



IRSTI 81.93.25
Research article

<https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-1702-2026-154-1-171-182>

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF URBAN VAGRANCY: THE CASE OF ASTANA

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Abstract. This article examines vagrancy as one of the pressing social issues of our time, affecting both domestic and global communities, and considers the sociological aspects of vagrancy in urban environments. In the context of rapid urbanization and city growth, such as in Astana, the problem of vagrancy assumes a pronounced socio-political character.

The research aims to study the sociological aspects of vagrancy in urban environments using Astana as an example, as well as to identify the causes and factors contributing to marginalization and homelessness and analyze the social consequences of this phenomenon.

Vagrancy as a social phenomenon is examined through the lens of structural functionalism, conflict theory, and psychological theories. It is also noted that vagrancy in the urban environment increases social tension and causes damage to urban infrastructure.

Based on analysis of data collected through surveys with marginalized groups, it was established that key factors contributing to vagrancy include economic crises, social instability, family conflicts, mental disorders, and substance dependency. It was identified that most respondents are of working age but encounter obstacles, including a lack of documentation, health problems, and low qualifications.

Keywords: Vagrancy, homelessness, individuals of no fixed address, marginalization, migration, urbanization, social instability, structural functionalism, economic strain.

Received: 12.10.2025; Revised: 20.03.2026; Approved: 27.03.2026; Available online: 31.03.2026

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Introduction

Vagrancy represents an acute social crisis in both Kazakhstan and globally. According to 2024 data, Kazakhstan experienced a 36% surge in homelessness compared to the previous year. Experts link this increase to deteriorating economic and social conditions among citizens. On a worldwide scale, 2024 statistics reveal that approximately 150 million people lacked permanent shelter, while 1.6 billion resided in inadequate housing conditions. Recent years have witnessed rising homelessness across several nations. The United States, for instance, recorded over 650,000 homeless individuals in 2022 – an unprecedented figure for the country. European nations similarly report increasing homelessness rates, particularly amid inflation pressures and the ongoing housing crisis.

Relevance of the topic

Vagrancy as a social phenomenon represents a pressing problem that confirms the existence of significant socio-economic and cultural inequalities in the urban environment. This phenomenon is connected to key problems of global instability, social justice, inequality, marginalization and violation of basic rights and dignity of the individual. Under conditions of growing urbanization and rapid growth of cities such as Astana, the problem of vagrancy has a socio-political character, since it affects the effectiveness of society's functioning and its ability to ensure equal opportunities for all residents, including vulnerable groups.

In Kazakhstan, the number of people without a fixed place of residence grows annually. Specialists say that such statistics are connected to population growth. For example, in the capital alone, compared to last year, the number of homeless people increased by 7%. Thus, since the beginning of 2024, more than 500 people have been admitted to the capital's "Demeu" Resocialization Center.

The complexity of the vagrancy problem is conditioned by its multifactorial nature, including socio-economic, psychological, legal and cultural aspects. Among the main causes of vagrancy are poverty, unemployment, migration, family crises, dependency on psychoactive substances, as well as insufficient state support and social adaptation programs.

The aim of the study is a sociological analysis of vagrancy in the urban environment using the city of Astana as an example.

Research objectives:

1. Study theoretical approaches to the analysis of vagrancy
2. Identify the causes and factors contributing to the formation of vagrancy and their impact on the urban environment.

The object of the study is vagrancy as a social phenomenon in the urban environment. The subject of the study is the sociological aspects of vagrancy: the causes and factors contributing to the emergence and spread of this phenomenon.

Overview of references

The problem of homeless people remains relevant for modern cities, particularly for Astana. Despite its socio-economic nature, explaining this phenomenon requires the use of classical sociological and psychological concepts. One such concept is Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie, which reveals the mechanisms of social disintegration and normative vacuum. Durkheim defined anomie as a state of society in which old norms regulating individual behaviour are destroyed and erased. Traditional values cease to perform their integrating function, and new norms have

