



Prevalence of sexually and blood-borne infections &
Tuberculosis among homeless people - pilot study

Planning and implementation of a study
on infectious diseases among people
experiencing homelessness

**How to deal with responsibilities and
ethical issues in research?**

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Robert Koch Institute



Background

- Appr. 256,000 PEH in Germany, 48,000 **sleeping rough**, of those, **up to 50% have no German citizenship** (BAG W 2021)
- **Only 38%** of PEH on the street or in similarly precarious overnight situations have **access to regular health care** (Gerull et al. 2018)
- High usage of **emergency care** (Vohra et al. 2022) and **low threshold services** (Steffen et al. 2022, Schindel et al. 2021)

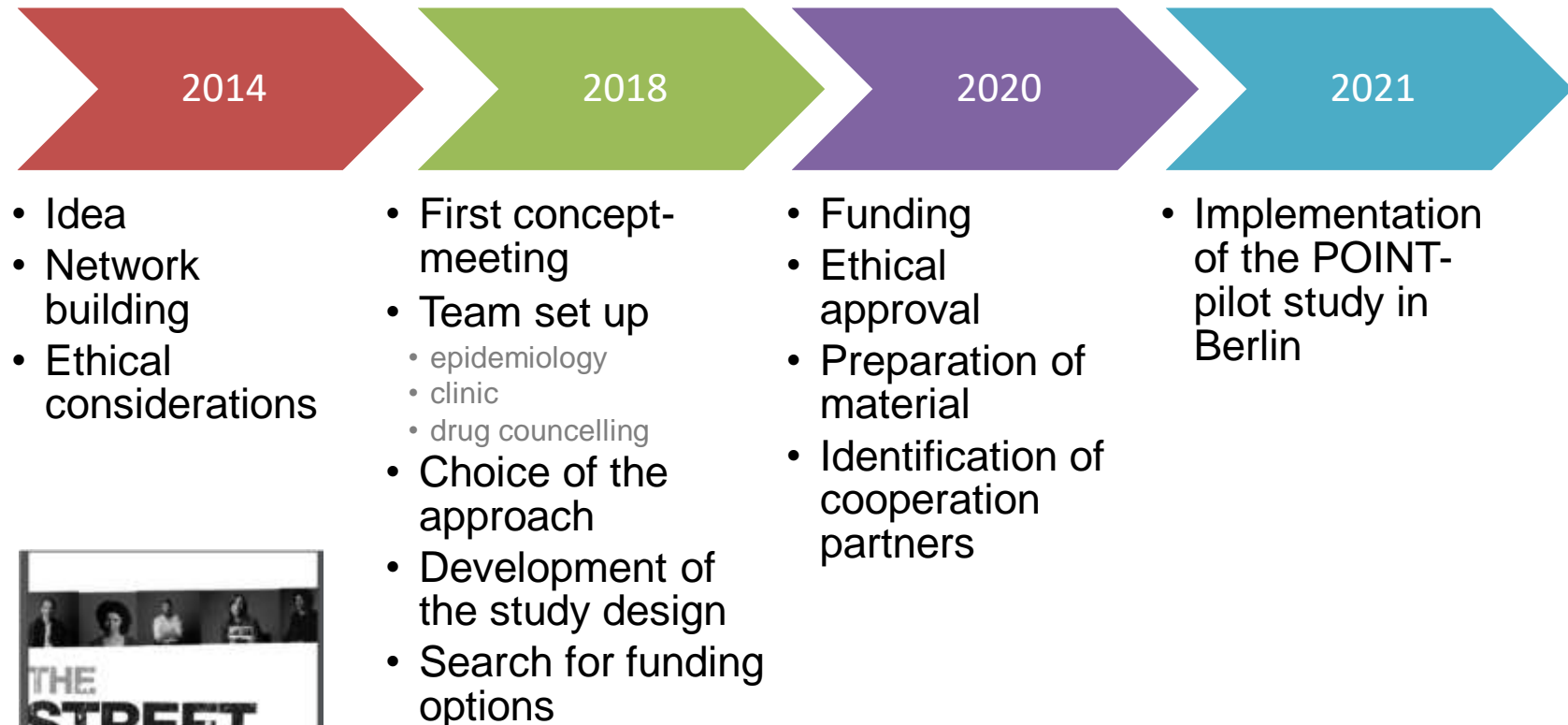


Questions

- How can research be done in a responsible and ethical way?
- How can we ensure that neither the planning, nor the data collection or the distribution of results harm the community?



