An Empirical Study of Homelessness and Crime

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INTRODUCTION

Defining Homelessness

Homelessness is difficult to define. As simple as it may seem to define it as someone who does not have a home, there are numerous factors relating to someone being homeless. The definition usually depends on the 'objectives and ethos' of the defining organisation (Ravenhill, 2008). Accordingly, this can be problematic for the development and implementation of policy designed to tackle homelessness. In the UK, however, the legal definition for homelessness is relatively broad. A person is legally defined as homeless if:

1. They do not have a home in the UK or abroad.

2. They have no home where they can live with their immediate family or carer.

3. They only have access to shelter on a temporary basis (for example, a short-stay hostel or staying on a friend's sofa).

4. They are not legally permitted to stay where they are.

5. They cannot live at home due to violence, threats or abuse.

6. They cannot afford to stay where they are.

7. They live in a property that is in very poor condition.

8. They live in a mobile home (such as a caravan).

(The Housing Act, 1996, Part VII).

This legal definition suggests that there are many circumstances which could be considered homelessness. 'Sofa-surfing' (sleeping at the home, often on the couch, of friends and family members), for example, is seen here as a form of homelessness. Similarly, residing at a homeless hostel (which is the case for all homeless participants in this research) or temporarily staying in a hotel or bed and breakfast is also considered homelessness. The causes of homelessness, according to the above legal definition can also be complicated. Such a situation could be the result of domestic violence, lack of affordability, lack of close familial ties or as a

result of legal complications around tenancies or unlawful eviction. The circumstances constituting homelessness for the purposes of this research will therefore be accordingly broad.

Homelessness is certainly one of the most vulnerable situations any individual can find themselves in. According to Crisis (2019) those who are homeless die on average at the age of 47 years old. Sadly, the rate of suicide among those who are homeless is nine times higher than for the general population. Substance and alcohol misuse and dependency is common in homeless communities, as are issues with mental and physical health. Those who are homeless are more likely to become victims of crime. Crucially, as will be shown throughout this dissertation, crime is common among homeless groups.

Aims and Objectives

There are three main aims of this research:

1. *To identify whether people who are homeless have higher rates of offending than those who are not homeless.*

There is little empirical evidence to highlight that those who are homeless commit higher rates of offending. It is important to establish whether or not this is the case.

2. *To identify any patterns of offending amongst homeless populations.*

Type and frequency of offending will be explored. For example, homeless people may be more likely to shoplift than commit violent crime or they may be more likely to offend during certain times of the year such as the Christmas season. This research will aim to identify patterns of offending by homeless people.

3. *To identify the wider context of offending among those who are homeless.*

If it is found that homeless people do commit more crime, then it is important to understand the context in which that occurs. The research will aim to gain a qualitative understanding of the factors that influence homeless people to commit crime.

The overall objective of the research is to identify the basic context of offending among homeless populations. As explained above, the research is relatively thin in this area and there are many benefits to expanding on this. The overall aim, therefore, is to demonstrate the need for more research into the context of homelessness and offending.

Structure

In order to meet these aims, the research will be divided into the following 5 chapters:

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter will outline current research into homelessness and its association with offending. The complex nature of homelessness will be outlined, aiming to make clear that homelessness should not be considered something that generally 'just happens' to anyone, at any time, with no predictable risk factors. A brief outline of homeless services in the UK will be outlined. Current research into the way homeless people are more likely to become victims of crime will be discussed before considering research into the ways homelessness can be 'criminogenic' – it can be seen as a *cause* of offending. The limitations in the literature regarding the ways homelessness can be criminogenic will be highlighted, focusing specifically on the reality that there is very little qualitative research into this. Finally, the usefulness of the research will be outlined.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Setting

Here, the methodology and research design will be described. There will be an outline of the hostels that the research took place within and an explanation of recent changes to the setup

and design of these hostels will be given. The sampling technique will be described and the process of conducting the semi-structured interviews with hostel clients and staff will be outlined. Finally, there will be a discussion of ethical considerations and the actions taken to ensure ethical practice during the research.

Chapter 3: Results and Analysis

This chapter will outline some of the specific themes identified in discussion with hostel clients and staff. It will begin with an analysis of the prevalence of offending of clients in the hostel, as recorded by hostel staff during risk assessment. A thematic analysis of discussions with clients and staff will demonstrate how the physical design of the hostels may impact on offending behaviour and relationships between clients and staff. Some of the complexities arising from the use of substances by those living in homeless groups will be presented as well as some interesting thoughts about the ways in which the police interact with those who are homeless.

Chapter 4: Stigmatised and Anomic Lifestyles

This chapter will be a continuation of data presentation, with a focus on framing discussion with clients and staff through sociological theory. The notion of anomie will be used as a lens to understand and interpret themes identified through interview. Issues of stigma will be identified and discussed through notions of labelling and police and public bias towards those who are homeless.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This final chapter will return to the original aims of the research. The importance and usefulness of homelessness for criminological study will be outlined along with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will outline and summarise the main areas of research concerning crime in the context of homelessness. It is important to first discuss 'who' becomes homeless. Literature addressing general perceptions of those who are homeless will be presented before critically evaluating the notion that 'anyone can become homeless'. A general overview of homeless services and provision will be provided before considering literature on the victimisation of those who are homeless. Limitations in the literature will then be identified before outlining the notion of homelessness as 'criminogenic'. The usefulness of research into this notion will then be considered.

1.1 Who becomes homeless?

Daly (1996) identifies the common (and misleading) notion of the homeless as: 'alcoholics' or 'substance abusers', 'shopping bag ladies' and the 'deinstitutionalised' (p. 20). It is rightly acknowledged here that this notion does not represent the "heterogeneous assortment of people" who suffer from homelessness. Rather, homeless communities consist of, among others:

"*low-income single mothers, battered women with children who have fled their homes, workers displaced by economic change, runaway youths and abused youngsters, elderly people on low fixed incomes, those who suffer physical and mental health disabilities, substance abusers, people who are transient as a result of seasonal work, domestic strife, or personal crises, recent immigrants, refugees… ex-prisoners and those recently discharged from detention or detoxification centres or mental hospitals*" (Daly, 1996, p. 20).

Heerde et al (2014) argue that homelessness is not simply the absence of physical shelter but is often also marked by marginalisation, a reduced ability to engage in education and employment, financial hardship, engagement in risk behaviours and increased exposure to crime and victimisation. Implicit in this discussion is the reality that homelessness rarely

presents itself as an individual, singular issue. If there are not many issues which do not contribute towards the root cause of homelessness, then there are certainly many which present themselves once an individual finds themselves in such a situation. Homelessness affects a large variety of people from an extensive diversity of ethnic, cultural and economic backgrounds and the reasons for people becoming homeless are just as wide-ranging.

Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) challenge the common notion that 'anyone can become homeless'. This notion is common in both academic discussion as well as in wider public debate. For example, they point to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016):

"*The reality is, almost anyone can experience poverty. Unexpected events such as bereavement, illness, redundancy or relationship breakdown are sometimes all it can take to push us into circumstances that then become difficult to escape"* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016, p. 4).

Also presented by Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) is an article by Marsh (2016) entitled *I am well-spoken and not an addict': How homelessness can happen to anyone*. This piece outlines the experience of 'Tom', who had returned home to London after living abroad to bury his father. He had no contacts within the city, was estranged from his family and did not know his National Insurance number. After failing to find work and "struggling to reintegrate into the social welfare system", 'Tom' found himself living on the streets. While accepting them as 'well meaning', Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) make the case that statements such as 'anyone can become homeless' don't reflect a grounded reality of homelessness and its causes:

"*do such 'inclusive' narratives, with their implicit appeal to enlightened self-interest as a galvanizing moral force, distract from the reality of a profoundly unequal set of risks, and potentially disguise deeper structural and other causes that may be identifiable, and possibly also preventable, should the political will be found?*" (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018, pp. 96-97).

This is an interesting perspective which resists the common image of the homeless simply as random victims, stricken by unforeseeable misfortune. There is indeed the potential for one to lose their job, to fall out with family and friends, lose their home or become addicted to drugs or alcohol. There is a very real chance for this happen to any individual and for this to lead to homelessness. However, there is much higher chance for such outcomes to be the result of serious, more long-term and known risk factors. Childhood poverty is the most important predicting risk factor suggested by Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018). This is closely followed by behavioural support needs during teenage years and a lack of social support networks in both adolescence and adulthood. Long term substance misuse is another very clear predictive indicator of adult homelessness. It should be clear then, according to Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018), that "homelessness is *not* randomly distributed along the population" (p. 112). It is predictable, but not inevitable, and based on a variety of identifiable risk factors which are often, but not always, outside of the wider control of the individual.

There are other factors which are known to cause homelessness. Those leaving prison are at a high risk of becoming homeless (Crisis, 2019). Many leave prison with no close contacts such as friends and family, little to no money and with the formal and informal stigma associated with offending (Homeless Link, 2011). This makes it difficult for prison leavers to find private rented accommodation, often resulting in them having to seek help from the local council which will often offer them a place in a hostel. As already discussed, living in a homeless hostel is indeed still considered to be homelessness and the findings of this research will demonstrate that hostel living does indeed come with many of the same problems associated with wider homeless situations such as sleeping rough.

