

Past, Current and Future Perspectives on Service Responses to the Homeless Street Drinking Population of Dublin City Centre.

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Content of Presentation

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The Purpose of The Research.

- The aim - to carry out a preliminary evaluation of the extent to which policy and practice is currently succeeding in addressing the needs of the 'homeless street drinking' population of Dublin City Centre.
- With two substantive areas considered –
 - The reality of the drinking problems faced by this cohort.
 - An evaluation of current policy and management/practice of services to this group.

Methodology

- Triangulation Method.
- A qualitative research approach:
 - Literature review critically analysed current national and international thinking regarding this cohort.
 - Eight semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders.

Literature Review - Extent of The Problem.

“Alcohol remains the primary drug of choice among the homeless population (70%).”

(Lawless & Corr (2005), p16).

Literature Review – Homelessness in Ireland

People are homeless in Ireland if, in the opinion of the local authority:

- they have no accommodation they can realistically live in or remain in
- or they are living in temporary accommodation of some type as they have nowhere else to go and they cannot afford to get their own accommodation.

Literature Review – Defining Street Drinker

Defining ‘street drinker’ is complex due to the number of possible variables that may impact on an individual living a street drinking lifestyle; however, there are consistent traits that are core to the experience.

Findings - A profile of Homeless Street Drinkers in Dublin City Centre.

- Older men with a smaller proportion of women presenting.
- Younger people, i.e. under 35 year olds, were identified as a group of concern with increasing poly-substance use issues.
- Increasingly presenting with multiple needs.
- Violence is common place within the group of homeless street drinking population in Dublin City Centre.

Findings - Poly-substance use and the risk of overdose.

- Poly substance and the risk of overdose are significant areas of concern.
- The research shows that the lines between alcohol and drug issues increasingly intersect.
- This is considered a new phenomenon in this group - it has only recently been acknowledged.
- This was a significant finding of this research as poly-substance use and the risk of overdose is not commonly associated with homeless street drinkers.

Findings - Non-compliance with homeless, medical and psychiatric services

- Non-compliance with services is a significant barrier to sustained and prolonged service delivery i.e. non-compliance often leads to a service being withdrawn even for the most tolerant of services.

Findings - The effectiveness of current service provision, in Dublin city centre, to homeless street drinkers experiencing co-morbidity?

- All respondents stated that there were deficiencies in the service delivery to homeless street drinkers experiencing co-morbidity:

“We need to make a decision in relation to how addiction and psychiatric services are going to deal with co-morbidity at the moment we’re not really following any particular model.”

(Consultant Psychiatrist 1)

“I think the current service delivery is hugely lacking and failing the homeless street drinker.”

(Consultant Psychiatrist 2)

Findings - Effectiveness of current service delivery to the homeless street drinking population of Dublin City Centre?

- Overall it was felt services to homeless street drinkers in Dublin City Centre had improved since 1996.
- Over the last six years, improvements had been made with regards to the development of specialist services i.e. a wet house, a residential detox unit and dedicated specialist outreach teams.

Findings - The effectiveness of crosscutting policy initiatives in meeting the needs of Homeless Street Drinkers?

- Consistently across the interviewees there was optimism and pessimism for policy making in Ireland for this cohort.
- A stronger sense of confidence in local policy making as opposed to national policy making.
- Respondents felt they had more opportunity to impact locally.

Recommendations - Future initiatives that will impact positively on the lives of those people living a street drinking lifestyle in Dublin city centre?

- Vision and leadership
- Responsibility and accountability
- A primary health care strategy
- Co-ordination of services that address co-morbidity
- A dedicated day/night service
- Innovative long term housing solutions
- Care and case management
- Address issues of compliance
- Service user involvement

Conclusion - A philosophical shift.

- In philosophical terms, service provision has now shifted to an unequivocal acceptance of harm reduction for homeless street drinkers. Despite the fact that traditional service responses were based on abstinence-only models of provision - and largely located within religious or temperance-type agencies (Butler S (2003), p.8) - there has now been a general acceptance of pragmatic strategies aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm rather than solely at bringing about abstinence.

Conclusion - Is service delivery to homeless street drinkers in Dublin City Centre effective?

The answer is a resounding - definitely maybe. In the final analysis, despite cynicism regarding cross cutting policy initiatives respondents did actually see progress in responding to the needs of this most complex and challenging group of service users.

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