not yet been formed, leading to an increase in deviance, social isolation and alienation (Merton, R., 1996). L. Cohen's theory of social disorganisation explains deviance through the structural characteristics of communities, such as the breakdown of social ties, the weakening of family and neighbourhood communities, the decline in the effectiveness of formal and informal control, and high levels of social mobility and population heterogeneity. E. Starlend's theory of cultural conflict allows us to view the problem of homelessness as the result of a clash between different values and cultures that are in conflict with each other. Homelessness here appears not only as social exclusion, but also as a special form of cultural adaptation. I. Goffman and G. Becker view vagrancy not only as a result of social and economic problems, but also as a process that is supported by society through a system of labels and stigmas. Stigmatisation makes homeless people 'outsiders,' which prevents their return to social institutions, thus perpetuating a vicious circle of marginalisation (Anikina, V.A., 2021, pp. 85–93). D. Walsh's phenomenological approach allows us to go beyond structural-functional explanations of this problem and see it as a unique experience of the subject, filled with individual meanings (Yakovleva, E.A., 2022, pp. 90–101).

Contemporary sociologists studying vagrancy and marginalization investigate these issues in the context of social changes, urbanization and inequality. Keith Hart, Jean-Louis Laville, and Antonio David Cattani (Hart, K., Laville, J-L., Cattani, A.D., 2010) examine the problem of marginalization, including vagrancy, in the context of the modern urbanistic economy in their work "The Human Economy: A Citizen's Guide." In his works "Liquid Modernity" and "Wasted Lives," Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman, Z., 2004) describes "floating" groups of people whom the system cannot retain and integrate. Cultural and social aspects of homelessness are studied by B.B. D. Haynes (Haynes, B.D., 2001) in his works on marginal and "peripheral" population layers in cities; his work describes the social and cultural integration of vagrants.

In the studies of Fitzpatrick et al., the significance of housing instability and institutional barriers is emphasized as key factors contributing to the formation of chronic homelessness in urban communities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). Similar conclusions are presented in the works of Saunders (2018), which note that the combination of economic insecurity, precarious employment, and the weakening of social ties significantly increases the risk of social marginalization among vulnerable population groups.

In European research, homelessness is conceptualized as a multi-level process of social exclusion encompassing structural, institutional, and cultural determinants (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010–2020). Particular attention is paid to the role of comprehensive social rehabilitation programs and intersectoral cooperation in the processes of resocialization of homeless individuals (Clapham, 2019).

In Kazakhstani sociological science, the problem of vagrancy remains understudied. However, some authors undertake attempts to investigate this phenomenon through the prism of moral values, social marginalization and deviant behavior. Thus, author A.A. Isakhanova studies the moral values of persons leading a vagrant lifestyle in the city of Astana in her scientific article (Isakhanova, A.A., 2017). Authors G. Abdikerova and K. Rakhimbekova examine the socio-economic and cultural aspects of homelessness, analysis of the work of adaptation and rehabilitation centers, issues of the legal status of homeless people (Abdikerova, G., Rakhimbekova, K., 2023, 107, pp. 102-106). Research by sociologist Sh.E. Dzhamanbalayeva in the field of deviant behavior, digital inequality, and subjective well-being allows considering her

approach as fundamentally resourceful for future works on the problem of vagrancy (*Dunaev, V., Dzhamanbalayeva, Sh.E., Kurganskaya, V., 2024, pp. 62–76*).

The scientific novelty of the study lies in a comprehensive sociological analysis of vagrancy as a form of social exclusion within the urban environment, using the city of Astana as a case study. In contrast to predominantly descriptive research, this work integrates an empirical assessment of the socio-demographic characteristics of homeless individuals with a theoretical interpretation of the mechanisms of marginalization.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on structural-functional and socio-ecological approaches to the analysis of social deviance and forms of social maladaptation. Within the structural-functional paradigm, vagrancy is viewed as a consequence of the dysfunction of key social institutions, including the family, the labor market, and the social protection system. The socio-ecological approach makes it possible to analyze the combined influence of macro- and micro-level factors, including economic instability, family conflicts, substance dependence, and limited access to social services.

Research materials and methods

The research materials included both primary and secondary data sources.

To achieve the set goal, a research question was formulated aimed at identifying the sociological factors contributing to the emergence and spread of vagrancy in Astana, as well as analysing its social consequences.

Hypothesis: it is believed that vagrancy is formed under the influence of a combination of interrelated factors such as economic instability, insufficient effectiveness of social institutions, social alienation and social isolation. These factors contribute to the marginalisation of homeless people and hinder their adaptation, which in turn leads to an increase in the city's social problems.