1.2 Homeless Services in the U.K.

According to The Housing Act 1996, local councils have a legal duty to assess those who present as homeless and to support them to find permanent accommodation should they be found to be homeless (Citizens Advice, 2018; The Housing Act, 1996; Wilson & Barton, 2018). In most cases, temporary accommodation is to be provided, often in the form of a hostel and occasionally a B&B if a hostel environment is deemed unsuitable. Any individual can apply for support with housing if they are currently homeless or if they expect to become homeless within eight weeks. An application should be made to the local council. Each council has its own individual process to support and house those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, but all are obligated by the same legal framework.

There are a number of processes, resources and services which are involved in meeting the legal obligations put onto local councils to house a person who is homeless. One of the most common is for a person to temporarily reside at a homeless hostel. Temporarily can mean anything from a day to over a year. Homeless hostels usually work directly with the council (for example, through their 'Housing Options' service). Hostels which work in this way tend to bid on contracts, offering their services based on a proposed payment amount made by the local council. This means that a homeless hostel becomes tied to the statutory obligation to house those who are homeless. Some hostels are more independent, able to self-fund through fundraising activities. These hotels do not have the same statutory requirement to house people and therefore may have stricter rules and are more able to 'ban' individuals from using the service.

1.3 Victimisation

"*Of all groups in English and Welsh society, [those who are homeless] are probably most at risk from crime although their marginality renders much of their experience quite invisible*" (Newburn & Rock, 2006: 121).

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), formally known as the British Crime Survey (BCS), excludes homeless people from its sample (Office for National Statistics, 2018). This makes it difficult to compare rates of victimisation of those who are homeless with those who are not within the largest, most comprehensive data set on victimisation the UK has to offer (Ballintyne, 1999). Research shows that those who are homeless report much higher levels of victimisation that those who are not. Ballintyne (1999) reports that four out of five of those who have been street homeless report that they have been a victim of at least one crime. In the same study, 62 per cent had been victims of verbal harassment more than once, 53 per cent had experience of more than one incident of threatening behaviour and two in five had been repeated victims of personal theft and common assault. Crisis (2019) states that around 30 per cent of those who are sleeping rough experience violence such as being hit or kicked. Furthermore, homeless individuals are far less likely to report crimes against them to the police (Ballintyne, 1999; Newburn & Rock, 2006), with about half the rate of reporting compared to those who are not homeless.

An interesting finding from Newburn & Rock (2006) is that the perpetrators of crime against those who are homeless appear to be primarily by members of the public. Victims report that this is the case with a number of types of offences, including burglary, violence, threats, sexual assault, and criminal damage. The only type of offence which was slightly more common from other homeless people was theft.

Those who are homeless are far less likely to access victim support services (Newburn & Rock, 2006) which makes sense alongside work by Shiner (1995) who showed that they make far less use of health and social support services.

1.4 Limitations in the Literature

The literature outlined so far represents a part of a wealth of research into the personal experiences of those who are and have been homeless. Current literature primarily focuses on homelessness as a public health concern, youth homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, government and NGO policies and strategies for preventing and reducing homelessness, and qualitative general descriptions of the experiences of those who are or have been homeless. However, very little research is focused on homelessness and its relation to crime. The research areas outlined above are indeed crucial to an understanding of homelessness. Indeed, much of it, as will be seen in this research, is vital to a full understanding of homelessness and its relationship to crime. However, there appears to be a gap in the knowledge regarding what factors may influence those who are homeless to offend. In fact, there appears to be little research even into rates of offending of those who are homeless.

1.5 Homelessness as Criminogenic

There some are exceptions, however. Homeless Link (2011) focuses specifically on reoffending among previous offenders who are homeless. The focus here is on how services can work better to support service users who are long term offenders. Faraji *et al's* (2018) recent research shows rises in property crime in areas where emergency winter accommodation had been provided – a rise of up to 56 per cent within 100 metres of the accommodation. This research, however, is based in Canada and therefore may not apply in the UK. Snow et al (1989) introduced evidence that homeless men have higher arrest rates for property crime, intoxication and theft but argued that there was little evidence to support the notion that homeless people

tend to be more violent or dangerous than non-homeless people. This study was conducted in the US and is too dated to confidently apply to present day Britain. Similarly, Tsai & Rosenheck's (2013) study of homeless veteran's showing higher than average involvement in crime was conducted in the US and is therefore difficult to apply to the UK.

DeLisi (2000) found in a comparative study of domiciled and homeless offenders that those who were homeless were more likely to commit violent crime. Those who were homeless had on average four times as many incidents of violent crime historically than those who were domiciled. Interestingly, it was found that homeless perpetrators of violent crime were more likely to use weapons than those who were domiciled – assumed here as a result of danger and a need for self-defence when living on the street. Homeless offenders were also more likely to commit 'nuisance' crimes as well as property crime. While this study goes some way to highlight the link between homelessness and offending, it relies on statistical data and falls short of elaborating on why these links are observed. Furthermore, the sample is small for a statistical comparison (100 homeless and 100 domiciled offenders) and is based in one city (Colorado) in the USA. In another US study, Jasinski *el al* (2005) support the findings of DeLisi (2000) in that they found that homeless men and women were more likely to offend than the wider population. They reason that higher rates of offending in this context are mainly due to survival needs though they do not provide much supporting evidence for this – not surprising or necessarily a weakness of their research since it was primarily an exploration of the homeless as victims of crime.

Again, based in the US, Fischer *et al* (1993) also provide evidence of much higher rates of offending by those who are homeless. In their study of homeless people in Baltimore, an increase of four times the arrest rate compared to those who are not homeless was found. It was found that homeless men offend at a higher rate than women and their offences tend to be more

serious. Interestingly, homeless women who were arrested were much more likely to also suffer from either mental health issues or substance addiction, while this had no impact on the arrest rates for men. Snow *et al* (1989) also found higher arrest rates of homeless men. It is suggested here that offending in this context is a result of being homeless

Williams *et al* (2012) give a useful analysis of data regarding the relationship between those in UK prisons and their previous housing situations. Among recent prison inmates, 15 per cent reported being homeless before prison. 44 per cent had only been in their accommodation for one year and 60 per cent believed having somewhere to live was important for them to reduce their offending. 79 per cent of those who had reported homelessness before being sent to prison reoffended and were sent back to prison within one year of release compared with 47 per cent of those who did not report prior homelessness. A report by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) argues that homelessness creates substantial public spending. It is suggested here that homeless crime significantly contributes to this cost, though the provided evidence and data to support this claim is relatively thin and it is recognised that there is difficulty in measuring the actual cost.

McCarthy & Hagan (1991; 1992) present a convincing argument that homelessness is a 'criminogenic situation' in that crime is an 'effect' or outcome of homelessness. They found that rates and seriousness of offending by young people increased when they became homeless. It is argued here that the effects of homelessness are more convincing as an explanation for crime than background variables – homelessness is criminogenic, it causes crime. Furthermore, the longer someone is homeless, the more likely they are to offend. McCarthy & Hagan (1992) in particular argue that there has been an abandonment of traditional theories to explain crime in the context of homelessness. They argue for the use of control and strain theories to examine and explore homelessness theoretically – something this research will aim to do. Further

research is suggested here including into why longer periods of homelessness increase rates of offending. However, it appears that little work has been done in this area. Heerde, et al. (2014) found in an international cross-study on homelessness and violence that homeless youth are more likely to become victims of violence and may be more likely to commit violent crime. It was recommended here that more research is required on the topic.

While surely not accounting for the totality of research into crime committed by the homeless, this short literature review has outlined much of it. There is surprisingly little investigation into the notion of the homeless as perpetrators of crime, though almost all that has been conducted shows that crime is more prevalent among those who are homeless compared to those who are not. Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) passively outline (they are not referring to crime) a potential reason for this in their discussion on differing ideological positions in the study of homelessness:

"*In part because of the connotations of 'blameworthiness' implied by many individually focussed accounts, most academic commentators in the UK have historically favoured structuralist, housing market-based explanations of homelessness*" (p. 97).

This could potentially account for the lack of research qualitatively exploring the context of homeless crime. This dissertation will aim to directly address such a link, though it should be noted that there is no suggestion here that those who are homeless necessarily commit crime (many don't). Furthermore, this research is an examination of the factors which may lead homeless individuals to offend – it is an analysis of the *why* and the *how*. The purpose is therefore certainly not to 'blame' those in such difficult and complex situations but rather to gain a fuller understanding of them.

1.6 The Usefulness of the Research

Much of the literature does suggest that homelessness and crime are connected. Indeed, perhaps it is obvious – though this does not mean that it should be immune from research. There are many reasons why research into homeless crime would be useful:

1. Correlations may be drawn between specific homeless situations and increases or decreases in rates of offending. For example, is rough sleeping more criminogenic than staying in a hostel?

