

A STUDY OF THE NUMBER, PROFILE AND PROGRESSION ROUTES OF HOMELESS PERSONS BEFORE THE COURT AND IN CUSTODY

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, who through the Probation and Welfare Service provided the funding to enable the study to be carried out. This research would not have been possible without the support and assistance of a wide range of individuals and organisations. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the Advisory Group to this research including Rosemary Cronin (Senior Probation and Welfare Officer, Research Unit), Michelle Johnston (Deputy Chief District Court Clerk), Seamus Sisk (Deputy Director of Regimes, Irish Prison Service), Vivian Geiran (Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officer, HOST), Kiran Sarma (Garda Research Unit), Simon Brooke (Trinity College Dublin), Helen Casey (Assistant Principal Officer, Prisons and Probation Policy Division) and David O'Donovan (Assistant Principal Probation and Welfare Officer).

Our thanks are due to prison and community based Probation and Welfare management and staff in Dublin for their contribution to this research and we would especially like to acknowledge the support of Rosemary Cronin (SPWO, Research Unit). Particular thanks are due to staff at the Court Service including Shay Keary (District Court), Eammon Mooney and Darrach Green (Circuit Court), Madeleine Moore (Children's Court) and Noel McNaboe (Drug Treatment Court) for the ease and efficiency at which they were able to provide court data. Prison management and officers at Mountjoy, Dóchas, St. Patrick's Institution, the Training Unit, Arbour Hill, Cloverhill and Wheatfield prisons went over and above the call of duty in facilitating the prison based aspect of this research – we wish to sincerely acknowledge their contribution to this study.

Thanks are due to management and staff at Trinity House, Oberstown Boys and Oberstown Girls Schools who provided invaluable data to inform the study. We would also like to thank all of those stakeholders who took part in the consultation process for this research including the Homeless Agency, the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Local Authorities and a wide range of statutory and voluntary Homeless Services in the Dublin area. There are a range of individuals who provided important input into this research and we wish to acknowledge their contribution – thanks to Siobhán Brett (Pathways Project) and Probation and Welfare staff from Mountjoy Prison for their presentations at the Prison Research Training Day organised by the Centre for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology in June 2003. We would also like to thank Lisa Harrison at the Irish Prison Service for her assistance in accessing and compiling the prison records and Aidan Connolly from the Homeless Offenders Strategy Team (HOST) at the Probation and Welfare Service who provided guidance on particular aspects of this research.

Our thanks are due to Dr. Lorna Ryan (Manager) and colleagues at the Centre for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology for their support throughout this study. We would like to sincerely express our gratitude to Sinead Freeman and Jonathon Illan (Dept of Social Science, DIT) for their excellent contribution and assistance with the prison based data collection. Finally, we wish to pay our deepest appreciation to all of the prisoners who agreed to take part in this study. Without your participation this research would not have been possible. We hope that we have done justice to your experiences by representing them in this report in an honest and accurate way.

Dr. Mairéad Seymour & Liza Costello

Preface

It is clear that, while crime is not an inevitable consequence of homelessness, lack of appropriate, stable accommodation does increase the risk of offending. From the point of view of organisations such as the Probation and Welfare Service, interventions to reduce reoffending and improve public safety are enhanced by available accommodation, with the provision of related support services, where required. Individuals already disadvantaged, including offenders, can face further barriers to social inclusion and resettlement when they are also homeless. Difficulties can be even further exacerbated when homelessness and offending are accompanied by other complicating factors such as mental health issues, addiction and so on.

There has been an acknowledged data deficit in relation to offender homelessness. That gap is addressed by the publication of this research report. The report highlights the complexity of the challenges faced in this area of work and calls forth imaginative and innovative responses. The Probation and Welfare Service is committed to the implementation of the Government strategy on homelessness, as it deals with offenders, in the community and in custody. The Government strategy emphasises preventative approaches and the need for a co-ordinated response to homelessness, based on responding to locally identified need, in a planned and coherent way, and providing best value for money.

The Probation and Welfare Service has worked over many years with a range of partners to improve accommodation and other service options available to offenders, to further their integration and reduce reoffending. In keeping with the Government strategy, the Service works with the Cross Departmental Team on Homelessness, the Homeless Agency and local homeless fora to achieve strategic goals on offender homelessness. This work has been given added impetus in recent years through support for an increasing number of local initiatives, as well as through the development of the Homeless Offenders Strategy Team (HOST), a multi-agency unit, located within the Service.

