

Heroin users, housing and social participation: attacking social exclusion through better housing

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Research questions

- In what ways, if any do housing options affect the well-being and social function of heroin users?
- What changes in current service provision and housing policy would improve the social participation of heroin users?

Expected outcomes

- Informed public health and housing policy dialogue
- To provide policy makers with a coherent and comprehensive body of research.
- To give a voice to heroin users

Policy context

- Increasing public health interest in other policy systems
 - ◆ Employment
 - ◆ Education and training
 - ◆ Housing

ANCD and housing

- *Australian National Council on Drugs* argues for

‘a better understanding of the structural determinants, that is housing, employment, education, socio-economic status, etc. for drug use, and approaching the issue as a whole. Synonymous with treating both the symptoms and the cause, the Council believes that a better, longer term improvements can be attained by taking a holistic approach’

ADCA and housing

- *Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia* identifies factors associated with drug misuse including

‘housing, employment and family environment’

and argues that

‘State and Federal Government programs that target employment, housing, income support and family services are key players in primary prevention and should be recognised in the National Drug Strategic Framework’

What do we know?

- Lack of secure accommodation can be a cause and effect of illicit drug use
- Higher levels of drug use exist amongst the homeless
- Problems associated with drug use are exacerbated by the transient lifestyle
- Simple provision of housing can not be expected to solve the problem
- Dependency becomes an issue for between 15-25% of heroin users

Methodology

- Three study sites
 - City of Yarra
 - Inner city Melbourne
 - Geelong
 - Provincial city
 - Cabramatta
 - Western suburbs Sydney

Types of data

- In-depth interviews: 15 per site
 - ◆ Everyday life accounts of drug use, housing, health, income, etc
- Survey questionnaires: 50 per site
 - ◆ Follow up data on the above
- Focus groups: service providers
 - ◆ Housing, crisis accommodation, health
- Secondary data
 - ◆ Housing market, drug use etc

Housing tenure (%) in 1996

Local gov't area	Owner occupied	Private rental	Public housing
Yarra	44	39	12
Geelong	73	18	4
Fairfield	65	22	8

Housing affordability

Local gov't area	No advertised	No affordable	Per-cent affordable
Yarra	1150	23	2
Geelong	1324	980	74
Fairfield	4614	1246	27

Vic and NSW Rent Reports March 2001 quarter

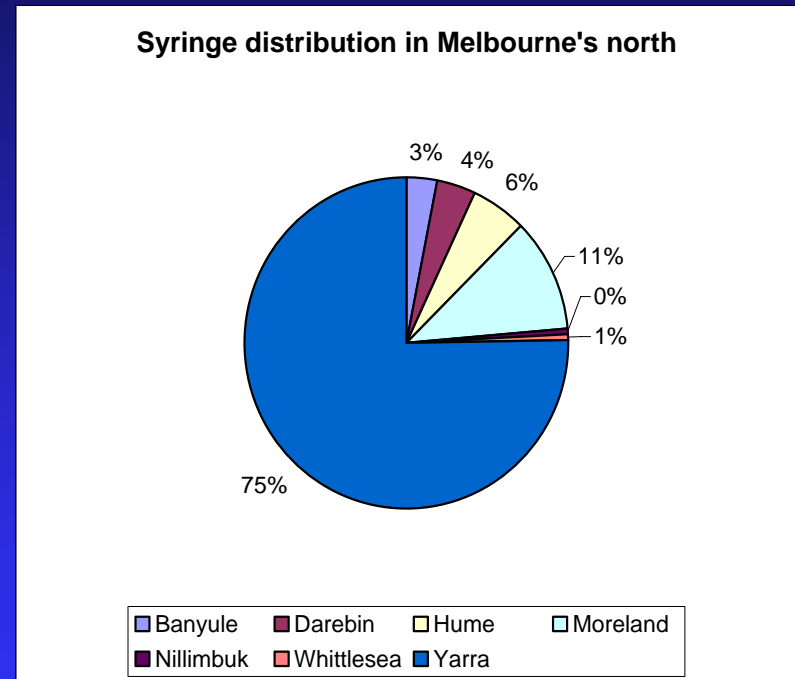
Interviews to-date

- Fifteen participants – City of Yarra
 - 1 in private rental
 - 5 in public housing
 - 9 in squats
 - All with distinctly different experiences

