

## Streetworking – The Stage of Environment Study. Theoretical-Practical Study<sup>1</sup>

Streetworking – etap badania środowiska. Studium teoretyczno-praktyczne

DOI 10.25951/12964

### Introduction

Contemporary societies face many challenges, including issues related to poverty, homelessness, addictions, or social marginalization. Faced with these difficulties, streetworking becomes an essential tool – a form of social work that directly engages in the field, reaching out to people in the most difficult life situations (Pierson 2010, p. 5; Fook 2002, p. 12; Adams et al. 2009, p. 30; Kamiński 2015, p. 45; Kowalski 2018, p. 32). The aim of this article is to present the role of environmental study in the context of streetworking and discuss both its theoretical and practical aspects. This article aims to introduce the reader to the essence of environmental study as a key tool in streetworker's work and to show the benefits that can arise from its application in practice. Considering the importance of environmental study in streetworking, we focus on two main aspects: theoretical study, which includes social, economic, cultural, and historical analysis of the studied area, and practical study, which is based on direct contact with the local community and data collection in the field (Karabanow 2004, p. 217; Fook 2002, p. 18; Kamiński 2015, p. 47). By understanding the environmental context in which streetworkers operate and analyzing its impact on residents' lives, interventions and actions can be better tailored to the real needs of the community and individuals in difficult life situations (Pierson 2010, p. 10; Adams et al. 2009, p. 35; Kowalski 2018, p. 34).

<sup>1</sup> The article was created as part of the project: "Streetworking as an Innovative Method of Impacting the Environment by „Street Educators,”" financed by state budget funds allocated by the Minister of Education and Science under the "Student Research Clubs Create Innovations" Program (artykuł powstał w ramach projektu: „Streetworking” jako innowacyjna metoda oddziaływania „pedagogów ulicznych” na otoczenie, finansowanego ze środków budżetu państwa, przyznanych przez Ministra Edukacji i Nauki w ramach Programu „Studenckie koła naukowe tworzą innowacje”).

## Characteristic of Action Research

Action research is a research method that focuses on solving specific practical problems through an iterative cycle of action-reflection-action. It is characterized by active involvement of researchers in practice and close collaboration with research participants, which enables the generation of practical knowledge, innovative solutions, and real changes in the environment (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 25; Stringer 2013, p. 20). Action research is action-oriented, focusing on practical action to solve specific problems in a real environment. Researchers take active actions in the field to implement changes and monitor their effects. The research proceeds in iterative cycles, where successive stages of action, reflection, planning, and implementation of changes are repeated to achieve the intended research goals (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 28; Kamiński 2015, p. 52). Furthermore, action research engages research participants in the decision-making process, action planning, and evaluation of results. This collaboration is based on a partnership approach that considers the perspectives and experiences of all involved parties (Stringer 2013, p. 25). A significant element of action research is reflection on one's own actions and critical analysis of results. Researchers systematically evaluate the effectiveness of their actions, identify barriers and opportunities, and adjust strategies accordingly (Burns 2006, p. 421; Pierson 2010, p. 12). The aim of action research is to generate practical knowledge that can be used to solve real problems in practice. Researchers strive to create applicable solutions that can benefit all involved parties (Karabanow 2004, p. 219). Additionally, action research often leads to systemic or organizational changes aimed at improving the functioning of a given environment or organization. Researchers aim to implement lasting and sustainable changes that contribute to community development (Fook 2002, p. 22; Kowalski 2018, p. 56).