In the course of the sociological analysis of vagrancy in the urban environment, primary empirical data were utilized, including the results of the author's own sociological study, as well as secondary sources containing statistical data relevant to the issue under consideration.

To study the state of vagrancy in Astana, we analysed secondary data indicators most frequently used in international and national assessments. For convenience, they were combined into the following major blocks: socio-economic and socio-demographic indicators.

One of the general economic indicators of the population's quality of life is the gross regional product per capita (Table 1).

Table 1. Dynamics of key indicators of socio-economic development in Astana

Indicators	2020	2021	2022	2023
Consumer price index (at the end of the period, as a percentage of December of the previous year)	107.7	108.8	123.0	109.1
Gross regional product, million tenge	7975283.1	8923711.8	10672480.5	12874957.1
Index of physical volume of gross regional product as a percentage of the previous year	101.0	105.4	105.5	105.4
Gross regional product per capita, thousand tenge	6,873.6	7,361.9	8,053.9	9,247.0

Notes. Compiled from the source <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/region/astana/> National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

As can be seen, the GRP per capita in Astana is constantly increasing. During the period under review, this indicator increased from 6,873,600 tenge in 2020 to 9,247,000 tenge in 2023. As of 1 January 2025, the population of Astana was 1,430,100 people (Table 2).

Table 2. Population of Astana for 2020-2024

Districts	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Astana	1,136,156	1,184,411	1,295,711	1,354,559	1,430,105
Almaty district	296,945	303,840	352,750	366,785	384,446
Yesil district	263,817	298,333	220,683	236,086	270,056
Saryarka district	337,961	342,136	343,165	345,226	350,520
Baikonyr district	237,433	240,102	236,030	233,282	231,248
Nura district			143,083	173,180	193,835

Note. Compiled from the source <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/region/astana/> National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The data presented in Table 2 shows that by 2024, the population of Astana had increased by 293,949 people, or 125.9%. An equally important indicator in assessing the current state of vagrancy in the region is the analysis of population migration (Table 3).

Table 3. Net migration balance of the population of Astana

Districts	2021	2022	2023	2024
Astana	24,865	30,906	33,837	51,539
Almaty district	-1,715	3,582	5,328	10,445
Yesil district	28,477	32,928	37,342	34,657
Saryarka district	-1,333	-1,589	-3,166	1,013
Baikonyr district	-564	-4,015	-5,667	5,424

Notes. Compiled from the source <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/region/astana/> National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan

From population migration data, it should be noted that in 2024, total migration to Astana amounted to 51,539 people, that is, compared to the 2021 indicator, it increased by 26,674 people or more than twofold.

In 2023, 1,267 people were admitted to the "Demeu" resocialization center of the Astana city akimat, and in 2024, 1,186 people. These data reflect only the number of persons who sought help at the "Demeu" Resocialization Center and do not account for those who are not registered or did not seek help at the center. The actual number of marginals in the city may be higher.

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy and included 50 respondents who were recipients of services at the Resocialization Center "Demeu" in Astana. The selection criteria were the respondents' actual status as persons without a fixed place of residence and their voluntary consent to participate in the research. The gender structure of the sample reflects the specific characteristics of the Center's clientele and corresponds to the general trend of male predominance among the homeless population.

Primary data were collected through a standardized questionnaire survey. The questionnaire comprised several thematic blocks aimed at identifying socio-demographic characteristics,

reasons for housing loss, duration of homelessness, current challenges, and the needs of the respondents. Closed and semi-closed questions with multiple-choice options were used.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical methods (calculation of percentage distributions and comparative analysis of indicators). The interpretation of the results was carried out within the framework of structural-functional, conflict, and institutional approaches, which made it possible to identify the interrelationship between individual life circumstances and the structural factors of the urban environment.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in April 2025 and received approval from the "Demeu" Resocialization Center of the Astana city akimat. All research participants gave informed consent to participate, while measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of their data.

Results and discussion

The study revealed the socio-demographic profile of respondents (Figure 1).