2. Research can inform practice for those working with the homeless. For example, if certain demographics are more at risk of offending then preventative measures could be put into place.

3. Research can inform policy. Ballintyne (1999) states:

"*despite the attention being given to street homelessness through work on social exclusion, the issues of street homelessness and crime have tended to focus upon rough-sleepers as offenders, with the policy debate exploring the potential for 'zero tolerance' policing to reduce offending and reassure the public*." (p. 94).

While this research is relatively dated, the statement is still relevant. More research is needed on the causes of homeless offending if effective policy is to be enacted.

4. An understanding of the context of homeless crime could inform the criminal justice system on the most effective prevention, intervention and sentencing measures.

5. Current criminological theory could be tested and adapted to explain and understand the context of homeless crime.

6. An understanding of the way homeless people commit crime can help to recognise the ways they are constructed as criminals.

7. Pleace (2015) points out that there is a need for better evidence on the costs of homelessness. A more comprehensive understanding of how homelessness is linked with crime would be useful in understanding the costs associated with homeless crime.

In light of the literature review presented here, and the gaps within the research identified, this dissertation will aim to consider offending within the context of homelessness.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND SETTING

This chapter will outline the setting and methodology used to collect data within the hostel's studied. First, a description of the hostels 'then' and 'now' will be given. This is because changes in hostel provision in the city these hostels are located within was identified by staff and clients interviewed as an important factor. The sampling technique, process of conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting quantitative data on the prevalence of offending by clients will be outlined. There will be a critical analysis of the data collection process used to collect quantitative data in this case. Finally, a discussion of ethical considerations will be provided.

2.1 The Hostels

During my time in the hostels conducting this research, a number of unexpected themes arose. One of those themes centred around the physical setup and process of the hostels. This information was gathered through informal discussion with staff in the hostels as well as in formal interviews. Staff agreed that I could take notes during informal discussions as I had noted that the discussion was relevant. The information below outlining the hostels 'then' and 'now' was collected through such discussions.

The research was conducted in homeless hostels in a large, Northern UK city. Over the past three years there have been substantial changes to the way the services are set up and delivered. Discussions with both clients and staff often involved a distinction between 'then and now' – how the issues discussed in the interviews were impacted by the way the hostels were designed

previously and the way they functioned currently. For this reason, 'then' and 'now' will be described. The importance of this distinction will become apparent during analysis of responses given by both staff and clients during interview.

All of the members of staff that participated in the research had worked with homeless people for a number of years – almost all had consistently worked in hostels, but some had worked with other types of services too (such as 'Street Outreach' services). Similarly, all of the participants had a relatively long history of intermittent or persistent homelessness. For example, some had been between the streets, prison and homeless hostels consistently for a number of years, while some had acquired tenancies but had become homeless again at some point. In some cases, this had happened on a number of occasions and was identified as a 'normal' pattern for some individuals living in the hostels – their situation can be described as 'long-term'. Interestingly, many of the clients living in the hostels knew the staff and had engaged in the services 'then', in the previous arrangements.

'Then'

Approximately three years prior to this research, the way homeless hostels in this particular city were arranged was significantly different. Firstly, the previous setup mainly provided accommodation in large, city centre buildings. It was common for a hostel to occupy between 25 and 50 individuals in one building. Clients generally had their own room, with a key, and a 'tenancy agreement'. Toilets, showers and baths were shared and there was usually a shared 'TV lounge', a shared kitchen, shared (and locked) laundry room. In every hostel there was a staff office which remained locked. Clients were often invited into the staff office but could not simply walk in. The main reason for this was for the privacy of clients who were receiving support in the office, as well as the need to keep personal documents, which were kept in the office, secure and confidential.

According to those who worked in them, these hostels were generally monitored by CCTV. In one hostel, for example, staff explained that there were more 30 CCTV cameras on the property. These covered almost every area of the hostel (all four floors, containing nearly 40 rooms). The only areas which were not covered by CCTV were inside the bedrooms and bathrooms, some parts of the staff offices and the laundry room, which remained locked. There were large kitchens, but these were locked throughout the night. Furthermore, entry to this hostel was gained via an iron gate, which was electronically locked. For any of the nearly 40 clients to enter, they needed to press the buzzer which was connected to an intercom system, identify themselves verbally, while also being identified on CCTV. This gained them access to the garden area. They would then need to buzz on another electronically locked door, whereby they could be seen by a member of staff in the office. Clients were able to come and go as they pleased but if they were not seen during the day then staff would go and check their room as a safety precaution. If a client was not seen for three days, then they risked losing their room as they were considered to 'not be using the bed'. In this case, a client may return after a week away to find that they no longer had a place at the hostel.

'Now'

Recent changes to homeless hostel provision in this city have meant that the services operate differently in some ways. First, and perhaps most importantly, the hostels are now much smaller. The large (up to 40 room) hostels have now been split into a larger number of smaller services housing between 6 and 14 clients. The hostels have also relocated further outside of the city centre, now residing between half a mile and two miles outside of the city centre as opposed to essentially being inside of it. The hostels now resemble shared houses. Clients still have their own room, with a key, and they still share bathroom and toilet facilities, a TV lounge, kitchen and laundry room. The laundry rooms and kitchens are no longer locked at any point

and the clients can use them as they please. There are still CCTV cameras in operation, but these are fewer than in previous setups. Clients no longer have to use an intercom to enter the building. Staff advised that there was a code which clients can use to enter the building. This is regularly changed and there are times when clients are not given the code. This is enforced when there are concerns that people who are not permitted to be in the building (those who do not live there) are gaining access as they have been given the code by a client. A key difference here, however, is that clients simply must ring a bell and a member of staff greets them at the door to let them in – there is no intercom system and no iron gate. This more recent setup considered 'less formal' and more 'relaxed'.

Staff monitor clients as they come and go from the hostel. Hostel policy is that each client must be seen or spoken to at least twice a day unless they have advised that they will be away for any given period of time. As with the old system, clients risk losing their place at the hostel if they are considered to not be using the service, although the new system is much more flexible. If a client is not seen, and staff are not able to contact then for over a week, then a decision may be made to open the room for another client. There are no objective timeframes for this, however, and each client is considered individually in this case. For example, a client may be given more flexibility if they are known to be particularly vulnerable or they are identified as living particularly chaotic lives.

Across both hostel setups, each client is provided with a key worker, who will get to know them individually. However, all clients can seek support from staff at the hostel at any time. Clients are expected to engage with their key worker and meet with them at least once a week to discuss support and long-term housing related issues. Staff at the hostels advised that this works well with some clients but said that some clients struggle to engage.

2.2 Sampling Technique

This researcher has worked at one of the hostels studied as a full-time member of staff but currently works there 'when needed' as a member of 'bank staff'. This association allowed the opportunity to gain access to the hostels in order to conduct the research. Information Sheets (see Appendix) were handed to staff and clients at the hostel. It was verbally explained to potential participants that I was hoping to study offending in the context of homelessness and therefore would like to interview them. Clients were advised to let myself or a member of staff know if they would like to participate and members of staff were asked to let me know directly if they chose to take part. No other prompts were given to ask for participation.

A mixture of male and female clients chose to participate. In one hostel, one female client agreed to be interviewed, and one male client agreed to take part in another hostel. Two members of staff were also interviewed – both female. Participants were from a variety of age ranges. Their age was not asked for, but they ranged from approximately 22 – 65. All clients interviewed had been homeless on more than one occasion and had stayed at a number of homeless hostels. All members of staff interviewed had worked in homelessness for more than five years and had worked in both the 'new' and 'old' types of hostel. Interestingly, one member of staff interviewed had a background in academic social science and social work fields – this certainly had an impact on the way they discussed and articulated ideas during interview. One member of staff did not have any formal education. It should be noted that this does not in any way reflect the validity or usefulness of answers given, but it was noticed that some were able to identify issues and phenomena occurring in the hostel through an academic social science framework – this will be elaborated on further in the analysis of results.

2.3 Method 1: Small Scale Quantitative data collection

Some basic information held by the hostels on the offending histories of clients in the hostels were collected. This data was taken from client's files, held by the hostels and updated regularly by staff. The information taken for this research was from risk assessments, which are created by staff at the hostel or updated if they had originally been completed by a different service that uses the same risk assessment documentation.

Overall, data on 18 clients was collected from two homeless hostels. This represents all of the clients currently receiving support from the two hostels studied. In some cases, the clients did not live within the hostel itself, but rather resided in a property close by and continued to receive support from the hostels. The goal of such an arrangement is to help clients to become more independent and prepare them for a more long-term tenancy.

There are, however, some issues with this data and the way that it was originally collected by the participating services that should be addressed. First, the data collected comes from two sources – self-reported by the client or reported by a secondary service or agency. In either case, this gets recorded during a risk assessment process when a client moves into the hostel. Risk assessment is updated as more information becomes available if it is not originally disclosed by the client or another service. The issue with self-reported offending is first that a client may choose not to disclose offending history, or they may claim that they have committed offences which they have not committed. There is no system to conduct a full DBS check or similar process, and information is not commonly requested from the police or other criminal justice organisations. Therefore, this data is not necessarily valid.