Action research can be applied in various fields such as education, health-care, social work, or management, where there is a need to solve specific practical problems and implement positive changes (Stringer 2013, p. 30; Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 35). Conducting action research is important for several reasons: it focuses on solving real practical problems that occur in a specific community, organization, or environment, enabling the implementation of specific changes that have a real impact on people's lives (Pierson 2010, p. 15). Through the iterative process of action, reflection, and strategy adjustment, researchers can gradually improve action methods, leading to increased effectiveness. Thus, action research enables the evaluation of action effectiveness and

identification of best practices (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 25). It engages research participants in the decision-making process, action planning, and result evaluation, based on a partnership approach that considers the perspectives and experiences of all involved parties (Stringer 2013, p. 40; Adams et al. 2009, p. 42). Action research generates practical knowledge that can be used to solve real problems in practice. Researchers aim to create applicable solutions that can benefit all involved parties (Fook 2002, p. 25). Through systemic or organizational changes resulting from action research, lasting and sustainable changes can be implemented, contributing to community or organizational development. These actions lead to improved functioning of a given environment or organization and increased community engagement in decision-making processes (Coghlan and Brannick 2014, p. 45).

### Researching the Environment as the First Stage of Action Research

Researching the environment constitutes the first stage of action research and involves a thorough familiarization with the area of operation through the analysis of social, economic, cultural, and historical knowledge. It encompasses both theoretical study, which involves analyzing scientific literature and reports concerning the studied area, as well as practical study, which entails direct contact with the local community and environment. It includes understanding the social structure of the studied area, identifying social groups, and their relations and social dynamics. Streetworkers may conduct interviews with local residents, community leaders, social workers, and other involved individuals to better understand their needs, concerns, and aspirations (Burns 2006, p. 425; Healy 2014, p. 58). Economic knowledge pertains to analyzing the economic situation of the studied area, including job availability, income levels, poverty indicators, or local businesses. Streetworkers may gather data on the job market, unemployment, living standards, and financial resources available to local residents (Karabanow 2004, p. 223; Pierson 2010, p. 20). Cultural knowledge involves understanding the culture, traditions, values, and social norms prevailing in the studied area. Streetworkers may engage in participant observations, participate in local cultural events, and talk to representatives of various ethnic and religious groups to better understand the cultural specificity of the community (Fook 2002, p. 28; Stringer 2013, p. 47). Historical knowledge includes analyzing the history of the studied area, including social changes, events important to the local community, and their impact on the current situation.

Streetworkers may conduct archival research, have conversations with local historians and older residents to gather information about the history and evolution of the community (Healy 2014, p. 62).

As a result of theoretical and practical study at the stage of researching the environment, streetworkers gain a deeper understanding of the context of their actions, allowing them to better adapt strategies and actions to the specificities of the local community and the needs of its residents (Burns 2006, p. 429; Karabanow 2004, p. 225; Pierson 2010, p. 25).

### The Context of Streetworking

The context of streetworking is a complex mosaic of environmental, social, and cultural factors that surround the work of streetworkers and influence the situation of the individuals they work with (Karabanow 2004, p. 227; Banks 2012, p. 83). Streetworking often operates in areas with challenging social and economic conditions, where high unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion prevail. These conditions can lead to a lack of access to basic social services and health problems (Burns 2006, p. 431; Healy 2014, p. 62). The social structure of the area under study also plays a significant role, determining social divisions, hierarchies, and power relations. Understanding these structures allows streetworkers to better identify social problems and the needs of residents (Pierson 2010, p. 30; Fook 2002, p. 32). The local culture, including traditions, values, and norms, shapes the context of streetworker's work. Understanding this culture enables better relationship building and communication with the local community (Karabanow 2004, p. 229; Banks 2012, p. 85). The community's history influences its current situation and needs. Streetworkers must consider the historical context, including any traumatic events or processes of social change, to better understand current challenges (Burns 2006, p. 433; Stringer 2013, p. 50). The availability of social services, as well as public policy and legal regulations, significantly impact the work of streetworkers and the situation of the individuals they work with. Streetworkers must take these factors into account in their actions to effectively support those in need and operate in accordance with legal provisions (Pierson 2010, p. 35; Healy 2014, p. 64).

