

Seminar 4: Exiting Institutions (Floor -1, Room 10)

Chair: Mike Allen, IE

John Cowman, IE: Accommodation Type Pre and Post Admission for Inpatients with Unmet Housing Needs in an Irish Mental Health Acute Inpatient Unit



John Cowman is the project manager (Housing Coordinator in Mental Health) in Community Healthcare Organization 7 in the Republic of Ireland. He is also the project lead on the Creating Foundations housing support project, which he developed in partnership with the mental health services and Focus Ireland, a key provider of homeless services. John's background is as a professional social worker and he is currently a part time PhD student in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast. John's passion is developing tailored responses to mental health service users who are at risk of homelessness.

In a 2019 review of 35 European countries homeless strategies, only one country produced figures specifically relating to discharge from psychiatric hospitals. Ireland's recent homeless strategies have been criticised for a lack of focus on prevention and that the available information is inaccurate and unreliable. No data are routinely reported regarding discharge from acute mental health units to homeless services.

This study sought to identify the accommodation settings, pre and post admission, for inpatients with unmet housing needs in Dublin. Data were collected over eight months, from senior nursing staff on an acute mental health inpatient unit. There were 109 admissions and discharges. Pre and post admission accommodation type was categorised using the ETHOS typology and frequencies were calculated using SPSS.

The largest category pre admission was 'insecure' housing (60%, n = 65), with 25 individuals (23%) admitted from the parental home. The most frequently used individual setting at discharge (n = 28, 26%) was homeless hostels. Half (50%, n = 54) of the inpatients with housing need were discharged to a different accommodation type than they were admitted from. 28% (n = 30) of inpatients with housing need may be using the institutional circuit.

The ETHOS framework is diverse, inclusive and leads to a more sophisticated view of the extent of homelessness and housing exclusion on our acute wards. This flow into homelessness points to a possible normalisation of homeless discharge from acute units. It is important not to try to normalise discharging into homeless services, but to look at possible systems failures contributing to failed transitions from hospital. The ETHOS framework should be used regularly in acute wards to record and report homelessness and housing exclusion and in particular to report the numbers discharged to homeless services.

Luca Decembrotto, IT: Homeless People, Prison, and De-institutionalization: Access to Alternative Measures to Detention in Italy



Luca Decembrotto PhD, is Senior assistant professor / Research of Inclusive Education and Special Needs at the Department of Education Studies - University of Bologna. He is also Member of Fio.PSD Scientific Committee.

National and international literature have documented that homeless people have often experienced incarceration and release (Bergamaschi, 2017; Decembrotto, 2019; Herring et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2010; Metraux et al., 2008; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Wacquant (2004) assumes that penal systems and welfare systems are connected, both in a practical and in a discursive way, to control marginalized population. The effect of this is a multiplication of discriminations and further exclusion experiences. In Italy, for example, homeless people denied access to alternative measures to detention and support services at the release because they do not have a residence address.



16th European Research Conference

22nd and 23rd September, 2022



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In 2016 the “States-general on prison and alternative measures” declared that no personal condition (drug addiction, immigration, or homelessness) may be a reason for exclusion from social recovery opportunities and may deny the right to a residence address, a prerequisite for the effective access to important citizenship rights in Italy. This perspective is supported by law no. 123/2018, which specifies the issue of the residential address (art. 11), but the practices are not promoted by other intervention. During covid-19 pandemic, a ministerial project for social inclusion of homeless in alternative measures to detention (“Progetto di inclusione sociale per persone senza fissa dimora in misura alternativa”) financed a first experimentation in all Italian regions, in order to hold the prison overcrowding.

A focus group was conducted with members of Fio.PSD, due to highlight the strengths and the limitations of this kind of intervention. Despite a high level of expertise, the group has trouble with the complexity of integrating the challenges of homelessness and those of de-institutionalization from prison, with the limits imposed by the alternative measures’ rules. The ordinary responses to this kind of problem proved lacking, and it is necessary to reflect to find new formulas.