A second issue with this data is that there is little to no information which adds context to or expands on the offences recorded in client's files. A risk assessment report may simply identify that a client has a history of violence, drug related offending or anti-social behaviour, for

example, while not providing any form of rich data on the context of the offence or offending behaviour. Furthermore, there is no system to record the rate of offending for any particular client. For example, it may have been recorded during risk assessment that a client has a history of violent offending. This could mean that the client has any number previous violent offences – it could be that the client has been arrested for their one and only violent offence, or it could be that the client has engaged in and been arrested and convicted for several offences over the course of a number of years. Such data simply is not recorded in these particular settings as a matter of standard process. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated in *Chapter 3*, the data proved useful and was therefore included in the research. The justification for this will be outlined during the analysis of results in the third chapter.

'Type' of offence was recorded. These were split into 9 categories, based on which offences were observed in client's files. Similar problems arise here because there is no consistent process aimed at classifying offence types within the hostels. However, they were categorised for the purposes of this research. These categories were chosen because they best represent the language used by the hostels within risk assessments:

- **Drug related** (including both possession and supply)

- **'Drunk and disorderly'** (this term was used four times, there was little variation or other offence type which could be considered similar)

- **Anti-Social behaviour** (again, used four times in risk assessment)

- **Violent offences** (any mention of violent offending. There is a section in the risk assessment which specifically asks if there is any indication of previous violent offending)

- **Criminal Damage**

- **Directly related to homelessness** (mainly referring to 'rough sleeping' which has had police or legal intervention).

- **Burglary**

- **Shoplifting**

- **Related to sex work** (offences occurring during the process of engaging in sex work).

Once these categories had been formulated, a basic tally system was used to mark each time a type of offence was identified in each clients' file. This was done in no specific order and no further information about the context was obtained (not least because such information was not available).

2.4 Method 2: Semi Structure Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to guide discussion with participants. A loose set of questions were prepared, though these were not asked in any structured way. These were designed to keep participants on topic and to guide the conversation if the participants were not sure what to discuss. Participants were given the opportunity to discuss issues at their own pace and were given the opportunity to discuss any topic that they wanted to in response to questions posed to them. The aim was to create a space for natural conversation rather than a directed back and forth, question and answer session.

A loose set of questions prepared and used in interviews included:

- Does being homeless make someone more likely to offend compared to the general population?

- Would you say that these sorts of issues are common in homeless hostels?

- If a person was to become homeless, who had never been homeless before and had never committed a crime in their life, would there be an impact on them in terms of crime?

- Do you think there is anything that could be done to reduce how homelessness might impact on crime?

These questions were asked at different stages during the interviews in order for the participant to have as natural and unguided opportunity to discuss what they felt were the most important issues. Furthermore, some of the questions were asked in slightly different ways and some questions were not asked at all in some interviews. This is clear in the transcripts provided. For this reason, every participant was made aware of the general objective of the research – to explore the way homelessness might lead to offending, before the interview. No more specific information was provided other than this basic statement.

The interviews took place in a dedicated interview room in the hostels which were monitored via CCTV but did not monitor sound. Every participant was interviewed individually – there were no group interviews. Clients were given the option to take breaks but none of them requested this.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this dissertation was granted by the Local Research Ethics Committee at Leeds Beckett University on 02 April 2019.

There were a number of ethical issues to address for this piece of research. Firstly, it should be noted that I am obligated to conduct research in an ethical way not only by the university, but also by the hostels. I have worked with the hostels for several years and I continue to do so. Therefore, I have both academic and professional commitments to conduct the research in an ethical manner.

Data gathered throughout each interview was voice recorded on a secure device which was not connected to the internet. This was taken home and transcribed within one week. Once an interview had been transcribed, the voice recording was deleted. All transcriptions removed all possible identifying information such as names and specific places. Transcriptions were kept in random order, with no obvious way to identify which participant was associated with which transcript.

Numerical data was also gathered on the offending histories of clients in the hostels. These were taken in no particular order, and only recorded whether a client had any history of offending (data taken from risk assessment in each file), and what categories of offending they had engaged in. No identifying information was collected here. There were no names and no other information taken from client's files. The hostels, who have control over the data and a right to decide if it can be used in research, gave consent for this data to be used in this way.

Informed consent was gained from each participant. It was explained that the aim of the research was to explore offending in the context of homelessness. All clients were informed that they had no obligation to participate and the offer to take part was only given once to avoid clients feeling like they were obligated to take part. It was made clear that the research was not being undertaken on behalf of the hostel. This is because there are often obligations for clients to take part in interviews and meetings (for example, support sessions) with staff as part of their tenancy at the hostel. Therefore, it was important to ensure that participants were aware that there was no such obligation placed on them.

At the beginning of each interview, some basic guidelines were established. Clients were asked not to disclose their name, the name of the hostel, city or any other client or individual. It was also requested that they do not disclose any information which may make themselves or others identifiable. Clients were also asked to refrain from discussing any serious offending

background, particularly any that have not been recorded by the criminal justice system. Similarly, clients were asked not to disclose any information regarding breaking the rules of the hostel. It was advised that should such disclosure be given, that I may be obligated to inform the hostel or the police.

Prior to the research taking place, a formal meeting was arranged between myself and senior staff and managers at the hostel. A copy of my dissertation proposal was offered. It was explained that this could potentially evolve over time but that if any major changes were made then these would be discussed first with management at the hostels. Interviews took place in a dedicated interview room which is available in the hostels. The interview rooms had CCTV but no sound, offering a private and safe environment to conduct the interviews. Staff at the hostels had previously offered to support clients should they become distressed in any way during the research process, and participants were made aware of this.

After the interviews had taken place, more in-depth information on the aims and theoretical positions underpinning the research was explained to participants. It was explained that clients could request that their interview be deleted at this time should they wish. However, it was advised that the ability for this to be done at a later date could become difficult as the data will be anonymised, and the voice recordings deleted. Nonetheless, participants were advised that they could request that the hostel staff contact myself at any point should they wish to withdraw and that if possible, their request would be accepted.

This chapter has outlined the setting and methodological research design used to collect data for this research. *Chapter 3* will outline and analyse the results before framing some of the interview responses through sociological theory in *Chapter 4*.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will first outline the general results obtained through quantitative data analysis of the prevalence of offending of those living in the hostels studied. It will be argued that while the data collection process is problematic, the data is nonetheless useful as a justification for research into homelessness and offending. General themes identified through semi-structured interviews will then be highlighted. Emerging themes involving the physical design of the hostels, drug use and police contact with those who are homeless will be outlined and analysed.

3.1 Prevalence of Offending in the Hostels Studied: Quantitative Data

Notwithstanding the methodological issues associated with the collection of this data outlined in *Chapter* 2, the quantitative data collected here was surprisingly clear. Data collected about 18 clients living in or receiving support from two hostels showed that *100 per cent* had some form of offending history. By itself, the simple data collected here presents some justification for the need for more criminological research into homelessness.

Most clients, 16 out of 18, (88.8%) had more than one type of offence recorded during risk assessment. The same percentage (88.8%) of clients had at least one offence which was drug related, although there were two clients who had committed more than one offence with neither being drug related. Four out of 18 clients (22.2%) had at least one incidence of anti-social behaviour recorded. Four (22.2%) had offences related to violence and three had been recorded as committing criminal damage. Two offences were directly related to being homeless. Four clients (22.2%) had one offence of drunk and disorderly and four (22.2%) had a record of burglary. The most common type of offence recorded except for drug related was shoplifting – seven out of 18 clients (38.9%). One client had one offence relating to sex work.

Considering the variety of offences recorded for each client, only two clients (11.1%) had a record of only one type of offence (both of these were drug related). Ten clients (55.6%) had a record of two offences. Five clients (27.8%) had a record of three types of offence and one client had a record of seven types of offence.

To summarise this data, most of the clients in the hostels which took part in the research had at least one type of offence recorded during risk assessment. Most of the clients had at least one recorded incidence of drug related offending and over half of the clients had at least two types of offences recorded.

As discussed in *Chapter 2*, this data is problematic. It is basic, taken from a very small sample, in one area and from only two hostels. For this reason, much more research is needed to be able to make any reliable predictions or identify any meaningful patterns. With that said, the data here presents a very clear indication that offending among those living in homeless hostels is almost certainly more prevalent than those in the general public. It is reasonable to assume that those living in homeless hostels are therefore more likely to be confronted with and to experience incidences of offending – something that will be demonstrated by the qualitative

data that this research is primarily concerned with. By itself however, this data provides justification for a need for more research to explore offending within the context of homelessness.

3.2 The Impact of the Physical Design and Policy in the Hostels

Discussion of the way the hostels were physically designed, their general policies and expectations of clients was an unexpectedly important theme which appeared during interviews.