## The Essence of Streetworking

Streetworking is a term used to describe the work conducted by educators, somewhat on the streets, which serves as an example of “outreach” methodology, meaning work outside institutions, in the environment where the client resides. Streetworking represents an innovative form of social work due to its flexible nature. It is becoming increasingly popular in the context of state institutionalized assistance to marginalized individuals, enabling support for people who have been isolated, rejected, and unnoticed in their places of residence (streets, clubs, selected city districts) (Banks 2012, p. 87; Karabanow 2004, p. 231; Kamiński 2015, p. 60). The essence of streetworking lies in a direct approach to social work, focusing on reaching out to people in need of help in their own living environment. Streetworkers do not wait for individuals in need of support to approach them but rather proactively engage by going out to the streets, public places, or shelters to establish contact with people directly in their environment (Fook 2002, p. 35; McNiff and Whitehead 2011, p. 38). They not only provide practical assistance, such as food, clothing, or shelter, but also offer emotional support and counseling to individuals facing difficult situations, such as homelessness, addiction, or violence (Burns 2006, p. 435; Stringer 2013, p. 52). Each person encountered by streetworkers is treated individually, taking into account their unique needs, life situation, and social context. Streetworkers strive to understand the history and experiences of each person to tailor their actions to their needs (Banks 2012, p. 89; Karabanow 2004, p. 233). Additionally, streetworkers collaborate with the local community, including residents, non-governmental organizations, social services, and other institutions. This collaboration allows for building trust, better understanding the needs of the community, and more effective actions (Fook 2002, p. 37; Pierson 2010, p. 40). They continuously monitor the changing needs and situations of the individuals they work with, adjusting their actions to provide them with appropriate support in different stages of life and various situations (Burns 2006, p. 437; Stringer 2013, p. 54).

## Theoretical-Practical Study of Streetworking – Assumptions

The theoretical-practical study of streetworking is a comprehensive analysis of both the theory and practice of this form of social work. It includes understanding the main concepts, assumptions, and methodologies of streetworking and

their application in fieldwork. Here are the main elements to consider when conducting such a study. The study begins with understanding the basic definition of streetworking and identifying the main goals of this form of social work. This is crucial to determine the scope and purpose of the analysis (Burns 2006, p. 439; Banks 2012, p. 91). Next, various models and theories of streetworker's work are analyzed, such as the structural-functional model or socialization theory. Studying these theories allows for understanding the main assumptions and strategies of working with individuals in need of support (Karabanow 2004, p. 235; Pierson 2010, p. 45). An important element of the study is also the analysis of ethics and values that guide the work of streetworkers. These values may include respect for the dignity of each person, individual autonomy, or social engagement (Healy 2014, p. 68; Stringer 2013, p. 56). The theoretical-practical study also includes an analysis of various methods and tools used by streetworkers. These can include methods of social activation, crisis interventions, or psychosocial support (Burns 2006, p. 441; Banks 2012, p. 93). An important element of the study is conducting case analysis and field studies, which allow for a better understanding of the effectiveness of different strategies and interventions in practice. Studying specific cases allows for identifying best practices and areas that require further development (Karabanow 2004, p. 237; Fook 2002, p. 50). Finally, the theoretical-practical study should include an evaluation of the effectiveness of streetworking, analyzing the results and effects of streetworkers' work based on indicators such as homelessness reduction, improvement in mental health, or increased access to social services (Healy 2014, p. 70; Stringer 2013, p. 58).

Conducting a comprehensive theoretical-practical study of streetworking allows for a better understanding of the principles, goals, and methods of this form of social work and enables the identification of best practices and areas that require further development and improvement (Burns 2006, p. 443; Banks 2012, p. 95).

