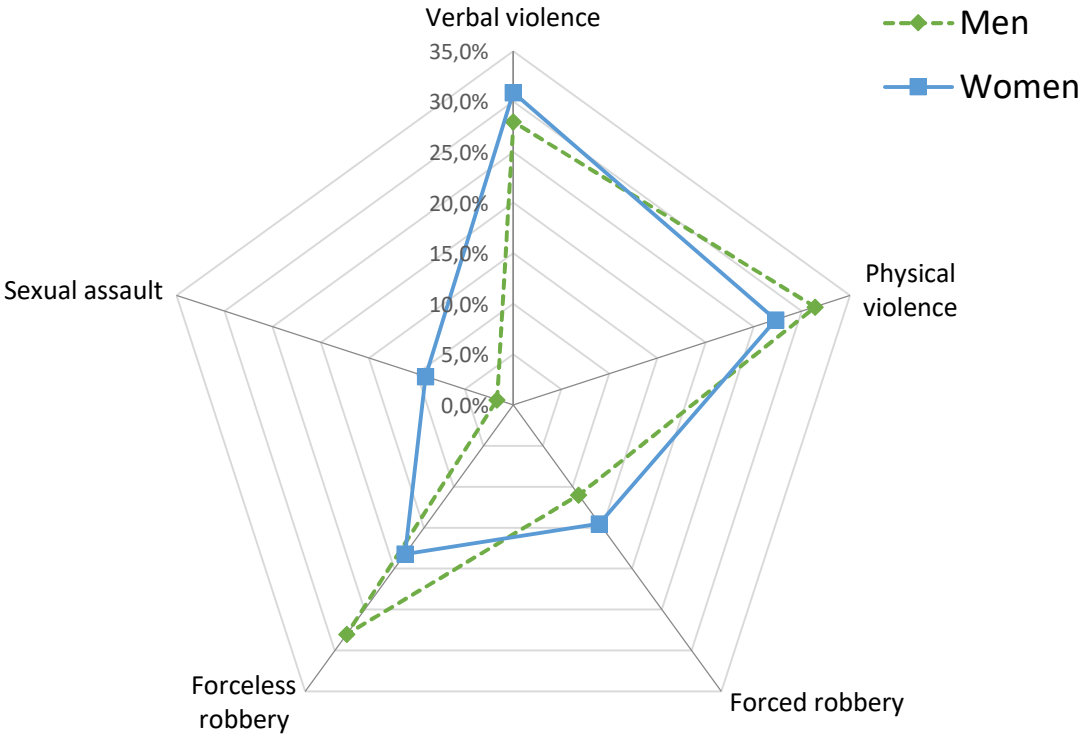
*Source:* Own elaboration.



On the other hand, the percentages of victimization due to aggression are considerable in both men (38.8%, n=64) and women (50%, n=25). Of the total cases of aggression, 48.4% of men have reported it to the police (n=31) and so did 60% of women (n=15).

If we go a step further and investigate the type of aggressions declared (not exclusive) by the homeless people interviewed (118 responses in men and 55 in women) (Figure 2), we find that the most common aggression is verbal, followed by physical, forceless robbery, and forced robbery. It is noteworthy to highlight the difference in the type of sexual assault, which is higher for women (9%) than men (2%).

**Figure 2.** Type of reported assaults to homelessness interviewees by sex.



**Economic situation and unemployment**

The data obtained on the participants’ employment situation confirms that there is a high prevalence of unemployment (92.1%). However, there are no significant differences according to sex as seen in Table 8. However, 40.6% of homeless men and 50% of homeless women in

Córdoba claim to have some source of income such as social benefits (i.e., pension or aid); small casual jobs; regular work; or money received from family or friends.

