

Seminar 11: Health of and Health Services for Homeless People

Chair: Lars Benjaminsen, DK

Tabea Linzbach, Anabell Specht, Theresa Hellmund, Merle Hörig, Andreas K. Lindner, Navina Sarma, DE: Development of Health Information for and with Homeless People During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond



Tabea Linzbach (24) is a master's student at the Berlin School of Public Health studying Public Health in her final year. She received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Medizinische Hochschule Brandenburg in 2019.

The team of the Charité-COVID-19-project for and with homeless people has worked together since October 2020. We are an interdisciplinary team from the fields of medicine, public health, social work and communication design including also early career researchers. Most of us have many years of experience from working in low threshold services for homeless people and are involved in various projects and networks concerning research and political activities in the field of homelessness.

The pandemic shows the important role of providing people with easy to access up-to-date information including digital formats. People experiencing homelessness have limited access to health information. Recommendations given during the COVID-19-pandemic did not reflect the realities of life on the streets, e.g. on distance rules or self-isolation. In addition, homeless people were hardly ever directly addressed through communication channels in Germany. Further challenges are a lack of digitalization within shelters and/or social services and technical and/or socio-economic barriers in purchasing and maintaining a smartphone.

The Charité-COVID-19-project for and with homeless people has created digital COVID-19 health information videos and vaccination posters, with an interdisciplinary team and a participatory approach. Two videos on general information and testing of COVID-19 were launched in 5 languages in February 2021. Vaccination posters in two language versions including 9 languages have been available since April 2021 and were distributed nationwide to support vaccination campaigns.

We will present the collaboration of research, practice and community, the production process, the distribution and the acceptance of the formats. The weblink refers to the videos, posters and further information:

https://tropeninstitut.charite.de/forschung/charite_covid_19_projekt_fuer_und_mit_obdachlosen_menschen/

Exclusion from (digital) information is an increasingly important part of the structural marginalization of homeless people. This, as well as the non-consideration of the living situation of this population in health communication and the pandemic response have to be addressed. Tackling the digital gap allows improved access to health information for homeless people and promotes health-seeking behaviour. Empowerment of the community through participation and building up a network between community, service providers, politics and research are also crucial to improve homeless people's health in the future.

Sándor Békási, Zsuzsa Györfly, Bence Döbrössi, Virág Bognár, Nóra Radó, Emília Morva, Edmond Girasek, HU: Measuring Openness Towards Telecare among People Experiencing Homelessness in Shelters Offering Mid- and Long-term Accommodation



Sándor Békási graduated from Semmelweis University (Budapest, Hungary) as a primary care physician and health manager. After molecular biology research activities, his attention turned to client-centric digital healthcare solutions. He is the chief physician and director at the Health Center of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta providing primary care services 24/7 to people who are experiencing homelessness. He is also the co-founder of Fitpuli, a Hungarian digital health start-up. His main interest is the integration of mobile applications, telemedicine, and remote patient monitoring into traditional medical care pathways.

Zsuzsa Györfly is a medical sociologist, Head of the Medical Sociology Department at the Institute of Behavioural Sciences of Semmelweis University, where she teaches medical sociology and digital health. She has a Ph.D. degree in Psychology and a Habilitation in Health Sciences. She is the leader of the Behavioural Science in Digital Health working group at

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the Semmelweis University. Her research activities are geared towards investigating how physicians and patients use digital health solutions, what advantages and disadvantages they have by implementing and operating such technologies. The conditions required for the successful implementation of digital health opportunities are also investigated from a societal, medical, and patient perspective.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an expansion of digital health solutions was experienced throughout Europe to provide traditional medical services online. These digital technologies might contribute to health inequalities of populations with lower socioeconomic status but also offer a new tool for better management of chronic conditions and are able to compensate for poor health care access.