Context: drug use in Yarra

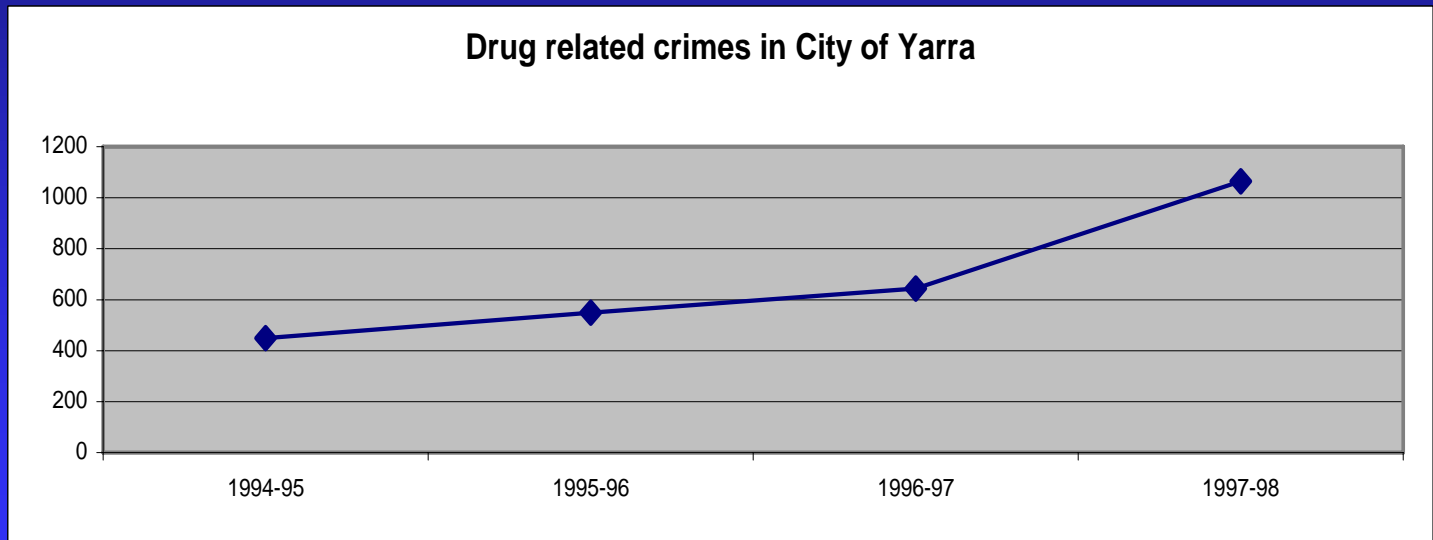
■ Syringes

- ◆ 75% of syringes distributed in Melbourne's north from eight sites in Yarra
- ◆ One site is opposite the Fitzroy public housing estate



Context: crime in Yarra

- Increased drug related crime



Yarra users: initial findings

- All experienced degree of heroin use dependence – 2.5 to 10+ yrs
- Heaviest habit - male / female couple using \$500 of heroin per day financed by shoplifting
- All experienced homelessness and stated that this impacted negatively on their drug use
- 4 dealt drugs to make extra income including one who allowed his public housing flat to be used for dealing drugs
- Income security payments supplemented by income from busking, window washing and theft
- Extent of drug use varied and not seen as necessarily a bad thing
- Family issues had and been issue for most problematic users
- 3 interviewees were pregnant (2 in squats, 1 in public housing)

User housing in Yarra

- Squats
 - ◆ Groups in unused buildings generally without services
- Public housing
 - ◆ Inner city high rise housing estates short waiting times
- Private rental
 - ◆ Scarce and expensive
- User housing aspirations
 - ◆ Security and comfort

Squats and drug use

I think squatting encourages people to use drugs a lot more because you are surrounded by it. For some reason it just seems to be that life style, everyone just seems to use, you are constantly seeing. But maybe the insecurity, you never know if you're going to be kicked out or not, so you tend to use more. I've noticed that when I've had stable environments I can control my using a lot better.