Publication of the present report is timely, at a point when a review of the Government's strategy on homelessness is being undertaken. The researchers, in their findings and conclusions, make challenging observations on current services for homeless offenders and recommendations for future development. Improving public safety and reducing reoffending are key issues for the entire community. Similarly, reducing and preventing homelessness among offenders requires co-ordination and commitment on the part of all services, including those in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The research findings in the report will inform the future development of the Probation and Welfare Service, and other bodies, in developing responses to the needs of offenders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to aid their resettlement and reduce offending. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the sterling work and professional approach of the two researchers who led this project, Dr. Mairéad Seymour and Ms. Liza Costello. I would also like to express sincere appreciation and thanks to all those who contributed to the research and gave so generously of their time and experience.

John Kilcommins
Acting Principal Probation and Welfare Officer
April 2005

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Executive Summary

In December 2002, the Probation and Welfare Service commissioned the Centre for Social and Educational Research at the Dublin Institute of Technology to undertake research on the number, profile and progression routes of homeless individuals appearing before the courts and in custody in the Dublin Metropolitan area.

Although the relationship between crime and homelessness has received significant attention in the international literature (Carlen, 1996; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992), it is an area that has received little formal attention in the Irish context.

The study had the following aim:

- To obtain accurate information about the numbers and the profile of homeless persons appearing before the courts and in custody in the Dublin Metropolitan area.
- To track and determine how homeless persons progress through the court and prison systems, with particular reference to any involvement by the Probation and Welfare Service.
- The overall objective is to generate path-finding information relevant to Probation and Welfare Service policy formulation, service development, planning and deployment of resources.
- To suggest new responses to proof state institutions and services against contributing to the problem of homelessness, marginalisation and disadvantage.

A review of the research into homelessness and offending found that although crime has not been shown to be the inevitable consequence of homelessness, some clear links have been exposed (Ramsay, 1986). Snow et al., (1989) outline a number of processes by which homeless people and rough sleepers in particular are more likely to commit an offence. These include engaging in criminal behaviour to survive on the streets; the criminalisation of street life including drinking in public; and the stigmatisation of street homelessness whereby the visibility and suspicion of rough sleepers as potential threats to community safety mean that they may be more likely to be formally processed for offences that may otherwise have been ignored. Carlen (1983) argues that homeless people are over-represented in the prison population for two main reasons. Firstly they have a higher reconviction rate than domiciled offenders and secondly their housing status may be instrumental in a court's decision to remand them to custody and sentence them to imprisonment. Previous research suggests that a period of incarceration increases a person's chances of being homeless (Carlen, 1983; Piliavin et al., 1993; Yanetta et al., 1999). Time of release potentially is 'a trigger that leads directly to the streets' (Greater London Research Authority 2000:7).

This research employed a number of methodologies including an analysis of records from the Probation and Welfare Service, Detention Schools, and the District (including the Children's Court and the Drug Treatment Court) and Circuit Courts in the Dublin Metropolitan area; a survey carried out with 241 prisoners in Mountjoy, the Dóchas Centre, St. Patrick's Institution, Arbour Hill, Cloverhill, the Training Unit and Wheatfield prisons; in-depth interviews with prisoners; focus groups with prison and community based Probation and Welfare teams and consultation with a wide range of service providers including all four Local Authorities in the Dublin area, the Eastern Regional Health Authority and a range of homeless services. The fieldwork was conducted during the summer months of 2003.

Key Findings

1. Number of Homeless Offenders

Official statistics generally grossly under-represent the number of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system because of the often adverse implications for offenders such as an increased likelihood of remand in custody and/or a reduced likelihood of receiving temporary release if they disclose their homeless status (Baldry, 2001). In this study, an analysis of official statistics found that 1.6% (n=159) of those appearing before the courts in the Dublin Metropolitan area and 9.3% (n=40) of all those cases referred to the Probation and Welfare Service over a six week period were homeless.

In contrast, results from a survey of prisoners (n=241) revealed that over half the prison sample (54%) had at least one previous experience of homelessness prior to imprisonment and 25% of all prisoners in the sample were homeless on committal into prison.