### Definition and Goals of Streetworking

Streetworking is a form of social work that focuses on direct engagement in the field and establishing contact with individuals facing difficult life situations, such as homelessness, addiction, or social marginalization. The main goal of streetworking is to provide support and assistance to these individuals by providing them with essential means of living, as well as emotional support, counseling, and referrals to appropriate institutions or social assistance programs. Streetworking



aims to reduce social exclusion by providing support to individuals facing difficult life situations. Streetworkers work to integrate these individuals into the rest of society and eliminate barriers to access social and economic resources (Karabanow 2004, p. 239; Healy 2014, p. 72). Streetworking seeks to improve the quality of life of the individuals with whom streetworkers work by providing them with essential means of living, such as food, clothing, shelter, and assistance in resolving crisis situations (Burns 2006, p. 445; Banks 2012, p. 97). Streetworking aims to promote the autonomy and self-reliance of individuals in need of support by enabling them to take actions to improve their life situations and personal development (Pierson 2010, p. 55; McNiff and Whitehead 2011, p. 40). Streetworkers work to prevent marginalization and social exclusion by providing assistance and support to individuals at risk and promoting social integration and active participation in community life (Healy 2014, p. 74; Stringer 2013, p. 60). By achieving these goals, streetworking contributes to improving the quality of life of individuals facing difficult life situations and building a more inclusive and supportive community (Burns 2006, p. 447; Karabanow 2004, p. 241).

### Models and Theories of Streetworker Practice

Models and theories of streetworker practice form the foundations for effective intervention in the field. The structural-functional model treats society as an organism, and streetworkers act as “social doctors,” restoring social balance (Healy 2014, p. 75; McNiff and Whitehead 2011, p. 42). The outreach model involves actively engaging in the field and direct interaction with individuals in need of support (Pierson 2010, p. 60). The theories of socialization and social interactions are important for understanding the impact of the social environment on individuals and the process of their integration. Streetworkers can use these theories to support individuals in accepting social norms and promoting positive behaviors (Fook 2002, p. 80; Banks 2012, p. 99). The empowerment model focuses on empowering individuals in need of support by increasing their ability to make decisions and take action. Streetworkers act as partners, supporting individuals in making their own decisions and developing skills necessary for achieving autonomy (Burns 2006, p. 449; Healy 2014, p. 76). These models and theories serve as the basis for streetworking practice, enabling effective intervention in the field and adapting actions to the individual needs and situations of those in need of support (Banks 2012, p. 99; Karabanow 2004, p. 243).

## Ethics and Values in Streetworking

Respect for the dignity of every individual is deeply rooted in the ethics and values of streetworking. Streetworkers are guided by the belief that every person, regardless of their life situation or behavior, deserves respect and dignified treatment. This fundamental principle forms the basis for building trust and effective interaction with individuals in need of support (Pierson 2010, p. 65; Fook 2002, p. 90). Furthermore, streetworkers place great emphasis on individual autonomy in their work. This means that they respect the right of each person to make their own decisions and life choices. Their role is to support clients in making decisions consistent with their values and life goals, rather than imposing their own views or solutions (Banks 2012, p. 101; Healy 2014, p. 78). Empathy also plays a significant role in the ethics of streetworking. Streetworkers seek to understand the life situation and emotions of the individuals they work with, by empathetically listening to their needs and experiences. Through empathy, they can better identify clients' needs and tailor their actions to their individual situations (Fook 2002, p. 92; Stringer 2013, p. 56). Integrity and honesty are key values in the work of streetworkers. They prioritize transparency and honesty in all their actions, avoiding manipulation or exploitation of individuals in need of support for their own benefit. They strive to maintain high ethical and moral standards, contributing to building trust and reputation in the community (Healy 2014, p. 80; Pierson 2010, p. 70). Finally, streetworkers demonstrate social commitment and solidarity by actively participating in the life of the local community and promoting cooperation and mutual support among its members. Through actions aimed at building social bonds and promoting solidarity, streetworkers support the process of social integration and the development of the local community (Burns 2006, p. 451; Karabanow 2004, p. 250).