POINT Study - Planning



<https://www.streethealth.ca/>



POINT Study - Research question

- What is the situation among homeless people regarding sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STI), tuberculosis and COVID-19?
- **Public health relevance:**
First data basis on infectious diseases among PEH in Germany for evidence-based services
- **Feasibility check:**
 - Acceptance of participation (testing and survey)
 - Cooperation with the low-threshold support system
 - Practical feasibility of an on-site test offer



Multicentre cross-sectional study in five low-threshold medical facilities in Berlin (01-12/2021)



Questionnaire-based interview

82 questions:

- Demographics
- Behaviour
- Health

Venous blood test

- HIV
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis C
- Syphilis
- Tuberculosis
- SARS-CoV-2

Urine sample

Quick test offer

- Chlamydia trachomatis
- Neisseria gonorrhoeae

POCT

- COVID-Ag
- HIV
- Hepatitis C





POINT Study - POINT Study – Results (n=216)

Prevalence and sociodemographics

- active Hepatitis-C-Infection: **16%** (prevalence in GER: **0,2%**)
- HIV-infection: **2,7%** (prevalence in GER: **0,1%**)
- vaccinated against HBV: **50%**
- good or very good German citizenship
- at least a vocational training

→ Better access to regular health care (prevention/vaccination/diagnostics/therapy)

Risk factors

- **47%** have injected drugs during the last 30 days
- Among HCV-positive participants (n=51)
 - **98%** reported injecting drug use during last 30 days and
 - **94%** reported to have ever been in prison
 - **57%** reported lack of health insurance

→ Cooperation between **addiction** and **homelessness services** and **infectiology**



Ethics/Responsibilities – 3 approaches

1.1. Having the relevant stakeholders on board

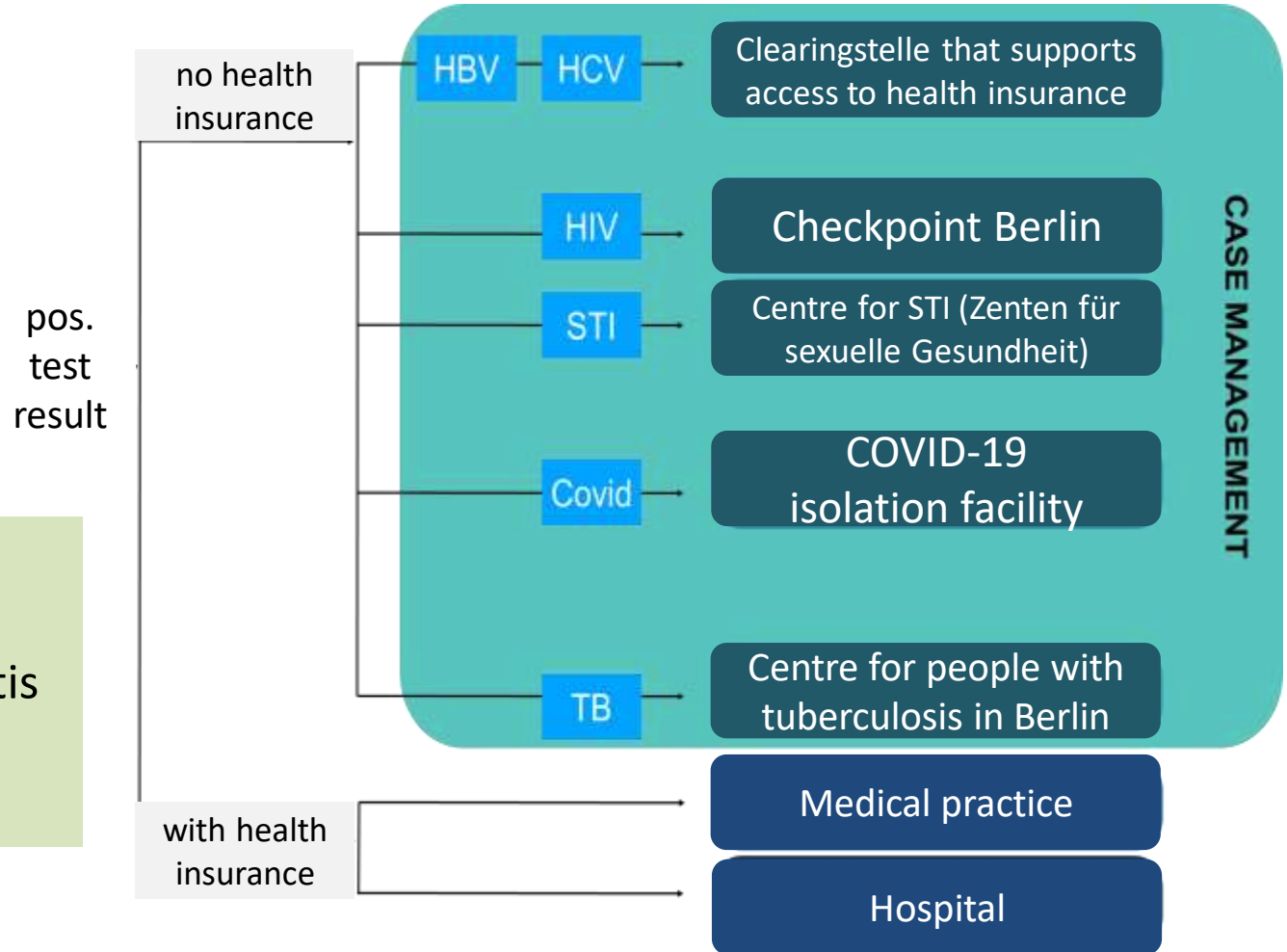
2. Involvement of the perspective of PEH