User: male, 26 yrs, using 6yrs, squatting 12 mths

Squats and safety

We sleep with an iron bar under the bed ... A lot of other people in the house use drugs and I'd say that they'd rip people off. You get rumors all the time that people are going to come around and bash this person ... if you've got anyone dealing that you're living with – that's the worst. You've got a lot of traffic ... a lot more things go missing and you've also got the threat of people doing 'run throughs', they come in and bash the dealer and take all his stuff ... they're likely to do it to other people in the house as well

User: female 28 yrs, using 7 yrs, squatting, pregnant, public housing applicant

Public housing and drugs

- Yarra public housing estates increased use and dealing from 1996
 - ◆ Vacancies increase but vary by estate
 - ◆ Dealing from flats increases
 - ◆ Safety issues for tenants and staff
 - ◆ Press reporting and reputation
 - ◆ Increasing drug related crime in Yarra
 - ◆ Enrolments at local high school decline disproportionately

Public housing: vacancies

Applicants make judgments in Yarra

Estate	Offers	Acceptances
Collingwood	260	50
Fitzroy	175	30
Richmond	40	20

March quarter 99

Public housing: dealing

- Dealers buy leases and use public spaces
- Most estate residents not involved
- OoH responses
 - ◆ Disrupt the market - tenancy verification, evictions and arrests
 - ◆ Increased security including concierge
 - ◆ Community development
 - ◆ Building up-grades
 - ◆ Additional inter-agency coordination

Public housing: safety

- Safety and fear issues vary by estate
- Tenants stay indoors because they are fearful of moving around the estates
- Tenants fearful of retribution for providing information about dealers
- Staff move in pairs and with security officer for home visits
- Sharps in public places

Public housing: reputation

Drugs arrests as police blitz flats

A FITZROY police blitz on crime in drug dealing and intimidation on the

Junkies' reign of terror

Flats become jails Kensington Public Tenants estate," Mr Clifford said. The on the estates keeping an eye on

MELBO news

Yarra is drug city

By INGRID SVENDSEN

the view that drugs were a problem for report, there were 57 drug-related

Public housing: user view

I wouldn't want my child brought up in high rise. I've had friends who have lived in high-rise and I've stayed in high-rise and I've spent enough time going up and down buying drugs in the high-rise. I don't really go out to the high-rise to buy drugs anymore. ... You would walk into the flat and there's the big guy ... you know they're wondering, 'how much money has he got on him?' You've got to worry about all of that. And there's the police and it's dirty – there are syringes everywhere ... The only thing they've got going for them is the view.

User: male, 26 yrs, using 6yrs, squatting 12 mths

Housing aspirations

- It would just make things easier. In a squat, you can't keep a lot of things there, things go missing.
- I just want to get out and get our own place. I'm just sick of living with other people that are dirty and just don't care about their health, let alone others.
- I get into gardening ... and doing things around the house. But when you're in a squat you can't ... you get bored a lot more ... when I have had a place, I've had little back yard so I've always got into gardening, it keeps you occupied a lot more.

Conclusion

- Users have housing histories and views
 - ◆ Transience choice and consequence
 - ◆ Personal control of domestic space
 - ◆ Housing drug market separation
- Options in Yarra
 - ◆ Private rental: expensive and limited
 - ◆ Public housing: easy access but unpopular
 - ◆ Squatting: autonomy, insecure and cheap