**TABLE 8.** Employment status and sources of income according to sex.

		<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Employment status</b>	Unemployed	92.7% (153)	90.0% (45)	92.1% (198)
	Working	6.7% (11)	8.0% (4)	7.0% (15)
	DK/NA	0.6% (1)	2.0% (1)	0.9% (2)
<b>Income</b>	No	59.4% (98)	50.0% (25)	57.2% (123)
	Yes	40.6% (67)	50.0% (25)	42.8% (92)
<b>Sources of income</b>	Social benefit (pension, aid)	64.2% (43)	72.0% (18)	66.3% (61)
	Small casual jobs	14.9% (10)	4.0% (1)	12.0% (11)
	Regular work	10.4% (7)	16.0% (4)	12.0% (11)
	Money received from family or friends	7.5% (5)	4.0% (1)	6.5% (6)
	Thrift shops	1.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.1% (1)
	Retirement	1.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.1% (1)
	I ask for it on the street	0.0% (0)	4.0% (1)	1.1% (1)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

Regarding the goods and services on which interviewees mostly spend their money and considering that their answers were derived from multiple choices, food, tobacco, clothing and accommodation stand out. No significant differences were found depending on sex (Table 9).

**TABLE 9.** Goods and services in which participants spend money according to sex.

	<b>Men (n=165)</b>	<b>Women (n=50)</b>	<b>Total (n=215)</b>
<b>Food</b>	26.5% (120)	28.1% (38)	26.9% (158)
<b>Tobacco</b>	19.0% (86)	17.0% (23)	18.5% (109)
<b>Clothing, footwear...</b>	15.7% (71)	11.9% (16)	14.8% (87)
<b>Accommodation</b>	13.5% (61)	11.9% (16)	13.1% (77)
<b>Transport, travel</b>	7.5% (34)	11.1% (15)	8.3% (49)
<b>Drugs</b>	4.6% (21)	8.9% (12)	5.6% (33)
<b>Alcohol</b>	4.0% (18)	3.0% (4)	3.7% (22)
<b>Leisure</b>	3.8% (17)	3.0% (4)	3.6% (21)
<b>Drug use</b>	2.6% (12)	1.5% (2)	2.4% (14)
<b>Gambling</b>	0.9% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.7% (4)
<b>Sex work</b>	0.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.2% (1)
<b>DK/NA/REF</b>	1.8% (8)	3.7% (5)	2.2% (13)
<b>Total responses</b>	100% (255)	100% (135)	100% (578)

Note: Answers are multiple choice.

*Source:* Own elaboration.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in terms of money expenditure, men are more oriented to their own expenses (77%) than women (54%). The latter spend 22% on the expenses of another person and 18% on both concepts compared to 10.9% and 8.5%, respectively for men.

### Use of mobile phone and Internet

Most of the participants (82.8%, n=178) have access to a mobile phone. About 78.6% (n=169) have their own mobile phones (77.6% of men, n=128; 82% of women, n=41) and 4.2% (n=9) have access to someone else's mobile phone (4.2% of men, n=7; 4% of women, n=2). The figure found by Rhoades et al. (2017) shows that 94% of homeless people in Los Angeles, California (n=421) own a mobile phone. These data highlight that the use of the mobile phone has become a daily necessity in the lives of these people and is one of the major Internet access channels for this group. (Rhoades et al., 2017).

Another interesting fact is to know the type of mobile contract they use on their mobile devices. The prepaid card is used 75.4% (n=95) compared to contract card (24.6%, n=31). This is an expense they mostly (82.3%, n=102) assume personally, although some acknowledge that they do so with the help of family and friends (17.7%, n=22), especially women (25.8%, n=8), as compared to men (15.1%, n=14).

These data confirm that the use of the Internet through the mobile device to connect with our environment is increasingly common (79.2%, n=141) and the highest percentage of people interviewed do so through Wi-Fi (34.8%, n=62) or both mobile data and Wi-Fi (34.8%, n=62) (Table 10).

