



## Disclosures

No conflicts of interest to declare



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## Background

- Illicit drug use in the top 20 contributors to the global burden of disease and injury
- Difficulty accessing marginalised sub-groups of people who inject drugs (PWID)
  - Often heavier substance users; e.g. people who are homeless
- Homeless population in Australia has risen by 8% from 2006 to 2011



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## Background cont.

- Individuals with a homeless history have much higher past 12mth prevalence than the general population of:
  - any mental health disorders (54% vs. 19%)
  - substance use disorders (18% vs. 5%)
- ↑ risk of being both the victim and perpetrator of violent crimes
  - = higher levels of contact with ED and the criminal justice system
- People who use drugs not a homogenous group
- So, what does the addition of homelessness mean for people who are using drugs heavily?



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## What we know about PWID so far

- PWID were more likely to be homeless if:
  - unemployed
  - last injected in public
  - diagnosed with schizophrenia
  - had a lifetime prison history
- However, remains unknown whether differences exist between types or durations of homelessness
  - Types: primary (no shelter) vs. secondary (makeshift shelter)
  - Duration: short (<6mths) vs. long (≥6 months)



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## Aims

This current study utilises a sample of people who inject drugs (PWID) to address two questions:

**Question 1:**  
What is the prevalence and characteristics of homelessness within a national sample of PWID?

**Question 2:**  
What are the correlates of homelessness in a national sample of PWID in relation to type and length of homelessness?



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## Methods

**Participants:** 898 PWID across Australia (2014 IDRS) who:

- injected at least monthly
- resided in the jurisdiction's capital city for the past year
- at least 17 years old

**Aim 1:** Descriptive data on homelessness history and reason for entry

**Aim 2:** Examined the association between type/duration of homelessness....

- *Type*
  - *Primary* = sleeping rough on the streets
  - *Secondary* = boarding house/hostel, emergency shelter/refuge, caravan park, couch surfing

## Methods cont.

- *Length*
  - *Short* = <6mths in total
  - *Long* = ≥6 months in total

... and variables significantly associated with homelessness status based on prior work:

- Sex (controlled)
- Age
- Unemployed
- Last injected in public
- Use of illicit Seroquel in past six months
- Psychological distress (Kessler 10)
- Diagnosed with schizophrenia
- Lifetime prison history
- Arrested past six months

## Results: IDRS sample characteristics

Socio-demographics	% / M
Male	69%
Age	41 years (18-67)
Indigenous	17%
Born in Australia	86%
Heterosexual	90%
Single	56%
Currently in drug treatment	47%
Self-reported mental health problem	44%
Lifetime prison history	55%
Lifetime history of homelessness	74%
Homeless in past 6 months	31%

## Results: Homelessness history

- 21% homeless at the time of interview
  - Mean duration of their current episode of homelessness was ~4 years (range: <1-44 years)
- Main factor that contributed to first episode:
  - relationship breakdown with family (41%)
  - drug use/dependence (37%)
  - financial difficulties (18%)
  - unemployment (11%)
  - domestic violence (11%)

## Results: Homelessness history cont.

- Exposure to violence in last six months of homelessness:
  - physically attacked (26%)
  - stood over (24%)
  - robbed (24%)
  - mugged (18%)
- Most commonly experienced forms of homelessness during both lifetime and 6 months:
  - sleeping rough (81%; 24%)
  - couch surfing (77%; 22%)
  - boarding rooms/hostels (55%; 12%)

## Results: Type of homelessness

Variable	Not homeless vs. primary	Not homeless vs. secondary	Primary vs. secondary
Male	ns	ns	ns
Age	ns	ns	ns
Unemployed	ns	ns	ns
Last injected in public	ns	ns	ns
Illicit Seroquel (6mths)	ns	ns	ns
Kessler 10 <sup>#</sup>	p<0.001 19 vs. 24	ns	p<0.001 24 vs. 20
Schizophrenia	ns	ns	ns
Prison	p=0.017 43% vs. 62%	ns	ns
Arrest (6mths)	p=0.009 20% vs. 40%	ns	ns

## Results: Length of homelessness

Variable	Not homeless vs. short	Not homeless vs. long	Short vs. long
Male	ns	ns	ns
Age	ns	ns	$p=.015$ 42yrs vs. 40yrs
Unemployed	ns	$p=.008$ 77% vs. 88%	$p<.001$ 74% vs. 88%
Last injected in public	ns	ns	ns
Illicit Seroquel (6mths)	ns	ns	ns
Kessler 10 <sup>#</sup>	$p=.003$ 17 vs. 22	$p<.001$ 17 vs. 24	ns
Schizophrenia	ns	ns	ns
Prison	ns	$p=.005$ 42% vs. 63%	ns
Arrest (6mths)	ns	ns	ns

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<sup>#</sup> higher scores indicate greater psychological distress

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## Recap and implications

- Three quarters reported being homeless at some point in their lives
- One-third experienced homelessness in the past 6 months, and one-fifth were currently homeless
- Main reasons included drug use
  - Need for D&A services to assess housing stability upon presentation
- Financial difficulties/unemployment contributed to both entry and longer lengths of homelessness
  - Underlying issue of poverty – need to provide opportunities to re-skill and re-enter workforce

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## Recap and implications cont.

- Over half reported being incarcerated
- Prison history significantly related to most extreme forms of homelessness (primary and chronic)
  - Continued need for suitable housing options upon release, as well as D&A and mental health services
  - Ex-offenders who use illicit drugs and are released without suitable housing options are at increased risk of both homelessness and recidivism

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Any questions, please email [e.whittaker@unsw.edu.au](mailto:e.whittaker@unsw.edu.au)

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