During COVID-19 lockdown, an exploratory study was completed among homeless persons (N=98) in 4 shelters in Budapest, Hungary. These shelters provide mid- and long-term accommodation with a focus on health improvement. Attitudes of accessibility and openness towards chronic care via telemedicine were measured by a questionnaire self-developed by the research team. To give a context of the results, a national reference group was used of individuals recruited from 2 average primary care practices from Budapest, Hungary (N=110).

Our results demonstrate that there was no significant difference in the openness towards a live online video consultation among the index and the weighted reference group. In the homeless group, participants more satisfied with general health care services reported more willingness to try telecare. Our multivariate analysis demonstrated that participants in the index group who experienced problems in getting regular medical care in the last year prefer in-person doctor-patient consultations.

Our survey suggests that telecare might be a potential new pathway in chronic care for people experiencing homelessness. Launching an on-site digital health program targeting residents of homeless shelters might be able to improve care regularity and lead to better access to health services. These shelters can provide infrastructure, human resources, and expertise for such medical programs. Building trust in such services might also play an important role in planning and implementation. Our research also served as an underlying study of a 12-week long telecare pilot. Early results of this ongoing pilot will be also available during the presentation.

Coline v. Everdingen, Peter Bob Peerenboom, Koos v.d. Velden and Philippe Delespaul, NL: Innovative Strategies to Enable Recovery of the Homeless: Methods and First Results of the Dutch HOP-TR Study



Coline van Everdingen (1968) is an independent researcher, with the background of a MD (1993) and Public Health specialist (2001). Additionally, she is a PhD candidate at Maastricht University. From 2015 to 2018, she conducted local reviews in various cities and homelessness settings. This resulted in a representative sample of Dutch homeless service users (N=436). The Homeless People Treatment and Recovery study uses this data to describe the health and needs and analyze the interaction of homeless service users and care systems. The study aims to identify which conditions can promote recovery in marginalized populations with interdependent needs.

Background: Homelessness is an increasing problem in Western European countries. Dutch local authorities initiated cross-sectional reviews to obtain accurate health and needs information on Homeless Service (HS) users. **Methods:** A group of Dutch HS users was selected using a naturalistic meta-snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews provided the primary data source. The interviews used open questions, the InterRAI Community Mental Health questionnaire and the "Homelessness Supplement". Algorithmic summary scores were computed, and integrated clinical parameters assessed, using the raw interview data. They result in health and needs in a rights-based, recovery-oriented frame of reference. The mental health approach is transdiagnostic. Health and needs are organized using the positive health or recovery domains: symptomatic (physical and mental health), social (daily living, social participation), and personal (quality of life, meaning).



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Results: Most subjects were males, low educated, with a migration background. The majority were long-term or intermittently homeless. Concurrent health problems were present in two domains or more in most (95.0%) subjects. Almost all participants showed mental health problems (98.6%); for a significant share severe (72.5%). Frequent comorbid conditions were addiction (78%), chronic physical conditions (59.2%), and intellectual impairments (39.9%).

Discussion:

Traditional epidemiological literature on homelessness is often domain specific and relies on administrative sources. The HOP-TR study uses an analytical epidemiological approach. It shifts the assessment focus from problem-centered marginalization processes towards a comprehensive, three - dimensional recovery-oriented vision of health. Different perspectives are integrated to explore the interaction of homeless people with care networks.

The sample characteristics and the significant concurrent health problems reveal the multi domain character of needs and the relevance of integrated 3-D public health approach. In the Netherlands, local authorities used the reports to reflect and discuss needs, care provision, access, and network cooperation. These dialogs incited to improve the quality of care at various ecosystem levels.

Keywords: homelessness, transdiagnostic mental health strategy, human rights, recovery, public health policy, healthcare ecosystem approach

References:

Health Patterns Reveal Interdependent Needs of Dutch Homeless Service Users. *Front. Psychiatry*, 25 March 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.614526>

A comprehensive assessment to enable recovery of the homeless: the HOP-TR study. *Front. Public Health*, accepted 9 June 2021 | doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.661517 (abstract)