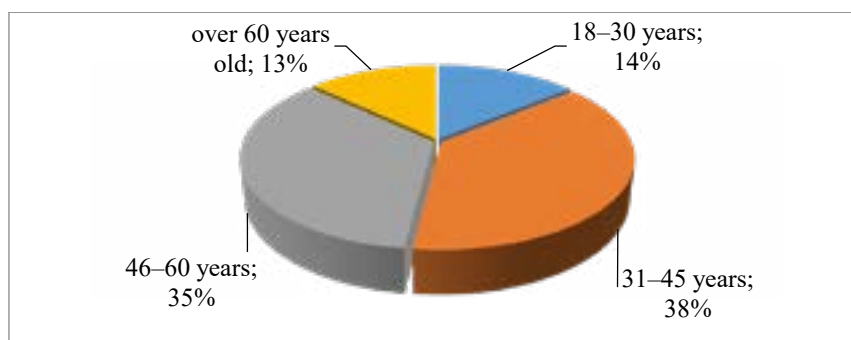


Figure 1 - Age structure

The main share of respondents consists of those aged 31-45 years (38%) and 46-60 years (35%).

Next, the composition of survey participants by gender was determined.

Fifty people participated in the survey, of which 82% were men and 18% were women. This structure indicates that men are more inclined toward vagrancy. Within the framework of structural-functional analysis, the predominance of male vagrants is explained by the fact that men are less protected by family and social institutions in case of loss of their status than women, who retain kinship and systemic connections.

From the analysis of the marital status of survey participants, it follows that 25 people are single, 15 people are divorced, 6 people are widowed, and only 4 people are married (Figure 2).

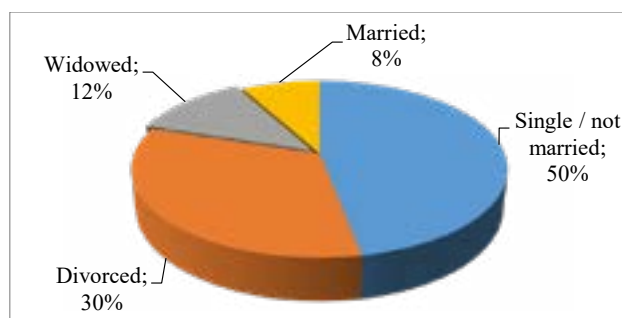


Figure 2 - Analysis of family status

Marital status is a key risk factor for vagrancy. Sociological analysis allows asserting that restoration or support of family connections can play an important role in the prevention and rehabilitation of persons without a fixed place of residence.

Persons living in the Resocialization Center of Astana city have basic general education - 52% (26 respondents), secondary education - 24% (12 respondents), secondary specialized education - 14% (7 respondents), higher education - 10% (5 respondents). The majority of persons leading a vagrant lifestyle are characterized by a low level of education, mainly incomplete secondary or general education. This indicator reflects weak socialization, a deficit of culture and social capital, and serves as one of the significant factors determining vulnerability to social marginalization.

Table 4 designates the main causes of vagrancy.

Table 4. What is the main cause of vagrancy? (Respondents could indicate more than one option)

Causes	Proportion, %	Number of persons
Loss of employment and lack of stable income	54 %	27
Family conflicts (divorce, quarrels, loss of support)	38 %	19
Debt obligations, loans	24 %	12
Alcohol or drug addiction	42 %	21
Mental illness	23 %	11
Release from prison	18 %	9
Other (e.g., fraud, loss of documents)	10 %	5

Analysis of the research showed that the main causes of vagrancy are job loss (54%), family conflicts (38%), and alcohol/drug dependency (42%). Some respondents encountered mental illnesses (23%) and adaptation difficulties after release from places of detention (18%).

This phenomenon is conditioned by a combination of a number of factors, such as socio-economic disadvantage, destruction of family connections, education deficit, mental disorders, as well as weakness of social institutions.

Further, the duration of respondents' stay in a homeless status was determined - from several months to more than three years (Figure 3). Analysis of the survey shows that for a significant part of respondents, vagrancy becomes not a temporary crisis, but a stable way of life.