Women appear to be highly represented in the homeless statistics of individuals in the criminal justice system. Of a sample of women prisoners (n=50) it was found that 33% were homeless on committal to prison. Furthermore, an analysis of Probation and Welfare records suggests that almost half of those homeless (43%) were women despite women making up only just over one-fifth of the community based sample.

2. Profile of Homeless Offenders

According to court record and prison survey data, approximately half of all homeless offenders progressing through the criminal justice system were under 30 years of age¹. Probation and Welfare Service records also suggest that the majority of homeless people (73%) referred to them were under 30 years. Homeless prisoners were most likely to be single (65%) and the vast majority (88%) of homeless committals to the prison system in Dublin were resident in Dublin prior to imprisonment.

Prisoners homeless on committal were even more educationally disadvantaged than the general prison sample with almost half (43%) having left school between the ages of 7 and 13 years, in comparison to 21% of the remainder of the sample. Only 12% of those homeless on committal were employed prior to imprisonment, in comparison to 41% of the rest of the sample suggesting that this group of prisoners were particularly marginalised from the labour force.

Homeless prisoners were significantly less likely to have the support of their family prior to or during their time in prison. Furthermore, homeless prisoners were less likely to anticipate they would have family support on release and were more likely than the remainder of the sample to identify family relationships as a problematic issue for them on release.

Drug use was one of the issues most strongly related to homelessness. Almost all (90%) prisoners homeless on committal were drug users prior to imprisonment and the most common drugs used were cannabis (91%), heroin (82%) and cocaine (82%). The majority of these homeless drug users said drugs caused problems in their lives such as family relationships,

¹ Under 30 years olds accounted for 54% of those homeless on committal to prison and 50% of those homeless according to court records.

criminality and the inability to hold down accommodation or employment.

Over three-quarters of those homeless on committal consumed alcohol prior to imprisonment. Of this group of homeless alcohol consumers, almost two-thirds identified public places such as the streets and parks as the most common location for consuming alcohol. This has particular implications for them in terms of being at risk of prosecution for public order offences.

Just over one-third (35%) of those homeless on committal said they had been diagnosed as having mental health illness and of them two-thirds had been hospitalised in a psychiatric institution. Two-thirds of female prisoners², homeless on committal stated that they had previously been diagnosed with a mental health problem.

3. Homeless Progression Routes

Youth homelessness emerged as a factor strongly related to homelessness in the prison sample. 64% of all prisoners who had experience of homelessness first became homeless before 19 years of age - of them approximately one-fifth had been homeless as a child.

Prisoners homeless on committal to prison were likely to have already spent significant periods of time homeless in their lives. The vast majority (88%) had been homeless for six months or more and 58% had spent three years or more homeless.

A significant proportion of homeless individuals coming before the courts, referred to the Probation and Welfare Service or in custody did not access homeless accommodation services. While 44% of homeless individuals appearing before the courts were staying in hostels it is noteworthy that a further 42% were sleeping rough. Of the homeless cases referred to the Probation and Welfare Service, over half were of no fixed abode (58%) with only 35% staying in B&B or hostel accommodation. In the prison survey, almost one-third (32%) of those homeless on committal were sleeping rough prior to imprisonment with a combined total of 29% staying in B&B or hostel accommodation. The take-up of homeless day services providing food and washing facilities was higher with 63% of those homeless on committal saying they used these services.

A number of reasons exist as to why individuals sleep rough as opposed to accessing emergency accommodation however a recurring theme in this research was the reluctance of prisoners to use hostel accommodation. According to respondents, their reluctance related to the living conditions in hostels, the rules and regulations attached to them, the sense of institutionalisation and the use and availability of drugs in the hostels.

4. Progression Routes into the Criminal Justice System

Analysis of the court record data suggests that homeless people had a higher number of charges against them than those in the non-homeless group. The average person appearing in the courts had 1.5 charges against them in comparison to 4.5 for those in the homeless group. However, offences committed by homeless individuals were generally not of a serious nature.

Almost all of the prisoners homeless on committal had come to the attention of the Gardaí in

² This figure is based on the booster sample (n=50) for female prisoners.

the five years before coming into prison on the current occasion with 59% stating they had been arrested 20 times or more.