3. Immediate benefit for the study population



3. Approach: Immediate benefit for the study population

We used the remaining project funds for a hepatitis B vaccination programme.





A study by Fixpunkt, Berliner Sozialprojekte and the Robert Koch Institute (RKI)

In May and June 2021, the POINT study will take place at this facility. Participation is voluntary; all participants will receive 10 euros.

What is it about?

There are good prevention and treatment options for HIV, hepatitis B and C as well as sexually transmitted diseases (STIs, e.g. syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea) and tuberculosis. If left untreated, they can have serious consequences. The objective of the POINT study is to provide insights into the spread of these diseases and to help better protect homeless people and people without health insurance. The study is being conducted in various facilities in Berlin.

Can I participate?

Yes, if you are homeless and over 18 years old.

What will I be asked to do if I participate?

Interview: Staff members will ask you questions. They will ask how you [live](#), how healthy you feel and whether you can find help if you are ill.

Blood collection and reporting of results: We will examine you and take your blood. You can collect the results about a week later.

Rapid test: If you want, you can take a rapid test for HIV, hepatitis C and the coronavirus. You will get the results about 15 minutes later.

Counselling: If a test is positive, we will advise you on how and where to get treatment.

Where can I go if I have questions about the study?

You are welcome to ask the staff here at the facility. Or you can call or email the study team.

Contact person:

Tel.: _____ Email: _____

Responsible entities for conducting the study and the respective contact persons:

Fixpunkt e.V. Astrid Leicht	BeSoG, Berliner Sozialprojekte gGmbH Dr. Christoph Weber	Robert Koch Institute (RKI) Dr. Viviane Bremer
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Co mnie czeka, jeśli wezmę udział?

Wywiad: Pracownicy będą zadawać pytania. Pytają, jak żyjesz, jak się czujesz, czy jesteś zdrowy/-a i czy możesz znaleźć pomoc, gdy jesteś chory/-a.

Pobieranie próbek krwi i powiadomienie o wynikach:



La ce să mă aștept dacă particip?

Interviuri: Angajații vă pun întrebări. Vă întreabă în ce circumstanțe trăiți, cum stați cu sănătatea, dacă reușiți să găsiți ajutor medical atunci când sunteți bolnav.



Исследование Fixpunkt, Berliner Sozialprojekte и Robert Koch-Institut (RKI)

В мае и июне 2021 г. в этом учреждении будет проводиться исследование POINT. Участие в исследовании добровольное, все участники получат 10 евро.