One participant, a male client who had stayed in the hostels both 'then' and 'now' states:

> *"It is better now… before was like jail. The staff were like screws – do you know what a screw is? Like a prison guard. They were always watching us. It was like jail. The staff didn't care, they just wanted a quiet and easy job".*

This client, when asked how the setup of the hostels had changed stated:

> *"It's like a house here. In the other place it was different. There were always banging and that… shouting, screaming, fighting. Everyone were on drugs, spice and that. It wasn't really any different to prison. It was all the same shit."*

It becomes clear through the discussion of both clients and staff that the physical setup of the hostels has had an impact on the way both groups view the hostel, it's purpose and its usefulness. This has clearly had an impact on the behaviour of clients and their relationship with the staff who are there to support them.

It is particularly interesting that the term 'jail' and 'prison' came up on several occasions during discussion of the hostels. This was only described in relation to the way the previous hostels had been set up and operated. Both staff and clients described the set-up of the previous hostels, 'then', as 'like prison' in many respects. Considering the description in the methods section of

the way the hostels were designed, this is hardly surprising. Clients had to buzz at an iron gate, identify themselves both verbally and on CCTV before they could be let in. They would have to be seen again at a second door before being granted entry. Similarly, clients would need to be seen each day, their use of the kitchens and laundry rooms were restricted, they were monitored continuously on CCTV.

The same male client states:

> "I might as well have been in jail. It's better in jail. If you treat me like I'm in jail, then I will just behave like it."

Later, he states:

> "Everyone there was the same as in jail anyway. Dealing, tappin', everyone on drugs and that. I might as well have been in jail… the staff acted like they were screws. They were always watching us. They wouldn't let us in if people were with us... always like 'who is it', 'who's that with ya'. And they would always threaten to kick us out and that. But they couldn't do nothing, they just threaten all the time. Just like screws".

This client is referring to the processes in the previous way the hostels were set up. He states that the previous setup was 'like prison', while the new setup 'like a house'. Interestingly, as seen above, he found the more recent setup to be less problematic.

3.3 Drug Use

During a discussion on some areas of a local town. A client explains the patterns of drug use in the area frequented by homeless people. During this discussion, it appeared that while not every person who spent time in these groups was homeless at any one time, most had been homeless or experienced cycles of intermittent homelessness. When asked if they were describing a group made up of homeless people, the client explained:

> *"Most of them. Some are, some aren't. Most of them have been in hostels and that. Some of them are sleeping in doorways. Some of them are sellers. Everyone there is smoking stuff. Some a bit of both. Some of them are sellers without even realising it. Cause there is so many about and they do it for them without even knowing. They buy it and then sell it on to people".*

The groups that this person is describing are not well documented in the literature. They are, however, well known to the local community, such as those working in the area, and to the police:

> *"But it's weird now, they walk into Greggs and grab want they want and just walk out with it without paying. And the workers in Greggs just think, not bothered... They just ignore it. It happens all the time. Unless you just start taking the piss. But it's, they, one of the workers said, it's not coming out of their wages. If they look like they've not noticed it then it doesn't matter".*

The group is described as large, with many people spread out over a relatively large area:

> *"From bottom of [area of city], to [area of city], to [area of city], to [area of city] and back down [area of city]. You'll notice it's a big square. And everyone down there know each other. So, if they see police coming down there, all it takes, it's like Chinese whispers. By the time the police get there they're gone."*

Drug use was explained to be very common in this particular area:

> *"...it's not hard to get. You're walking down there and their all dropping like flies after they've just been stood there wide awake at night. But it's hard to catch that person dealing."*

The same client explains how her first time staying in a hostel led to long-term drug use:

"When I first went to a hostel I wasn't on drugs. I ended up in [hostel name] and ended up trying spice. And then cause there were more people on different drugs than spice, I started taking different drugs because that was what I could get… so I took different stuff because I couldn't get spice. I could get hold of it easier cause there were more people taking it."

We can see from this discussion how using drugs can lead one to spend time among homeless groups – indeed, it is clear how drug dependency can lead to homelessness, but in this case there is a clear suggestion that becoming homeless lead to an individual's first use of drugs. Furthermore, this can lead to a person encountering substances they have not used before:

"Then there's two drugs your chasing then. And then that lead onto another one and that leads onto another one. And you're sharing with people and it's not enough, so you have to commit crime to get more. So, it's just like a domino effect really."

Again, we can see here how becoming homeless can lead to circumstances which increase the likelihood of becoming involved in new drugs, but also with crime generally. This will become important during a discussion on causality in *Chapter 4*.

3.4 Police Contact

There were some interesting perspectives to note on the contact and interaction between homeless groups and the police. One client interviewed had some interesting insight into experiences and contact with the police:

"The police know ya. They know you by face anyway. But then, it can be a good thing or a bad thing because if they don't see you for a couple of days then they know there is something up. And then you get reported and there are people looking for you to see

if you are alright. But then, if you're known, if you've been seen somewhere where a crime happened but you didn't do it you are known, and you still get linked to it.''

While the police are considered by this individual to be part of keeping the homeless community safe, they are also seen as monitoring them:

"And you'll be down there and the police will be around looking at ya. Cause it's a bad view all that. It's a bad view and I understand why people are complaining… They're locking a lot of the homeless up now… especially those on spice. And after a few times they get quite a big sentence. And cause most of em are selling, they only need to catch them once or twice. So, they are all shitting it now… And everyone down there know each other. So, if they see police coming down there, all it takes, it's like Chinese whispers. By the time the police get there they're gone."

A member of staff provides an insight into views of the police from somebody who has experience working with homeless people:

"The police, you just can't… I don't think they have the training or knowledge about the complexities of homelessness and how to deal with somebody in that specific trauma. I get their policies and things like that have to be one size fits all, but really when you are looking at people in that category, there needs to be a better depth of knowledge of how to deal with those people, if you see what I mean. It is different, it is definitely different… I don't think that they have a clue of how to address these people. And, what they have to do differently to somebody else who is homeless, it is a whole different ball game. And not just the police… I'll go back to hospital staff… they have not got a clue who they are dealing with."

There is an argument here that the police should have more training to be able to deal with those who are homeless more effectively. It is suggested that homeless people should be seen

as a special case and should be treated according to the specific needs of those living in such a situation.

This chapter first outlined the quantitative data collected from files at the hostels studied. It was shown that 100 per cent of client in these hostels had some form of offending history. This was argued to justify the need for more research into this area. The chapter then focused on a number of themes identified during interviews with clients and hostel staff. These included the importance of the physical design of the hostels, drug use and police contact. *Chapter 4* will analyse further themes through the sociological frameworks of Merton's (1965) anomie theory and through the notion of *stigma*.

CHAPTER 4: STIGMATISED AND ANOMIC LIFESTYLES

This chapter will use Merton's (1965) strain theory and the notion of *stigma* first outlined by Erving Goffman (1963) to frame some of the discussion identified during interviews with clients and hostel staff. Quotations from participants will be presented in each section of this chapter before integrating discussion of theory. The chapter aims to show how current sociological and criminological theory can be utilised to frame and explore the lives of those who are homeless. Concluding the chapter will be a necessary discussion on causation.

4.1 Anomic Lifestyles

An important theme which consistently presented itself during discussion with staff and clients was that homelessness tends to be a chaotic situation. One staff member explains how this chaotic aspect of homelessness and living in homeless hostels must have an impact on clients:

> *"We work here, we get space away, but when you have, you know, a number of people that have got really complex needs that you are trying to deal with… with all them needs it can be loud, it can be disruptive, there can be a lot of drug use around the area, a lot of people that know each other from previous services or tent cities or whatever.*

If you have people that have all got these challenges or issues or difficulties that they are facing in one place and you've got people that their way of coping with difficulty comes out behaviourally, you may get outbursts… you may get emotional or physical outbursts and if you are living in this environment and that is what you are up against I can't imagine how challenging it is when you might be trying to watch TV or get some sleep and someone starts 'effing and jeffing' down the corridor and smashing things around and then if you've got someone who seems calmer then you might buddy up with them and you can get pulled in I think with that sort of friendship, whether it is a positive or negative influence because it seems calmer that the person who for whatever reason is having their outburst. And we have a lot of people with mental health difficulties and some of them they present a lot of symptoms and that can present as quite chaotic and quite challenging for the staff, let alone people who have to live in the environment as well"

Indeed, the same participant goes on to explain that offending is normal within such a context:

"I think being in here and trying to work with these homeless people I think it certainly becomes more obvious to see how integral offending is in a way to their day-to-day life. It is just normal. If you get someone who doesn't have an offending history, it is almost just a surprise."

It is interesting to note that it is suggested that it is 'surprising' to encounter and work with those in the hostel who do not have some form of offending history. Offending is described as 'integral', a part of 'day-to-day life' and 'normal' for those who are homeless.