## Methods and Tools of Streetworker's Work

In the work of a streetworker, it is essential to employ various methods and tools to effectively support individuals facing difficult life situations. These methods and tools are tailored to the individual needs of clients and the specifics of the environment in which streetworkers operate. One of the key methods is street outreach. Streetworkers actively engage in the field, patrolling streets, parks, and other public places, establishing direct contact with individuals in need of support. This allows them to quickly identify clients' needs and offer assistance on



the spot (Pierson 2010, p. 75; Fook 2002, p. 95). Another important element of streetworker's work is crisis intervention. Streetworkers are trained to provide psychosocial first aid and support in crisis situations such as suicide, domestic violence, or substance abuse. They act quickly and effectively to provide assistance and ensure the safety of individuals in need (Burns 2006, p. 453; Healy 2014, p. 85). Streetworkers also provide psychosocial support by offering emotional support and counseling to individuals facing difficult life situations. They listen to their problems, provide advice, and help them solve issues to enable them to take steps towards improving their situation (Banks 2012, p. 105; Stringer 2013, p. 60). Another tool in the streetworker's toolkit is mediation and referral to assistance. Streetworkers act as intermediaries between individuals in need of support and institutions and organizations providing social assistance. They assist clients in accessing various services and assistance programs such as shelters, psychological support, or material aid (Pierson 2010, p. 80; Karabanow 2004, p. 260). Additionally, streetworkers conduct educational and training activities by organizing workshops, training sessions, or educational campaigns on topics related to health, safety, or life skills. This helps raise social awareness and support educational processes in local communities (Healy 2014, p. 88; Fook 2002, p. 100). Building collaboration networks and engaging in partnership activities is also crucial in streetworker's work. Streetworkers actively collaborate with other institutions and social organizations, social services, and local authorities to provide comprehensive support to individuals in need and effectively address social issues (Burns 2006, p. 455; Stringer 2013, p. 65). By employing these methods and tools, streetworkers are able to effectively support individuals facing difficult life situations, socially integrate them, and support them in achieving independence and improving their quality of life. By using various techniques and approaches, streetworkers can adapt their actions to the individual needs and situations of clients, contributing to the effectiveness of their work (Pierson 2010, p. 85; Fook 2002, p. 105).

### Case Analysis and Field Studies

Case analysis and field studies are key tools in the work of streetworkers, enabling a better understanding of the situations of individuals in need of support and the social context in which they operate. Case analysis involves a detailed examination of clients' life histories, their needs, goals, and challenges. Streetworkers seek to identify the main factors influencing the client's situation and deter-

mine the best support strategies that will help achieve desired outcomes (Healy 2014, p. 90; Karabanow 2004, p. 270). Field studies, on the other hand, allow for the collection of data regarding specific social conditions and needs in a given area. Streetworkers can better understand the social context in which their clients live, enabling them to tailor their actions to local realities and identify areas requiring intervention (Burns 2006, p. 457; Stringer 2013, p. 70). Through case analysis and field studies, streetworkers can better tailor their actions to the individual needs and situations of clients, contributing to more effective support and social integration of those in need. This tool also allows for monitoring client progress and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, enabling continuous improvement of streetworker's work and better response to changing needs of local communities (Pierson 2010, p. 90; Fook 2002, p. 110).

### Evaluation of Streetworking Effectiveness

Evaluation of streetworking effectiveness is an essential process that allows for a thorough understanding of the impact of streetworkers' actions and the effects of interventions in local communities. It involves systematic examination, analysis, and interpretation of the results of actions aimed at assessing the degree of achievement of set goals and the effectiveness of measures taken. Streetworkers initiate the evaluation process by defining specific goals they aim to achieve through their actions. These goals may relate to reducing the number of homeless individuals, improving access to social services, or increasing the involvement of the local community. They then gather diverse data concerning their work, such as the number of clients, the type of support provided, or the community's reactions to their actions (Burns 2006, p. 459; Pierson 2010, p. 95). The next step involves analyzing the collected data, which allows for assessing the achieved results in the context of the set goals. Streetworkers examine whether their actions contribute to desired changes in local communities, whether they achieve intended goals, and what are the main factors influencing the effectiveness of their work (Stringer 2013, p. 75; Karabanow 2004, p. 280). Based on the data analysis, streetworkers draw conclusions and formulate recommendations for further steps. They may propose changes in intervention strategies, adjust actions to the changing needs of local communities, or identify areas where additional actions or support are necessary (Healy 2014, p. 95; Fook 2002, p. 115). As a result, the process of evaluating streetworking effectiveness enables streetworkers to continuously improve their work and more effectively support individuals in

difficult life situations. By consciously monitoring progress and responding to changing needs, streetworkers can contribute more effectively to improving the quality of life in local communities (Burns 2006, p. 461; Pierson 2010, p. 100).