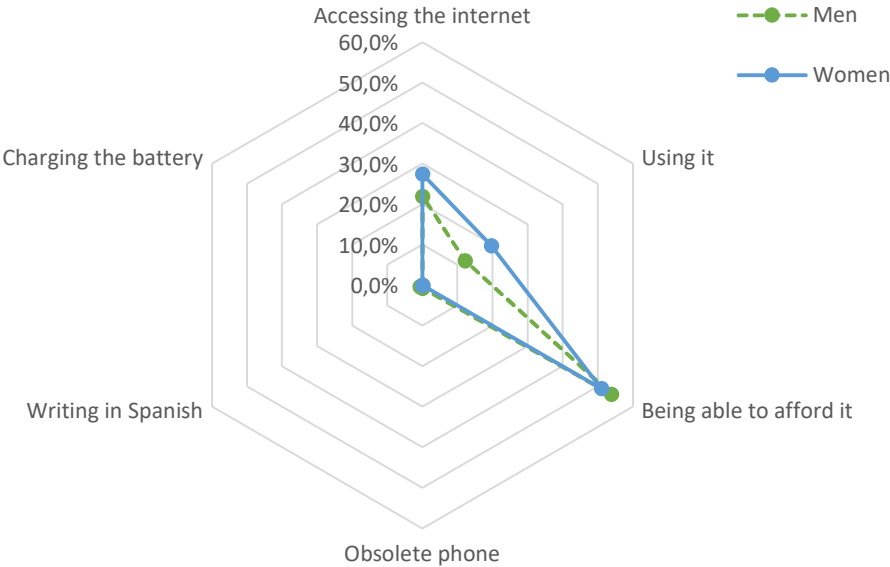
**TABLE 10.** Internet access with a mobile device according to sex.

	Men (n=135)	Women (n=43)	Total (n=178)
<b>Access the internet</b>	81.4% (110)	72.1% (31)	79.2% (141)
Through mobile data	9.6% (13)	9.3% (4)	9.6% (17)
Through Wi-Fi	34.8% (47)	34.9% (15)	34.8% (62)
Both	37.0% (50)	27.9% (12)	34.8% (62)
<b>Do not access the internet</b>	18.5% (25)	27.9% (12)	20.8% (37)

*Source:* Own elaboration.

However, this group of homeless people has some difficulties in solving this connection to the world and accessing information channels that allow them to feel part of society and active members of it. Figure 3 shows answers (not exclusive) on the main difficulties that homeless people declare in using mobile phones depending on sex, such as being able to afford them (around half of men and women) and access or use the Internet. It is noteworthy that they manage to charge their batteries and do not consider it as a difficulty (0%).

**Figure 3.** Main difficulties declared in the use of mobile phones.



Finally, when analyzing results of the frequency of phone use for different actions, as shown in Table 11, it is observed that the options *to listen to music, communicate with people via WhatsApp or other instant messaging, or call by phone* are those that have a higher average score in both men and women, all above three out of five. The actions with the lowest averages (less than two) are *games, watching TV shows broadcast on Internet, offering services, for sexual purposes, selling goods, and offering sexual services*. The core scores lie in actions such as *watching videos on YouTube or similar, taking photos, reading news, looking for work, topics of personal interest, watching social networks, current issues, housing issues, receiving or sending an email, information about social resources and health issues*.

**TABLE 11.** Main uses of the mobile phone and Internet, as well as frequency of actions according to sex.

	Men (n=165)			Women (n=50)			Total (n=215)		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
<b>Listen to music</b>	134	3.57	1.596	43	3.44	1.695	177	3.54	1.617
<b>Communicate with people via WhatsApp or other instant messaging</b>	135	3.3	1.684	44	3.36	1.686	179	3.31	1.680
<b>Phone calls</b>	134	3.33	1.418	44	3.23	1.445	178	3.30	1.421
<b>Watch videos on YouTube or similar</b>	135	2.96	1.652	44	2.86	1.773	179	2.93	1.678
<b>Take photos</b>	135	2.83	1.669	43	2.91	1.743	178	2.85	1.682
<b>Read news</b>	135	2.95	1.668	44	2.52	1.663	179	2.84	1.672
<b>Search for a job</b>	135	2.84	1.749	44	2.75	1.727	179	2.82	1.739
<b>Topics of personal interest</b>	135	2.84	1.672	44	2.25	1.512	179	2.69	1.649
<b>Look up social media</b>	135	2.51	1.648	44	2.43	1.605	179	2.49	1.633
<b>Current issues</b>	135	2.57	1.717	44	2.14	1.456	179	2.46	1.663
<b>Housing issues</b>	98	2.19	1.571	29	2.72	1.623	127	2.31	1.592
<b>Receive or send an email</b>	134	2.19	1.600	44	2.23	1.597	178	2.20	1.595
<b>Information about social resources</b>	98	2.09	1.520	27	2.30	1.728	125	2.14	1.562
<b>Health Issues</b>	97	1.87	1.366	29	2.72	1.811	126	2.06	1.517
<b>Games</b>	135	1.92	1.388	44	1.91	1.507	179	1.92	1.414
<b>Watch TV shows broadcast on the internet</b>	134	1.74	1.387	44	2.02	1.649	178	1.81	1.457
<b>Offer services</b>	133	1.47	1.178	43	1.49	1.099	176	1.47	1.156
<b>For sexual purposes</b>	134	1.28	0.871	44	1.05	0.211	178	1.22	0.768
<b>Sell goods</b>	134	1.16	0.651	44	1.09	0.473	178	1.15	0.612
<b>Offer sexual services</b>	133	1.04	0.312	44	1.00	0.000	177	1.03	0.270