Almost half (47%) of those homeless on committal to prison had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service in the five years before coming into prison on the current occasion. Of particular interest were the findings highlighting that only 7% of those homeless on committal had not been in prison in the five year period before imprisonment on the current occasion. In fact, almost two-thirds (64%) had been in prison more than twice in the five years prior to their current sentence or period of remand.

Those homeless on committal were not only likely to have been in and out of the prison system but perhaps unsurprisingly they also spent significant periods of time in prison over their lives. The majority (78%) of those prisoners homeless on committal had spent more than two years in prison in their lives and over half (54%) had spent five years or more in prison.

5. Difficulties of Supervising Homeless Offenders in the Community

Community-based Probation and Welfare Officers identified three main difficulties in relation to the community supervision of homeless offenders. These included: the problem of tracking homeless offenders; the difficulty of case supervision being dominated with crisis intervention work with little or no opportunity to focus on offending; and the difficulty of accessing accommodation for homeless clients and attempting to maintain clients in such placements.

6. Difficulties of Reintegrating Prisoners

Prison-based Probation and Welfare Service staff identified a number of barriers towards planning for release from custody. These included: the difficulty for some prisoners, particularly sex offenders of recognising their risk of homelessness prior to release; the fact that prisoners are not recognised as a homeless group; the practice of unsupervised temporary release; the absence of a bridging service between custody and the community; and limited Probation and Welfare staff.

In many respects the views of prisoners with regard to their needs reflected those of Probation and Welfare Officers. The issues identified by prisoners included: the need for basic information and advice on housing and money entitlements; a point of contact in the prison to access information and assistance from the agencies involved; pre-release work to access and secure housing and support services before leaving prison; the need for follow-up support services on release especially with regard to drug treatment; better housing provision; and the need for an improved system in attempting to access housing.

7. Housing Provision and Support

The common issues identified by all homeless prisoners were the need for accommodation, the need for a range of accommodation and the need for improved emergency accommodation provision. Probation and Welfare Officers also identified a number of accommodation needs including: the need for a diverse range of accommodation; greater flexibility in the opening hours of emergency homeless services in particular the Homeless Person's Unit; a need to maintain Local Authority tenancies; overcome offender difficulties in attempting to access private rented accommodation.; and the need for support services, to assist offenders sustain their placement

in the community.

Key Recommendations

A combination of the factors identified in the key findings has contributed to a situation where many offenders find themselves trapped in a recurring cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment. Diversion strategies are required at a number of levels to prevent individuals from entering the formal criminal justice system, to divert offenders from custody and to assist prisoners break the cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment. Successful diversion from the criminal justice system will only be achieved in the long term, however, if it is supported by the provision of appropriate housing and services. This approach points to the involvement of a wide range of agencies including the Probation and Welfare Service, the Prison Service, Local Authorities, the Homeless Agency, the Health Boards and a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations.

General

- It is strongly recommended that homeless prisoners be recognised as a sub-group of the homeless population while in custody and that this issue is examined by the Cross Departmental Committee on Homelessness.
- The specific responsibility of each relevant agency and authority in relation to the accommodation needs of offenders and ex-prisoners needs to be clarified by the Cross Departmental Committee on Homelessness.
- It is strongly recommended that community-based sanctions be considered for appropriate homeless cases and a custodial sanction imposed only as a last resort.

Probation and Welfare Service

- It is recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service consider the introduction and development of a designated team in Dublin to work with 'no fixed abode' referrals from the courts.
- The Probation and Welfare Service should explore new methods for engaging with and supervising homeless clients with a view to more effectively meeting their needs, reducing re-offending and reducing the likelihood of breach proceedings for non-attendance.
- It is recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service build upon its existing contacts and formalise its relationships with a wider range of homeless and housing services to overcome the difficulties encountered by Probation and Welfare Officers in accessing services for their clients.
- Drug use was clearly identified as a risk factor related to both homelessness and criminality. The Probation and Welfare Service needs to continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with drug treatment services, maintain a focus on the needs of homeless offenders in the community and on release from prison, and work in a co-ordinated way towards meeting these needs.