## Conclusions

The theoretical-practical study of streetworking serves as the foundation for effective streetworker practice, integrating theoretical knowledge with field experience. Through the analysis of social, psychological, and pedagogical theories, streetworkers gain a deeper understanding of social issues and the needs of individuals in difficult life situations. At the same time, practical field experience allows them to verify and apply acquired knowledge in real-world environments. The study enables streetworkers to develop communication, empathy, and interpersonal skills, which are crucial in building trust and relationships with clients. Furthermore, it facilitates an understanding of the principles of ethics and values that should guide streetworkers' actions, such as respect for dignity, individual autonomy, and social solidarity (Burns 2006, p. 463; Healy 2014, p. 105). In conclusion, the theoretical-practical study of streetworking is an essential element in preparing streetworkers for effective fieldwork. The integration of theoretical knowledge with field practice enables effective support for individuals in difficult life situations and action to improve the quality of life in local communities (Stringer 2013, p. 80; Pierson 2010, p. 110).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams R., Dominelli L., Payne, M. (2009), *Critical Practice in Social Work*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Banks S. (2012), *Ethics and Values in Social Work*, 4th ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burns D. (2006), *Evaluation in Practice: Monitoring and Evaluation in Social Work*, 3rd ed., Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Coghlan D., Brannick, T. (2014), *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 4th ed., London: SAGE Publications.
- Fook J. (2002), *Social Work: Critical Theory and Practice*, London: SAGE Publications.
- Healy K. (2014), *Social Work Theories in Context: Creating Frameworks for Practice*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Karabanow J. (2004), *Being Young and Homeless: Understanding How Youth Enter and Exit Street Life*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

- Kamiński R. (2015), *Pedagogika społeczna*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kowalski M. (2018), *Praca socjalna: teoria i praktyka*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- McNiff J., Whitehead J. (2011), *All You Need to Know About Action Research*, 2nd ed., London: SAGE Publications.
- Pierson J. (2010), *Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion: Promoting Social Justice in Social Work*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge.
- Stringer E.T. (2013), *Action Research*, 4th ed., London: SAGE Publications.

## SUMMARY

Streetworking is a form of social work that involves direct contact with individuals in difficult life situations. This article presents the role of environmental study in streetworking, discussing both theoretical and practical aspects. It highlights the importance of social, economic, cultural, and historical analysis of the studied area, which allows for better tailoring of interventions to the real needs of the community. The article also outlines research methods and evaluates the effectiveness of streetworkers' actions.

**KEYWORDS:** streetworking, social work, environmental studies, social interventions

## STRESZCZENIE

Streetworking to forma pracy socjalnej polegająca na bezpośrednim kontakcie z osobami znajdującymi się w trudnych sytuacjach życiowych. Artykuł przedstawia rolę badania środowiskowego w streetworkingu, omawiając zarówno jego aspekty teoretyczne, jak i praktyczne. Podkreślono znaczenie analizy społecznej, ekonomicznej, kulturowej i historycznej badanego obszaru, co pozwala na lepsze dostosowanie interwencji do realnych potrzeb społeczności. Przedstawiono również metody badawcze oraz ocenę efektywności działań streetworkerów.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** streetworking, praca socjalna, badania środowiskowe, interwencje społeczne

PAULINA FORMA – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach  
ANNA KANABROCKA – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach  
KAMILA LACH – Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach

Pedagogika / Pedagogy

Przysłano do redakcji / Received: 15.12.2023

Data akceptacji do publikacji / Accepted: 25.12.2023