Note: The scale range ranges from 1-5.

Source: Own elaboration.

Likewise, exploring in depth the use of mobile devices and the Internet by homeless people has allowed us to design actions aimed at improving the well-being and quality of life of people in homeless situations, allowing access to information, greater social participation, and expression of their own identity<sup>1 2</sup>. Obviously, this is not the solution to homelessness, but, while other measures are being implemented, it is necessary to address the needs of people who are already

<sup>1</sup> Project Triple-marginalized: women, homeless and “disconnected”. New intervention strategies in Casa Libertad (Prolibertad). V Galileo Plan for Innovation and Transfer of the University of Córdoba (2019). Responsible researcher: Carmen Cruz. Participating researchers: Amalia Reina, Eduardo García and Belén Donoso

<sup>2</sup> UCOHabita Project: development and consolidation of the web cordobasinhogar.es, a tool to facilitate access to information and social participation for the homeless. VII Galileo Plan for Innovation and Transfer of the University of Córdoba (2021). Responsible researcher: Amalia Reina. Participating researchers: Carmen Cruz, Eduardo García and Belén Donoso

immersed in this situation and implement intervention strategies that are focused on reducing the digital divide and barriers of access to the information that we have found.

## CONCLUSIONS

At a descriptive level, and as a conclusion, Table 12 shows the main characteristics of homeless people attending Córdoba's attention network according to the different variables of interest analyzed in this study.

**TABLE 12.** Main characteristics of homeless people in Córdoba according to sex.

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>MEAN AGE</b>	44.82 years (SD=12.94)	43.48 years (SD = 12.76)
<b>STUDY LEVEL</b>	21.3% can only read and write 45.7% primary education 22% secondary education 6.7% university level	24% can only read and write 52% primary education 18% secondary education 6% university level
<b>NATIONALITY</b>	66.7% Spanish nationality 56.4% over 10 years in Spain 81.8% with regularized legal status	88% Spanish nationality 66.7% over 10 years in Spain 100% with regularized legal status
<b>TYPES OF CURRENT HOMELESSNESS. ETHOS TYPOLOGY</b>	41.8% roofless 33.3% houseless 17.6% insecure housing 6.1% inadequate housing	28% roofless 36% houseless 32% insecure housing 2% inadequate housing
<b>HOMELESS SPAN UNTIL NOW</b>	70.9% < 2 years homeless 29.1% > 2 years (18.8% > 5 years)	60% < 2 years homeless 40% > 2 years (18% > 5 years)
<b>MOTIVES TO BE HOMELESS</b>	25.1% could not afford their home 18.4% issues with the family 11.8% being an expat and not owning a house 9.8% to be left without family	26.9% left home due to issues with family 20.9% could not afford my previous home 17.9% had to flee my house for fear that something would happen to me 10.9% I was left without family
<b>HEALTH</b>	M= 3.58 (SD=1.00) (range 1-5) declared health status 33.9% serious or major illness diagnosed by a professional Daily alcohol consumption (17.6%); consumption in the last month of: joints (29.1%); cocaine (10.3%); heroin (7.9%)	M= 3.18 (SD=1.04) (range 1-5) declared health status 52% serious or major illness diagnosed by a professional Daily alcohol consumption (14%); consumption in the last month of: joints (28%); cocaine (6%); heroin (2%)
<b>RECOGNIZED DISABILITY</b>	27.3% recognized disability >33% (of which 15.2% > 65%)	40% recognized disability >33% (of which 24% > 65%)
<b>MATERNITY/PATERNITY</b>	50.3% acknowledge paternity 57.8% offspring >18 years old 92.8% non-coexistence	72% acknowledge maternity 52% offspring < 18 years old 88.9% non-coexistence
<b>RELATIONSHIP STATUS</b>	24.6% roofless with partner (13% live together) 18.5% houseless with a partner (7.4% live together)	64.3% roofless with partner (50% live together) 38.9 houseless with partner (22.2% live together)
<b>VICTIMIZATION BY AGGRESSION</b>	38.8% victims of aggression 48.4% reported to the police	50% victims of aggression 60% reported to the police
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT</b>	92.7% unemployed	90% unemployed
<b>INCOME</b>	40.6% with income	50% with income 72% social benefits (pension or allowance)