It is worth here considered R. K. Merton's (1965) *Social Structure and Anomie* to frame this discussion. Merton begins with the Functionalist position that society is structured along the lines of value consensus – shared norms and values. Merton focuses upon two in particular –

2

what he refers to as shared social goals and the institutionalised means of achieving these goals. For Merton, the 'American Dream' is society's shared goal. This is the outcome most members of Western societies are aiming for – a good, well paid job, a family, a reliable car, regular holidays, ownership of a house. This goal is 'normal', it is the accepted and acceptable aim for members of Western societies. There are, of course, accepted and acceptable means of achieving these goals. That is, going to school and college, attending university, gaining employment and working hard, getting married and having children, getting a mortgage.

Merton (1965) suggests that there are only limited responses available if a person does not have the ability or desire to aim for socially accepted goals according to the institutionalised means of achieving them. These 'modes of adaptation' essentially reflect a rejection of one, or both, of the shared social goals and the institutionalised means of achieving them. For example, an individual may accept the goal but reject the means of achieving it. Simply, they may still aim for wealth and a comfortable life but reject the notion of working in a legitimate occupation. This mode of adaptation is referred to by Merton (1965) as 'Innovation'. An individual may, for example, feel that they are unable to achieve success through education and legitimate employment but can become financially successful by selling drugs. Similarly, an individual may reject both the shared social goals and the institutionalised means of achieving them. This is described as 'Retreatism'. This could describe those who have perhaps 'dropped out' of the system, aiming for different goals in life and going about achieving these by different means that wider society.

Anomie theory is relevant here because it describes how 'anomie' can lead to offending. If a person is not able to participate in wider society, they are, by definition, living in a state of anomie (often referred to as 'normlessness' or 'chaos'). This is particularly apparent considering the discussions above. Clients living in homeless hostels often deal with shouting

where they live (if they do not live on the streets, that is), they are faced with drug use, offending, sex work and mental health issues on a regular basis. This is not to say that a person who is homeless is engaged in these issues. The suggestion being made here is that a person who is homeless is simply faced with these issues - they experience them and those who suffer and do engage in them to an extent that those who are not homeless generally do not. It is in no way controversial to describe homelessness as 'anomic'. Homelessness is certainly one of the most anomic situations one can find themselves in. Considering the undeniably chaotic nature of such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that those who are homeless are more likely to offend.

Interestingly, one of the members of staff interviewed explained how a desire for 'normality', and for belonging can impact on where someone who is homeless might choose to live when they look for tenancies:

> *"... normal society – I don't like to use that word, but normal society don't accept them. And don't accept what's normal for them. And therefore, they don't fit in. We have had a lot when they do want to be rehoused that will not go to posh areas, they won't go to [area name]. They want to go to rundown areas, so they blend in and don't stick out like a sore thumb. And you know that, with things like the drugs, the poorer area is no good for them. But because they don't feel part of anything they don't want to go. They can't make that huge jump, so they will stay in areas where they blend in."*

The marginalisation from wider society could be seen here to lead to a reluctance or a feeling of inability to participate in wider society. Indeed, once a person finds themselves existing outside of social normality, it is understandable that they may find it difficult to adjust back into normal society. One participant who has found themselves living in homeless hostels and on the streets on and off for a number of years explains:

"But I stopped it when I came in here this time. But when I'm on the street it's always that or spice, if you get me. I have to keep myself to myself. I just sit and do like a puzzle upstairs and that. Everyone is still doing it, all over the place. You can't associate with them… especially with spice and that cause they will just get me back on it if I associate with them so I just sit on my own."

This particular client openly explains how they have felt the need to exclude themselves. Seclusion is considered as the only way to reliably keep 'out of trouble'. To engage with the wider community of people who are from a similar background, living in the same setup risks engaging in offending, drug use and generally harmful activities.

4.2 Stigma, Labelling and Bias

The notion of *stigma* also became apparent. A staff member in one of the hostels outlines how those who are homeless are often seen as criminal. It is interesting that the participant here uses the word 'stigma' to describe this:

"Yeah it's illegal and for a lot of our clients that's just a normal thing to do. It like to some degree going back to the vagrancy acts of Victorian England where being homeless itself was illegal. They are putting up spikes in areas to stop people sleeping there because they don't want to admit there are homeless people there… or they don't want homeless people to be in the nice areas. It's like 'let's ignore it'. I think because the stigma is with homeless people there is the drugs, the offending, the anti-social behaviour. It's kind of viewed as that is what homeless people do."

This has been a common discussion within the media in recent years. For example, in Manchester, some city centre shops have recently installed metal spikes on the floors around their shops to prevent homeless people from sleeping there (Worley, 2017). Similarly, Launder (2018) and Borromeo (2015) show a number of images of physical deterrents to prevent

homeless people from sleeping on benches and on the streets or in doorways. These include spikes, metal bars and extra arm rests in the middle of benches. Some of these measures have been implemented by local councils. Such practices are branded as 'inhumane' by these reporters and by homeless charities, organisations and some politicians. They do indeed demonstrate a clear picture of the homeless as unwelcome, a burden – they reinforce the stigmatising effects of homelessness.

Stigma and labelling were common themes throughout discussion during interview. Those living 'normal' lives have a tendency to criminalise those who are homeless. Reflecting on the way those who are homeless are criminalised, a member of staff states:

> *"Again, looking at crime and offending within homeless communities it is quite a difficult thing to do without thinking about all the other things as well. You know, drug use is criminal, it's an offence… begging as well… it's illegal and for a lot of our clients that's just a normal thing to do. It like to some degree going back to the vagrancy acts of Victorian England where being homeless itself was illegal."*

And a client at one of the hostels states:

> *"… they are committing crime just by being stood there. By begging and dealing. But then people just walk past and they're like shouting things at them like "you fucking spice head, you're this you're that" and people presume they've done something. So, they have a label. They go into McDonalds and they get followed into the toilet cause people think they're up to something. And you'll see someone else come in that's not homeless and they won't get followed.".*

The same client explains how she has been 'banned' from shops because of her association with this particular group, and also, apparently, due to the fact that she has been homeless:

"The police know ya. They know you by face anyway. But then, it can be a good thing or a bad thing because if they don't see you for a couple of days then they know there is something up. And then you get reported and there are people looking for you to see if you are alright. But then, if you're known, if you've been seen somewhere where a crime happened but you didn't do it you are known, and you still get linked to it. Because you're known. I'm banned from loads of shops in town even though I've never stepped foot in them".

When asked what she had been banned for, she explains:

"Because I associated with the homeless, and I slept in the doorway".

She goes on to describe another example:

"I can go into some of them now because they haven't seen me for a while and now I look half decent. But I used to walk down the street and, you know when they hand out leaflets in the street for like a café and that – they don't hand them to ya. But then they don't realise when I walk past further down the line, the same person and they're like "here, come to my café", not realising it were me. So, if you're not known, or even if you've stayed away for a while and then gone back, your face gets forgotten. But I will never be able to get a job on [area of city centre] because the managers do know me, and the security guards".

Another member of staff explains how homeless women face stigma within a hospital environment:

"The best example I can give of that is when our homeless women go into hospital where it is a caring profession. And unfortunately for homeless people and drug users they are and have been treated terribly. And they have been judged and not got the

treatments they deserve. They don't get the pleasantries that the normal people get. It's disturbing. And yet that is a very caring profession. So, for a lot of our clients they don't want to go into hospital, they don't want to stay and get treatments and things because of the embarrassment and not fitting in. They try to get out as fast as they can. They are ill-treated. It's sad."

The work of Erving Goffman (1963) is useful here. In *Stigma*, Goffman outlines the process and impact of stigmatisation on members of society. On the impact of stigma, both for the individual being labelled as well as the one labelling, Goffman writes:

"By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma-theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class." (Goffman, 1963, pp. 15-16).

The homeless person, the rough sleeper, the drug user, is seen as something, or someone, apart from wider society. They are not participants, they are not 'normal' – and this impacts on the way they are treated by the world around them. It is interesting that the member of staff I spoke to was able to identify the stigmatising process that occurs with homeless people in the same breath as outlining the 'vagrancy acts' of Victorian England – something Phelan et al (1997, p. 323) identify as policies "intended to stigmatise".

Phelan et al (1997) and Belcher & Deforge (2012) argue that the homeless are perhaps the most stigmatised members of society. It is argued here that the homeless are more stigmatised than the 'general poor' and tend to suffer similar stigmatised labelling as those who are hospitalised for mental health illnesses (Phelan et al, 1997). Furthermore, it is argued here that the homeless also suffer further stigmatisation which is not connected to psychiatric hospitalisation – they

are often blamed for their own situation, their own poverty, and they are often identified as the cause of many wider social problems (Belcher & Deforge, 2012; Phelan et al, 1997).

It is interesting that the client I spoke to is able to clearly identify some of the ways in which she is stigmatised by wider society. She is able to articulate and provide useful, real life examples. Importantly, she seems to be keenly aware of exactly *why* she is stigmatised – she can identify who is stigmatising her, for what reasons and what the effects of this are. This particular example provides a good basis to claim that those who are stigmatised (in this case, homeless people) may be able to act as a useful resource to further explore the process of stigmatisation.