В чем заключается исследование?
Для ВИЧ, гепатита B и C, венерических болезней (например, сифилиса, хламидий, гонорей) и туберкулеза существуют эффективные меры профилактики и лечения. При отсутствии лечения эти заболевания могут иметь серьезные последствия. Целью исследования POINT является выявление распространенности этих заболеваний и поддержка в предоставлении лучшей защиты для бездомных и не имеющих медицинского страхования людей. Исследование проводится в различных учреждениях Берлина.

Можу ли я принять участие?

Да, если вы являетесь бездомным и вам больше 18 лет.

В чем заключается мое участие?

Интервью: сотрудники зададут вам вопросы. Они спрашивают, как вы живете, каково ваше самочувствие и получаете ли вы медицинскую помощь в случае болезни.

Забор крови и сообщение результатов: мы проведем ваше обследование и выполним забор крови. Вы можете забрать результаты примерно через неделю.

Экспресс-анализ: по вашему желанию вы можете сдать экспресс-анализ на ВИЧ, гепатит C и коронавирус. Результат будет готов примерно через 15 минут.

Консультации: если результат анализа положительный, мы проконсультируем вас о том, как и где вы можете получить медицинскую помощь.

Куда я могу обратиться по вопросам в отношении исследования?

Вы можете обратиться к персоналу учреждения. Вы также можете позвонить контактному лицу исследования или отправить электронное сообщение. Контактное лицо:

Тел.: _____ Эл. почта: _____

Ответственное лицо за проведение исследования и за контакты:

Fixpunkt e.V. Astrid Leicht (Astrid Leicht)	BeSoG/Berliner Sozialprojekte gGmbH Dr. Christoph Weber (Dr. Christoph Weber)	Robert Koch Institute (RKI) Dr. Viviane Bremer (Dr. Viviane Bremer)
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Evaluation with PEH: Two Focus Groups (9/10 participants) on acceptance and feasibility of the study design



I want to see if the infection has returned

Questions were straight forward, that was good

Queues were too long

Handwritten notes in Russian and Polish:

① Как мои близкие были поражаются...
 ...могут увидеть что это что-то...
 ...и даже в процессе...
 ...от заражения 2 раза...

Languages:
 Russian, Polish and German

Handwritten notes in German:

Wahlung mirie son T...
 byten OK. Die m...
 ...sie ze procowny bylo wy...
 ...Ostrojew...

Handwritten notes in English:

with my own
 ...after

Cool that we can do it in all languages

I took part in the study because it was anonymous



Communication of Results: Conferences



<https://fast-track-city-summit.berlin/content-hub/>, Session available online



Communication of Results: Conferences



Live from Checkpoint BLN

Resumé from the perspective of a project partner (Mateusz)

- It is good to have such an offer
- It gave me a "positive kick" because everything was negative. But even with a positive result, they would have supported me for treatment. You are not left alone with the results
- It was quick and uncomplicated, just like with people with health insurance
- After the first study day, the information spread quickly on the street
- For some people the offer was enough, but 10 Euros was also a good reason to participate because people on the street don't have so much money.

(Comment: Slide originally in German, translated für the purpose of the FEANTSA-presentation)



Lessons learned

1. Having the relevant actors on board proved to be helpful to
 - reach the study population
 - create ownership among different stakeholders
 - communicate the results in relevant contexts
 - consider complex needs
2. Involvement of the perspective of PEH only partially fulfilled
 - but proved to be working during the evaluation
 - joint conference presentation as source of income
3. Direct benefit for the study population could be insured
 - incentives proved to be much welcomed
 - test opportunity in a respectful setting was appreciated
 - people were consulted in case of a of positive test results BUT treatment for (uninsured) PEH is a challenge
 - HBV vaccination could be offered as a direct result



Team

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Fixpunkt e.V.

3 Fixpunkt e. V., Berlin, Germany

BeSog Berliner Sozialprojekte gGmbH

4 BeSog Berliner Sozialprojekte gGmbH, Berlin, Germany

With the support of all the [study participants](#), staff from [Berliner Aidshilfe](#), [Checkpoint BLN](#), and the staff from the locations where the study took place ([Berliner Stadtmission](#), [GeBeWo](#), [HVD](#), [Aquarium](#))

Contact: sarman@rki.de



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- BeSog Berliner Sozialprojekte gGmbH: <https://www.besog.de/Startseite/>.