

Title: “We ended up doing more rough sleeping just to be together”: Homeless drug users’ experiences of hostel living and intimate relationships

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Abstract:

Background: Emergency hostels and night shelters accommodate and support some of the most vulnerable individuals in society. **Aims:** Our overall study aim is to provide insights into hostel living that will lead to service improvements. In this presentation, we explore experiences of hostel living and intimate relationships. **Design:** Semi-structured qualitative interviews analysed inductively. **Setting:** Participants were recruited from homeless day centres, street beggars, Big Issue sellers, needle exchanges and other homelessness and drug services in London and South Central England. **Participants:** 40 homeless drug users (29 men and 11 women) who had all recently stayed in emergency hostels or shelters. **Findings:** Important issues relating to intimate relationships within hostel accommodation emerged. Consistent with previous research, we found that love and sexual relationships were often discouraged by service providers. This was because homeless drug users’ romantic relationships tended to be seen as exploitative, potentially violent, destructive and detrimental to recovery by hostel staff. Furthermore, hostel policies often made it difficult for individuals to form new relationships or to sustain existing long-term relationships. Despite this, our data show that intimate relationships between homeless drug users can be highly supportive. Moreover, many homeless drug users would welcome more support for couples within the hostel system. **Conclusions:** Current policies and negative attitudes towards intimate relationships within the hostel setting potentially minimise hostel residents’ access to social capital and so hinder one fundamental aim of the hostel environment: to enable individuals to move on to independent living.

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Conflict of Interest declaration:

The authors report that there is no conflict of interest.