

S. Memedovic<sup>1</sup>, T. Slade<sup>1</sup>, M. Teesson<sup>1</sup>, L. Burns<sup>1</sup>, and E. Conroy<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales  
<sup>2</sup> University of Western Sydney



## BACKGROUND

- Homelessness tends to be a chronic problem with people cycling in and out of homelessness a number of times in their lives<sup>1</sup>
- As such, even after an individual has obtained housing, they may be in need of further assistance to avoid homelessness in the future
- Currently, however, very little is known about the characteristics of “formerly homeless” individuals
- The current study is the first to use a nationally representative sample to address *both* of the following questions:
  - What are the lifetime characteristics of formerly homeless individuals? and,
  - How does being formerly homeless impact on current psychosocial functioning?

## METHODS

### The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007

- N = 8841
- Response rate = 60%
- All individuals currently domiciled, asked about prior homelessness
  - “Have you ever been homeless”
  - “How long altogether were you homeless? Include times that you spent in shelters for the homeless” (30 days minimum required to classify as “formerly homeless”)

### Lifetime characteristics

- Socio-demographic characteristics
- DSM-IV Psychiatric disorders
  - Composite International Diagnostic Interview 3.0<sup>2</sup>
- Psychosocial characteristics
- Health characteristics

### Current psychosocial functioning (past 30 days)

- Psychological distress
  - Kessler Psychological Distress Scale<sup>3</sup>– 10 item (K10)
- Level of disability experienced
  - World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule II<sup>4</sup> (WHODAS)
- Number of days out of role

## ANALYSIS

### Lifetime profile

#### 1. Univariable Logistic Regressions

Outcome variable = homelessness  
 Predictor variables = lifetime profile characteristics

#### 2. Multivariable Logistic Regression

Variables significant at  $p < .20$  in step 1 entered into the model simultaneously

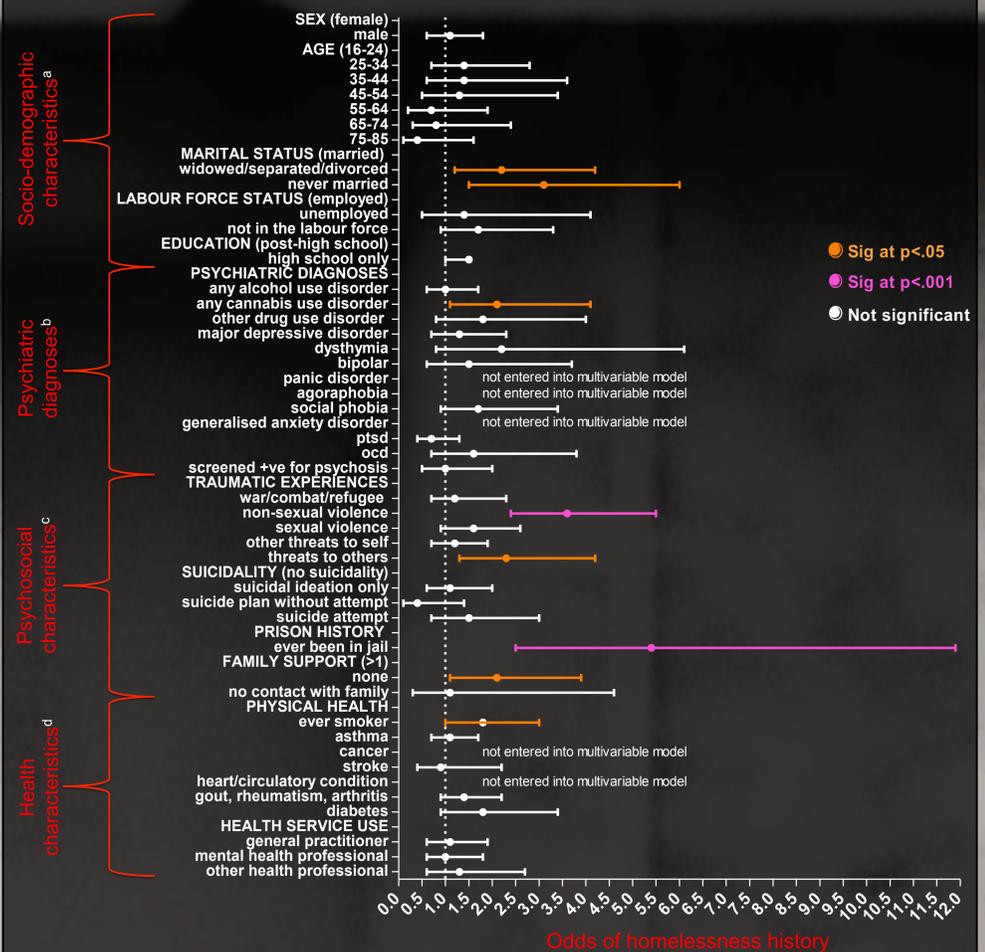
### Current psychosocial functioning

- 3 separate multivariable logistic regressions
  - homelessness predicting each of the three current functioning variables, while controlling for socio-demographic characteristics

## RESULTS

- 2.5% (n=245) of individuals reported a prior history of homelessness

**Figure 1. Lifetime profile results – multivariable logistic regression**  
 Odds of homelessness history among people with different socio-demographic, psychiatric, psychosocial and health profiles



<sup>a</sup> Reference category = in brackets. <sup>b</sup> Reference category = no disorder. <sup>c</sup> Reference category = in brackets / no trauma / no prison history. <sup>d</sup> Reference category = no health problems / no service use

A number of variables were uniquely associated with greater odds of homelessness, and in particular, prison history (OR 5.4) and experience of non-sexual violence (e.g. having been beaten by a partner; OR 3.6)

**Table 1. Current psychosocial functioning results**  
 Odds of poorer psychosocial functioning on the K10, WHODAS and Days out of role measures, among formerly homeless versus never homeless individuals

	K10: High/very high level of psychological distress			WHODAS: Clinically significant disability			Days out of role: 2 or more		
	OR <sup>a</sup>	Lower CI	Upper CI	OR <sup>a</sup>	Lower CI	Upper CI	OR <sup>a</sup>	Lower CI	Upper CI
Formerly homeless	2.6**	1.7	4.2	1.9*	1.3	2.8	2.1**	1.4	3.1

A history of homelessness uniquely predicted poorer functioning on all three indices of psychosocial functioning in the 30 days prior to the interview

## CONCLUSIONS

- Formerly homeless individuals have poorer lifetime profiles compared to individuals without a history of homelessness
- In addition, formerly homeless individuals are doing significantly worse in terms of their levels of psychological distress, levels of disability and the number of days out of role in the month preceding the interview
- Overall, the findings suggest that despite obtaining housing, formerly homeless individuals remain a disadvantaged group that require ongoing support and attention to avoid future homelessness
- By describing the characteristics and needs of formerly homeless individuals these findings may inform the development of support programs for homeless people after they have obtained housing

## REFERENCES

- Chamberlain, C., Johnson, G. & Theobald, J. (2007). *Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge*. RMIT University Press, Melbourne
- Kessler, R.C., & Ustun, T.B. (2004). The World Mental Health (WMH) Survey Initiative Version of the World Health Organization (WHO) Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI). *The International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 13, 83-117
- Kessler, R. C., Andrews, G., Colpe, E. et al (2002). Short screening scales to monitor population prevalences and trends in non-specific psychological distress. *Psychological Medicine*, 32, 959-976
- World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule II (WHODAS II). 2001. URL: <http://www.who.int/icidh/whodas/index.html>.