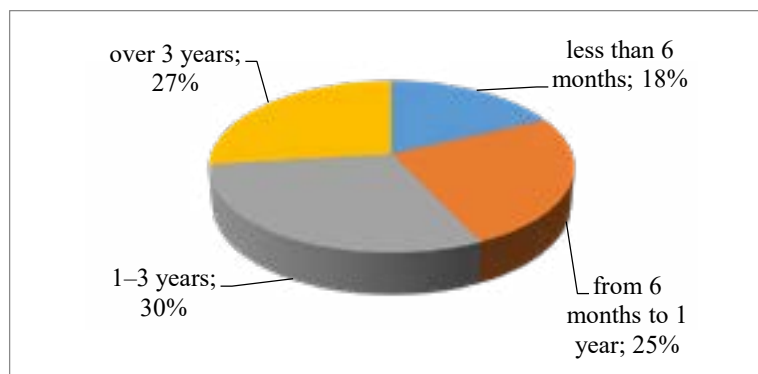


Figure 3 - How long have you been in a homeless status?

The majority of surveyed respondents (37 respondents) indicated the absence of support from relatives and close ones, which testifies to the weak inclusion of these persons in family and kinship connections. Further, the difficulties faced by respondents were studied (Table 5) and the help they need (Table 6).

Table 5. What main difficulties do you experience at present? (Respondents could indicate more than one option)

Difficulties	Proportion, %	Number of persons
Lack of food and clothing	60	30
Unemployment	52	26
Health problems	48	14
Lack of documents	38	19
Social isolation	30	15

The main difficulties faced by respondents are the absence of work, health problems and shortage of food.

Absence of basic conditions for life is one of the most widespread problems among homeless people. This includes a shortage of food and clothing. The condition of homeless people is generally unsatisfactory due to the absence of basic needs and medical assistance, which also affects their mental health. Unemployment is considered one of the key causes of homelessness, which is also connected with the low level of education of homeless people.

When asked "What help is most necessary for you now?" the following answers were given (Figure 6)

Table 6. What help is most necessary for you now? (Respondents could indicate more than one option)

Help	Proportion, %	Number of persons
Permanent accommodation/hostel	52	26
Employment	28	14
Medical assistance	10	5
Document retrieval	8	4
Social support (psychological help, rehabilitation)	2	1

Analysis of the homeless respondents' answers showed that they need to satisfy their primary needs before their secondary needs. Sociological interpretation points to the complex nature of homelessness: it includes not only material, but also institutional and socio-psychological aspects. These responses confirm the relevance of the concept of social exclusion, according to which homeless people are deprived of access to key resources and institutions of society.

When asked, "If you had the opportunity to find employment, would you agree to work?", the following responses were given:

Yes, I am ready to start working immediately - 61%;

Yes, but only after undergoing medical treatment/rehabilitation - 18%;

No, I don't feel strong enough - 21%.

At the same time, 61% of respondents want to find employment, but noted the need for professional retraining and social support from the state in order to reintegrate into society.

Consequently, the results of the research showed that the key factors contributing to the spread of vagrancy in Astana are economic difficulties, job loss, family conflicts, and debt obligations. The majority of respondents belong to the working age from 31 to 60 years; however, their possibilities for return to social life are limited due to loss of documents, health problems and insufficient level of professional preparation.

The main needs of respondents are the availability of housing and the possibility of employment. Nevertheless, almost half of the respondents did not undertake active actions to improve their social position, which may indicate a low level of motivation, limited trust in social institutions or insufficient awareness about available support measures.

Conclusion

The conducted study made it possible to carry out a comprehensive sociological analysis of vagrancy as a form of social exclusion within the urban environment of Astana.

It was established that the formation of vagrancy is conditioned by the interaction of economic, institutional, and socio-psychological factors. Among the key determinants are employment instability, family disintegration, substance dependence, mental disorders, debt obligations, and limited access to social support resources.

The theoretical interpretation of the research findings was based on structural-functional and socio-ecological approaches, which made it possible to consider vagrancy not only as an individual social problem but also as an indicator of structural dysfunctions within contemporary urbanized society. The empirical data obtained confirms the complex nature of social marginalization and demonstrates the interconnection between economic, demographic, and institutional factors of social vulnerability.

The practical significance of the study lies in the potential application of its findings in the development of social rehabilitation programs, homelessness prevention strategies, and the improvement of institutional support mechanisms for vulnerable population groups.