4.3 Thinking About Causation

An issue of causation arose during the proposal stage of this research. The aim of the research is to outline how a state of homelessness can be criminogenic - a cause of offending behaviour. But there is a question as to whether homelessness causes crime or is itself an effect of crime or similarly entangled issues such as substance misuse. Indeed, one of the participants in this research, a member of staff in a homeless hostel stated, without prompting to discuss causation:

> *"A lot of the clients have got either historically, current or sometimes quite extensive offending histories and I don't know if, you know, what comes first if it is sort of the crime leads to homelessness or if being in the homeless environment and within them peer groups if that kind of helps escalate the offending".*

This was an interesting observation which raised an important question of causation. There is a simple answer to this question of whether offending is a cause or an effect of homelessness – both, it *can* be a cause and it *can* be an effect. Rather than asking '*is* homelessness criminogenic', it appears more sensible to ask, '*can* homelessness be criminogenic?'. This approach is outlined well by Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) who identify what they describe as

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a 'Critical Realist' approach to studying who is at risk of homelessness. In this case, it is identified that homelessness is a multifaceted, complex situation. Social causation in this context is seen as contingent on a wide variety of factors. The causes of homelessness are open to a number of potential variables as well as protections (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick, et al., 2018). For example, the loss of a loved one can be seen as having the potential to cause a recovering drug user to relapse and use again. However, having a close family may protect an individual from this while a single person may see less reason to refrain from self-destructive behaviour. There being a protection from a cause does not mean that there is no cause in effect. And in the case of links between homelessness and poverty, Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) argue that while childhood poverty is a major risk factor for adult homelessness, homelessness is also a major risk factor for adult poverty. Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018) argue that with such multifaceted social situations as homelessness, rather than asking if something *is* a cause, it is better to ask, *how it can* cause a particular outcome.

Then there is notion of reciprocal causation to consider. Here, causal relationships can be seen as bidirectional (both ways) rather than unidirectional (one way) (Dooley, 2004). As discussed above, there is evidence suggesting that issues of mental health, drug use and offending behaviour can lead to homelessness. However, there is little research into offending behaviour (or, for that matter, mental health and substance misuse) as a result of homelessness. The aim of this research is to explore this, and it will make the claim that homelessness can indeed lead to crime. But it should be made clear that this claim does not challenge previous research into other causes of crime or causes of homelessness. It will not ask *if* homelessness results in offending behaviour, but *how* it can. The assumption is that there is bidirectional, reciprocal causation involved here, as opposed to a mere correlation – offending can lead to homelessness, and homelessness can lead to offending. Homelessness and crime then, should be considered as part of the same cycle. They often exist very much within the same context – which often

involves aspects of poverty, addiction, seclusion and marginalisation, mental and physical ill-health, exploitation by others, a multitude of forms of victimisation, to name just a few. An individual may find themselves pulled into this cycle at any of its junctions. Once there, they may become subject to "complex and multi-directional feedback loops" clearly in action within the situation of homelessness (Bramley & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 113).

Finally, as with Bramley & Fitzpatrick's (2018) assertion regarding protection from causes in a multifaceted social situation, there is an assumption here that a causal link to crime as a result of homelessness does not mean that homelessness necessarily leads to crime, all the time. The assumption taken is that the social situation that those who become homeless find themselves in presents more exposure and access to offending behaviour. This leads to a higher occurrence of offending but does not necessitate it absolutely. The research outlined within the above literature review shows there is good evidence to suggest that crime is more prevalent among homeless communities. Not all homeless people will offend, just as not all offenders will become homeless. The suggestion is that the context of homelessness will make offending more likely, not inevitable.

This chapter first explored current sociological and criminological theory (anomie theory and the notion of stigma) as a way to frame the responses given by participants during interviews at the hostels. This shows that current research into these areas can be useful in framing the complex situation of homelessness and how it might lead to crime. A discussion on causation concluded the chapter and the presentation of the results. The following chapter will provide a broader discussion of these results before offering concluding remarks and overall thoughts on the findings of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter will offer a broader discussion of the research, critically evaluate its findings and provide suggestions for further research. There will be a return to the aims stated at the beginning of the dissertation and an examination of the effectiveness of this research in meeting theses aims. There will be a brief overview of each chapter in order to draw wider conclusions on the issues and debates contained throughout. The dissertation will conclude with a summary of the general positions that have guided the project.

5.1 Discussion and the Need for More Research

This research has aimed to show the relevance of homelessness for criminological research, demonstrating a need for further research into a number of areas. Returning to the aims and objectives stated at the beginning of this dissertation:

*The **first aim*** of this research was to identify whether or not those who are homeless engage in higher rates of offending than those who are not. The research supports for the claim that they do, though the data collected here has major methodological limitations, as discussed in *Chapter 3.*

The ***second aim*** of this dissertation was to outline the offending patterns of those who are homeless. Both the first and second aim of the research are closely linked, and both functioned more as a justification for this and future research. Both were achieved, though there were a number of methodological issues with this data. Much more research is needed to be able to make any reasonable, evidence-based conclusions on this question. Research incorporating a much larger sample size would be useful here. Quantitative data examining the offending rates of those living in hostels throughout different areas in the UK would provide results which are more generalisable. More importantly, future research should aim for higher a degree of validity, perhaps incorporating qualitative interviews with clients after analysing offending rates in their files. This would allow for more accurate data collection and the ability to explore the wider context of any offending patterns identified.

Indeed, further research highlighting similar offending rates throughout homeless groups in the UK could arguably make the case that homelessness is criminogenic by itself. However, that offending is common among homeless groups is hardly surprising. This data supports research that has already been conducted, as outlined in the literature review. The more surprising reality is that there is little research qualitatively exploring how such crime occurs, it's context, specific causes – what it 'looks like'.

For this reason, this research went on to outline qualitative interviews with staff and clients in homeless hostels and framed their responses through a criminological lens. This addressed the ***third aim*** of the dissertation, which is undoubtedly the most important of the three. It was interesting that both clients and staff were able to very articulately frame issues facing those who are homeless. There is a high degree of potential for academic criminological and sociological interpretation and analysis of the self-reported experiences and knowledge of the social worlds that those who are homeless and those who work in homelessness inhabit.

Discussion in *Chapter 3* unexpectedly highlighted the ways in which the physical design of homeless hostels may impact upon offending. One of the clients referred to the previous hostel design as 'like prison' and discussed the way that he responded to this – he suggested that his behaviour was a reflection of the way he felt he was being treated. Again, the limited sample used in this research makes it difficult to generalise this finding to homeless hostels generally. However, there is the potential that this may have made visible an apparently completely unstudied and unrecognised factor which could have the potential to inform the design of future homeless services. The policy and general approach of homeless services may have an impact on the way those who reside there see themselves, interpret the way others see them and may indeed have an impact on offending. Research which aims to specifically consider these factors would be useful. Again, a wider, more generalisable sample size would be useful here. Comparative analysis of interviews with clients and staff in hostels of different physical structure, and with different policy to address behaviour and conduct in the hostel would be valuable.

Findings related to patterns of substance misuse were ultimately unsurprising. As discussed by Bramley & Fitzpatrick (2018), there are a variety of predicting risk factors which lead to homelessness, and substance misuse is one very clear example of this. Discussion with clients and staff provided data to support this assertion. One client discussed how she did not have an issue with substance misuse until she first became homeless. She had started using 'spice' after being offered this by another client at a hostel. She developed a level of dependency for this drug but found herself using other substances when she could not acquire 'spice'. It was explained that this led to problems with crack cocaine and other highly addictive substances. For this purpose of this research, it was interesting that this client explained how developing issues around other substances led to an evolution in her offending behaviour. It was outlined how spending time with other clients who were dependent on different substances had this

impact. In this way, it can be argued that becoming homeless had a direct impact on this client's offending behaviour. More research into the way that substances are used in hostels, and particularly the ways in which different patterns of offending could be linked with specific types of drugs would be a useful extension of this finding. Perhaps more useful would be an exploration of the ways in which those who are homeless might become vulnerable to getting involved with different types of substance use. Finally, the ways in which those who are homeless might influence each other to both use other substances and offend in different ways would be useful.

There were also suggestions in *Chapter 3* during interviews that there are policing practices which specifically target groups frequented largely by people who are, or who have been homeless. Again, this should be of interest to the field of criminology. What views do the police have of homeless people? Do they target people simply *because* they are homeless, or is it that homelessness leads to behaviour and involvement in activities that the police are attempting to deal with? Furthermore, there is an aspect of the discussion here which suggests that the way in which those who are homeless perceive the police may be of importance. One client explained how the police were seen in a positive way to the extent that they may be a necessary actor in keeping those who are homeless safe. The client explained that they appreciated that the police would ultimately look for her if there were any concerns about her wellbeing. On the other hand, one of the members of staff interviewed expressed a concern that the police do not have a realistic understanding of the issues facing those who are homeless and that there may be a benefit to a greater degree of training to address this. With the suggestion that the police may indeed be considered of importance for keeping those who are homeless safe, and therefore that their regular interaction with those who are homeless is arguably a necessity, more research into the factors involved in policing the homeless would be useful.