	64,2 % social benefits (pension or allowance) 14.9% small casual jobs 10.4% regular work 7.5% money received from family or friends.	4% small casual jobs 16% regular work 4% money received from family or friends.
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>	77% expenditure in their own expenses 10.9% on someone else's expenses 8.5% both	54% expenditure in their own expenses 22% on someone else's expenses 18% both
<b>MOBILE PHONE</b>	77.6% own a personal mobile phone	82% own a personal mobile phone
<b>INTERNET CONNECTION</b>	81.4% access the internet 34.8% Wi-Fi internet connection 37% combined Wi-Fi and data connection 9.6% mobile data connection	72.1% access the internet 34.9% Wi-Fi internet connection 27.9% combined Wi-Fi and data connection 9.3% mobile data connection

*Source:* Own elaboration.

It should be noted, that, among other aspects, although having very similar characteristics of mean age (44 years) and level of education (mostly basic), there are striking differences between men and women on the street situation. The lower presence of women on public roads is the result of their avoiding sleeping in the open or in places where they may be exposed to violent situations. They also take advantage of the strong social ties that they maintain with the family and friendships due to the gender roles that have historically been assigned to them, or looking for other options (i.e., internal domestic service, sex work ), although very often this place them at risk of exploitation and precariousness that also constitute forms of homelessness. In relation to the above, more women report to be mothers and two-thirds of homeless women have a partner (compared to only a quarter of men) which is probably an attempt, among other things, to seek protection in such extreme conditions. It should be kept in mind that half of the women and more than a third of the men out of all the people participating in this study have been victims of some type of aggression, although many of them have not reported it. Most people have been homeless for less than two years, although there is an alarming number of them who have been homeless for more than five years. This is a fact that, in our opinion, shows a significant failure of the system in its ability to respond to the homelessness issue. The most frequent reasons include not being able to pay for the house and problems with the family.

In the case of women, there is a painful and worrying third reason that is often related to having to flee their own house for fear that something would happen to them.

Regarding health, a significant number of homeless people (more than half of women) claim to have a serious illness diagnosed by a professional and, contrary to the stereotypes, there are very few (around 15%) who consume alcohol daily.

This knowledge of the different trajectories and characteristics of homeless people and, more specifically, the group of women is already being considered in the design of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan for the Eradication of Homelessness of the city of Córdoba.

### **Acknowledgments**

This work has been carried out following the guidelines of a specific collaboration agreement between the University of Córdoba and the City Council of Córdoba from 2019 to 2022 for the development of the project “Diagnosis of homelessness in the city of Córdoba, gender perspective and repercussions on life satisfaction, psychological and social well-being.”

This study has been possible thanks to the collaboration of the social entities of the city of Córdoba that make up the Cohabita Network (Caritas, Spanish Red Cross, Prolibertas Foundation, Association of Encounter and Shelter for the Drug Addict (ADEAT), Hogar Sí and Municipal Reception House) and the technical staff of the City Council of Córdoba. We would also like to thank all the people who agreed to be interviewed – we are grateful to you for sharing your situations and experiences with us.

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