Author Contributions

A. K. Uasheva – Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Validation, Formal Approval of Manuscript.

D. M. Sagyn – Data Curation, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Interpretation of Results.

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ҚАЛАЛЫҚ ОРТАДАҒЫ ҚАҢҒЫБАСТЫҚТЫҢ ӘЛЕУМЕТТАНУЛЫҚ АСПЕКТІЛЕРІ: АСТАНА ҚАЛАСЫНЫҢ МЫСАЛЫНДА

Андатпа. Мақалада қаңғыбастық отандық және әлемдік қоғамдастыққа әсер ететін қазіргі заманның өзекті әлеуметтік мәселелерінің бірі ретінде зерттеледі, қалалық ортада қаңғыбастықтың социологиялық аспектілері қарастырылады. Астана қаласы сияқты қарқынды урбанизациясы мен өсуі жағдайында қаңғыбастық проблемасы айқын әлеуметтік-саяси сипатқа ие болады.

Зерттеу Астана қаласының мысалында қалалық ортада қаңғыбастықтың әлеуметтанулық аспектілерін зерттеуге, сондай-ақ маргиналдануға және баспанасыздыққа ықпал ететін себептер мен факторларды анықтауға, осы құбылыстың әлеуметтік салдарын талдауға бағытталған.

Қаңғыбастық әлеуметтік құбылыс ретінде құрылымдық функционализмнің, конфликтологиялық көзқарастың, психологиялық теориялардың объективі арқылы қарастырылады. Сондай-ақ, қаңғыбастық әлеуметтік шиеленісті күшейтеді, қылмыстың өсуіне ықпал етеді және қалалық инфрақұрылымға зиян келтіреді.

Маргиналды топтармен сауалнама барысында жиналған деректерді талдау негізінде қаңғыбастыққа ықпал ететін негізгі факторлар экономикалық дағдарыстар, әлеуметтік тұрақсыздық, отбасылық қақтығыстар, психикалық бұзылулар және заттарға тәуелділік болып табылады. Респонденттердің көпшілігі еңбекке қабілетті жаста, құжаттардың жоқтығы, денсаулығына байланысты проблемалар және біліктілігі төмен кедергілерге тап болатыны анықталды.

Негізгі ұғымдар: қаңғыбастық, баспанасыздық, тұрақты мекенжайы жоқ адамдар, маргиналдану, көші-қон, урбандалу, әлеуметтік тұрақсыздық, құрылымдық функционализм, экономикалық шиеленіс.

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СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ БРОДЯЖНИЧЕСТВА В ГОРОДСКОЙ СРЕДЕ: НА ПРИМЕРЕ ГОРОДА АСТАНА

Аннотация. В данной статье бродяжничество изучается как одна из актуальных социальных проблем современности, затрагивающая отечественное и мировое сообщество. Рассматриваются социологические аспекты бродяжничества в городской среде. В условиях стремительной урбанизации и быстрого роста городов, таких как Астана, проблема бродяжничества приобретает выраженный социально-политический характер.

Исследование направлено на изучение социологических аспектов бродяжничества в городской среде на примере города Астана, а также на выявление причин и факторов, способствующих маргинализации и бездомности и анализ социальных последствий данного явления.

Бродяжничество как социальное явление рассматривается через призму структурного функционализма, конфликтологического подхода, психологических теорий. Также, отмечается, что бродяжничество усиливает социальное напряжение, способствует росту преступности и наносит ущерб городской инфраструктуре.

На основе анализа данных, собранных в ходе анкетирования среди маргинализированных групп, установлено, что ключевыми факторами, способствующими бродяжничеству, являются экономические кризисы, социальная нестабильность, семейные конфликты, психические расстройства и зависимость от психоактивных веществ. Обозначено, что большинство респондентов находятся в трудоспособном возрасте, встречаются с препятствиями в виде отсутствия документов, проблем со здоровьем и низкой квалификацией.

Ключевые слова: бродяжничество, бездомность, лица без определенного места жительства, маргинализация, миграция, урбанизация, социальная нестабильность, структурный функционализм, экономическое напряжение.

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Сагын Д.М. – әлеуметтік жұмыс мамандығы бойынша магистрант, Л. Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан.

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Сагын Д. М. – магистрант образовательной программы по социальной работе, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л. Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан.



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