In *Chapter* 4, two traditional and time-tested sociological theories were used to frame the discussions with staff and clients within the homeless hostels. Merton's (1965) anomie theory demonstrates how crime can be seen as an expected, or at least increasingly likely outcome for those who live the difficult, chaotic, 'anomic' lives associated with homelessness. This theory suggests that when an individual finds themselves living in a social situation which does not allow the ability for the individual to conform to the wider value consensus, then there are only limited ways for an individual to adapt. According to Merton (1965), crime is an understandable response to such a situation. Furthermore, 'retreatism', described by Merton (1965) as a rejection of both cultural goals and the institutionalised means of achieving them may be a useful way to frame potential responses to the anomic aspects of homelessness. In Merton's (1965) own words, examples of individuals who 'retreat' include "… vagrants, vagabonds, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts" (p. 677). While the historically common language is unfortunate from a contemporary frame of reference, Merton (1965) was certainly referring to those who are homeless in this description.

It should not be controversial to suggest that homelessness is perhaps one of the most 'anomic' situations a person could find themselves in. It is doubtful that there are many situations whereby a person could be considered more vulnerable than the case of homelessness. Some of the themes revealed during these few interviews make this case clearly, particularly when considering that drug use, exploitation by other members of the homeless community and stigmatisation by wider society appear to be common themes associated with being homeless. To use another useful quote by Merton (1965) which perhaps encapsulates this, "persons who adjust (or maladjust) in this fashion are, strictly speaking, *in* the society but not *of* it" (p. 677). One of the clients discussed the way in which some members of wider society, such as in the city centre, would ignore her (for example, not offering her a leaflet in the street), she would be banned from shops for which she had never been inside because she had slept in the doorway

and she also described being followed into the toilets by members of staff in a McDonalds restaurant. Indeed, this is not difficult to frame as being *in* society but not *of* it.

Framing homeless services, homeless groups and situations as 'anomic' then may lead to the potential for solutions to reducing homelessness, drug use, violence and other offending activities which appear to be common among homeless groups. It is perhaps unreasonable to suggest that such an analysis would lead to outright solutions, but surely such theory and academic frameworks could help to inform practice. It is interesting that Merton (1965) directly addresses the notion of homelessness (in his words, 'tramps', 'vagabonds', 'vagrants') in his well-known theory on the causes of crime and deviance, while there has been very little contemporary work which actually applies this theoretical framework in studies linking crime, deviance and homelessness. Of course, Merton's (1965) work has its own issues with validity, not least because it requires the structure of society to have much of its grounding simply in shared goals and agreed means of achieving them – an astoundingly simplified view even for a Structural Functionalist. Nonetheless, this version of anomie theory could be a useful tool for making visible the impact of the precarious, anomic lifestyles inherent in homelessness.

Commencing *Chapter* 4, Erving Goffman's (1963) *Stigma* was also considered as a way to frame the ways in which homeless people are more vulnerable. Not only are homeless people seen as 'different', 'not quite human', it would also appear that they are criminalised. Discussion with the client outlined here shows an awareness of this process. It should be interesting to those involved in criminology how this process works, how it is understood by those who are homeless (the stigmatised) and those who stigmatise them. There has been some work around this, though it is empirically thin and heavily theoretical. It does not give much attention to the real-life experiences of those living and working within such a context. Again, more research into the way those who are stigmatised in this way understand this process would

be useful. Research into the ways in which those who are stigmatised respond and adapt to the situation of homelessness would also be useful. As above, there is current criminological theory which could be utilised to explore this, but there is little empirical research conducted to test it.

5.2 Summary and Concluding Remarks

The original aim of this study was to conduct ten or more interviews. This was abandoned almost as soon as interviews began due to the wealth of contextual knowledge and understanding offered by both clients and staff. They have a lot to offer. Perhaps more attention and involvement from an academic perspective could help to organise, frame and analyse ideas and changes to practice.

This dissertation has taken three key positions. First, that there is not enough research into the way that homelessness may be a criminogenic situation. Previous research that has been conducted is generally quantitative, describing what is happening, but not asking how or why. The second position taken is that there is currently a good deal of sociological and criminological theory already available which offers a useful way to frame the situation of homelessness and the context within which this relates to offending. Finally, this dissertation has taken the position that those who are homeless, and those who work with them, are perhaps the most useful resource for conducting research into this area and for theoretically framing the debate.

This dissertation has supported these three positions by applying these principles within a study of homelessness and crime. The quantitative data collected could perhaps best be seen as a justification for the research. Homelessness and the way in which it provides a context for offending – that it is criminogenic, appears to be an understudied and relatively ignored area of criminology. Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2018) hint towards possible reasons as to why this

may be the case. As quoted in the literature review in *Chapter 1*, they argue that researchers highlighting the life stories and analysing the individual situations of those who are homeless may be concerned with the possibility that they are misinterpreted as 'blaming' the homeless for their offending. In this way, it is considered that the qualitative analyses and explorations of the issues surrounding homelessness deliberately discount and overlook suggestions that crime may well be a core aspect of this situation. This surely comes from a protective, empathetic and honest desire to avoid wider misunderstandings at academic, professional, media and political levels. But the result is that a very real aspect of the social worlds that those who are homeless inhabit remains hidden and therefore unresolved.

It should be noted that there is no suggestion that a person who is homeless is therefore a criminal. This research is aiming simply to show that crime is a very real and prolific aspect to those social worlds discussed throughout this dissertation. Substance use can be considered in the same way – being homeless does not mean that an individual uses drugs or alcohol, but drugs and alcohol are a consistent and impactful part of the world within which they have found themselves. This dissertation has attempted to avoid connotations of 'blameworthiness'. But it has done this simply by not blaming those who are homeless for the various troubling aspects of their situation while still directly addressing and exploring their offending. Again, it is interesting that those taking part were incredibly honest, open and candid about the social world of homelessness within which they inhabit and the way in which crime is a core part of this social world – those living and working within these social worlds are absolutely invaluable in understanding these situations and should be asked more frequently for their input.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTICPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant information/interview protocol

Introductions

Who am I?
My name is Jason Taylor. I'm a full-time postgraduate student at Leeds Beckett University, and I'm doing some research about the context of offending by people who are homeless.

Why am I here?
I am conducting this research as part of my MSc research at Leeds Beckett University. I am hoping to find out about your life and your understanding of how being homeless may or may not increase the likelihood of offending.

Who has reviewed the study?
The study has been reviewed by the Leeds Beckett University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee and some members of the *Turning Lives Around* management team.

What will happen today?
If you do decide to take part, I would very much like carry out an interview with you. The interview should last no more than 1 hour.
I would like to ask you some questions about your experience of offending (if any) while being homeless.

If you find any of the questions disagreeable, in any way, then please do not feel that you have to answer them. You will be free to stop the interview at any point or take a break during the interview should you wish to do so.

I am interested in what you have to say and hope that you will enjoy speaking with me about your experiences.

I would also like to look at sections of your notes held by the Turning Live Around. If you agree I would like to look at any of your notes relevant to your taking part in this research. You have the right to refuse this at any time.

What will happen after we have spoken?

I will write up what you have said as part of a thesis that will be read by my supervisor and examiners. After I have finished my research a copy of it may also be put in the university library so that others can read it. I will also let *Turning Lives Around* know what I have found (but not about you specifically).

A copy of my research will be sent to the Prison Service Headquarters, and I may publish some of my findings in journals read by other people in my field of research.

Confidentiality and consent

Information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you will have your name removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

If it's alright with you, I may use quotes from what you have said but your name will not be used, and it will not be identifiable as you.

If it's okay with you I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that I don't miss anything you say. Your name won't be written on the tape and the tapes will be kept securely.

Should you disclose either the intention to harm yourself, harm another individual, or act in any way that may result is unsafe, or break any Turning Live Around rules, I am required to tell the service. I am also obliged to inform hostel managers if you disclose any unreported offences to me during the interview. Other than in these areas however, none of the information resulting from the interview will be shared in a way that would enable you to be identified by anyone outside of the study.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time or a decision not to take part, will not affect your status at Turning Live Around.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or require any further information, please email me at the following email address:

Name: Jason Taylor
Email Address: j.taylor2477@student.leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Thank-you for taking the time to read this Participant Information Form and for considering the possibility of taking part in the study. This Participant Information Form is for you to keep.

If you do wish to take part in the study, please sign the consent form. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

Research consent form

Consent form for participating in an exploration of the context of offending by those who are homeless.

1. I have read and had explained to me by *Jason Taylor* the accompanying information sheet relating to the project.

2. I have read and understood why I am eligible to take part in this study.

3. I understand the purposes of the project and what will be required of me. I agree to the arrangements described in the information sheet, in so far as they relate to my participation.

4. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. I have received a copy of this consent form and of the accompanying information sheet.

Participant's name:

Date:

Signature:

Investigator's name: **Jason Taylor**

Date:

Signature:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Review Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, please contact my research supervisor, Prof. Colin Webster at **c.webster@leedsbeckett.ac.uk**. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.