

Housing and heroin: housing issues in the lives of heroin users

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Introduction

- About the research
- Research questions
- Research design
- The research participants
- Users and their housing 'options'
- Heroin users and public housing
- Key findings
- Policy directions

About the research

- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
- The team
 - Judith Bessant ACU
 - Heidi Coupland UNSW
 - Tony Dalton RMIT
 - Lisa Maher UNSW
 - James Rowe RMIT
 - Rob Watts RMIT
- Report *Heroin users, housing and social participation: attacking social exclusion through better housing* available from <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/>

Research questions

- In what ways if any, do accommodation options affect the wellbeing and social experience of heroin users?
- In what ways does current service provision for long-term heroin users address their housing needs?
- What changes in current service provision and housing policies would improve the social opportunities of heroin users?

Research design

- Method

- User accounts of everyday life (47)
- Survey of users (130)
- Service provider focus groups

- Three locations with different housing markets

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

The research participants

- Recruited through service agencies and invited to tell their stories about
 - Leaving home
 - 'Housing career' over recent years
 - Drug use
 - Health
 - Income
 - Education and training
 - Community attitudes to heroin users

Housing at the time

	Geelong	Yarra	Cabramatta
Homeless including squats	-	8	5
Private rental - formal	6	1	5
Private rental - informal	2	1	3
Public housing	5	6	2
Community housing	2	-	-

Changing circumstances

now partly splitting time between a squat just up in Johnston St., and ah, some friends of mine who had been living in a house in Burnley [whose tenants had stopped paying rent in a dispute with the landlord].

Alex

I found out this morning, I wasn't there last night, the police came around and locked [the squat up]. At the moment as of now, I'm presently homeless ... I do have a couple of places I can doss and I have a girlfriend who is overseas at the moment

Mike

Leaving home

	Mean	Range	Total
Geelong	15	11-24	15
Yarra	14	5-19	14
Cabramatta	16	10-39	16

- No axiomatic connection between using and leaving home
- Reasons for leaving home include
 - Sexual and/or physical abuse
 - Conflict with parents or carers
 - 'Coming out to play'
 - Drug use

Income sources

	Geelong	Yarra	Cabramatta
Employed	2	4	-
Social security	14	16	15
Crime/Dealing	-	4	6

- Heroin use often leads to search for 'extra income'
- Definite views about 'ethical' crime and dealing

Education and training

- Overall low level of educational attainment
 - 20 per-cent completed secondary
 - 5 per-cent completed post secondary
 - 6 per-cent completed some post secondary
- English as a second language issue especially in Cabramatta

Users and their housing

- Private rental housing
- Public rental housing
- Short term accommodation
- Sleeping rough
- Big issues
 - Housing and health
 - Housing location
 - Housing and autonomy

Private rental housing

- Overall declining private rental affordability
- Affordability varies by location
- Discrimination by agents
- Shared rental houses can be complicated

Users cannot live together because, I don't care what anyone says, it's very hard to find a true friend that's a user because in the end the drug will always override. It's sad but it's true. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Mel

Public rental housing

- Affordable housing for low income households
- A priority system that can enable users to be fast tracked into affordable housing
- Difficult service and management issues

Two weeks ago I got public housing accommodation, so I have got my own flat. It's a breeze, the rent gets taken out of my dole check and I am clean as well ... we put down the area of Caulfield and Caulfield's got 14 supporting areas attached to it and Moorabbin is one of them but it is better than living in a high rise.

Bob

Short-term accommodation

- Boarding houses
- Community transitional housing
- Emergency accommodation
- Informal housing
- Family and friends

When me and (boyfriend) argue I say 'oh I'm sick of this place' and he always tells me, 'then fuck off. Pack your bags. Get out'. And I feel so ashamed because I've got nowhere to go. You know? And it's his house.

Elisabeth

Sleeping rough

- Parks, alley ways and under bridges
- Squatting in vacant houses and commercial properties

We sleep with an iron bar under our bed ... A lot of other people in the house use drugs and I'd say that they'd rip people off. You get rumours all the time that people are going to come around ... bash this person and that person. You sort of have a fear sometimes of people coming around. In some squats, if you've got anyone dealing when you're living with it, then that's the worst.

Lana

Big issues: health

- Good housing can
 - Promote better general and maternal health
 - Improve access to drug treatment services
 - Lower risks associated with injecting drugs

I know when I'm at home I'll have like a draw of surgical waters, clean syringes all the time. I never share but sometimes I do have to re-use my own syringe. Well you wouldn't do that at home. You'd have swabs all the time.

Mel

Big issues: location

- Good housing and a choice of location can be important for controlling drug use

We want to stop because we're sick of going out rorting every day, ... that's why we're planning to move to Mitcham, close to my girlfriend's parents for support as well... we want to go out there because [that's] the only way we can really stay off it ... You have to completely stop being in the environment where there is users and syringes

Sven

Big issues: autonomy

- Personal wellbeing is related to an individual's capacity to make decisions and good housing enhances this

[When] you get your own private place ... you can really start all over again there because ... it doesn't belong to someone. It's yours. You can start all over again. You can ... get your own furniture. You're not being ordered around by anyone.

Nikki

Users and public housing

- The only realistic option for low income dependant users
- User views about public housing
- Major service delivery issues
 - Public housing availability
 - Additional demands placed on the system
 - Establishing 'sustainable tenancies'

User views

- Public housing tenants
 - Generally satisfied with dwelling
 - Often unhappy with neighbourhood drug dealing

I am grateful for the roof that I have got over my head from the Ministry and that's why I would never loose the Ministry place. How pathetic if you can't keep it. I pay \$45 a week rent. It is not even a cap of heroin.

Vicki

Public housing availability

- Shortages of
 - Stock in all areas
 - One and two bedroom stock
- Concentration of stock reduces locational choice
- Drug dealing makes some areas unpopular and unsuitable

I guess the problem for us is that it's [drugs] bloody well everywhere and how could we allocate where we can feel confident they're not going to be having a supply really readily available. So ... it's really difficult to allocate more appropriately.

Housing officer

Additional demands

- Heroin use places additional demands on public housing system
 - Loss of residential amenity
 - Makes allocations more complex
 - Requires integration with other service systems

I guess there's this assumption particularly in the estates that the people on our estates, it's our problem and we're supposed to subsidise extra services and we need to coordinate them, which of course is really problematic for us

Housing officer

Sustainable tenancies

- Change in public housing system
 - Upgrading of public housing stock and only small growth
 - Change in work organisation eg. Housing Support Coordinators
- Additional demands on other service providers

I think what the issue is, for example here in Liverpool, who are we going to find to support a young person? There isn't the existence of those services here to support a young person in a tenancy in Liverpool

Youth worker

Key findings

- The reasons for heroin use vary as do the impacts
- Safe and secure housing has the potential to increase the wellbeing of heroin users
- The lack of stable housing makes injecting practices high-risk and increases the risk of infection
- There are a range of health benefits associated with secure housing
- Access to secure and affordable accommodation enhances an individual's capacity to make use of education and employment opportunities
- Public housing is the only affordable and secure housing option for low-income dependent users

Policy directions

- Social housing provision and improvement
 - Service integration development
 - Supply increase
 - Supply upgrade and reconfiguration
- Policy for locating drug markets in cities
 - ‘Pull’ the drug market out of public housing areas
 - Locate ‘elsewhere’ as a result of policy choice
- Engage heroin users in program development
- Extend housing service provider knowledge and understanding of drug issues and services