Probation and Welfare Service/Irish Prison Service

- It is recommended that the Homeless Person's Unit initiative in Mountjoy and Arbour Hill prisons be continued and extended where appropriate to other prisons as a means of alleviating unnecessary hardship on release. Where such an initiative is not appropriate, it is recommended that arrangements are established between the Probation and Welfare Service and Community Welfare Officers for emergency payments to prisoners on release.
- The use of custody-based drug maintenance programmes and drug free units, where available, were viewed as positive opportunities by prisoners to address their drug use in prison. It is therefore recommended that drug free units be available across all closed regime prison establishments, to ensure that prisoners who enter the system drug-free or choose to address their addiction in prison are afforded such an opportunity.
- It is recommended that family contact and support is fostered and encouraged by initiatives developed by the Probation and Welfare Service and the Irish Prison Service.
- The need for information about basic issues such as housing provision, welfare entitlements and support services emerged as a dominant theme in this study. It is recommended that an up-to-date and user friendly information and advice service about housing, money entitlements and support services is set up in each prison with a liaison officer to co-ordinate the information and develop links with the relevant statutory, community and voluntary groups as a means of facilitating and supporting the prisoner's reintegration.
- The issue of homelessness and housing for prisoners needs to be set in the context of a reintegration framework. For successful reintegration to occur the research evidence (Altschuler & Altschuler, 1999) suggests that planning needs to begin at an early stage in the sentence and continue through to release with follow-up support in the community. The concept of Positive Sentence Management encapsulates Altschuler & Altschuler's (1999) 'reintegrative confinement' approach whereby a comprehensive plan of action involving a multi-disciplinary approach addresses the wide range of prisoner's needs. It is recommended that Positive Sentence Management be promoted as a framework to support the reintegration needs of prisoners.

Local Authorities

- It is recommended that Local Authorities provide clear, user friendly information to homeless individuals on the operation of their housing and homeless lists; simplify the process of registering on the housing and homeless lists; identify and provide a range of specialist housing including supported and transitional housing, half way houses and independent housing units for homeless offenders and ex-prisoners; increase the level of housing stock for single household applicants and liaise with the private rented and voluntary sector to increase the housing options available.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The lack of stable housing has increasingly been linked in the criminological literature to a high risk of re-offending, and as adversely impacting on prisoner reintegration (May, 1999; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Despite this, there has been limited research undertaken in the Irish context to examine the issue of homelessness and risk of homelessness amongst individuals before the courts and in prison.

Quantifying the number of individuals in the criminal justice system with housing difficulties is problematic. It is well documented that homeless individuals often provide the address of their parental or family home as Murie (1998) describes:

When people's association with their parental home is weak and family relationships are in difficulties, the address notified as the place of residence is still likely to be that of the parent in the absence of any other permanent address. Consequently, people whose place of residence is insecure or temporary and who are on a circuit of homelessness, while retaining some links with the family, will be recorded as living at the family address in the event of any conflict with authority.

An individual's interpretation and understanding of what it means to be homeless further complicates the issue. For example, research (O'Sullivan, 1996) indicates that there are a number of categories of homelessness including the 'visible homeless' such as those living on the streets or in hostel accommodation and the 'hidden homeless' who stay temporarily with family and friends because they have no where else to go. Confusion with regard to the definition of homelessness goes some way to explaining the differences in the level of homelessness recorded in prison studies in Ireland and abroad. For example, O'Mahony's (1997) study reported that 7% of prisoners in Mountjoy were homeless, while research in England and Wales suggests the figure is closer to 13% (Home Office, 1992) and yet other studies have identified the high numbers in the prison population (40%) who are homeless on release (Paylor, 1992).

Although the relationship between crime and homelessness has received significant attention in the international literature (Carlen, 1996; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997), it is an area that has received little formal attention in the Irish context. An exploratory study of crime and homelessness in Ireland by Hickey (2002) began the process of identifying issues in relation to prisoners on release from custody. This study identified the need for further research to examine the relationship between crime and homelessness.

In December 2002, the Probation and Welfare Service commissioned the Centre for Social and Educational Research at the Dublin Institute of Technology to undertake research on the number, profile and progression routes of homeless individuals appearing before the courts and in custody in the Dublin Metropolitan area.

The study had the following aims:

- To obtain accurate information about the numbers and the profile of homeless persons appearing before the courts and in custody in the Dublin Metropolitan area.
- To track and determine how homeless persons progress through the court and prison system, with particular reference to any involvement by the Probation and Welfare Service.

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- The overall objective is to generate path-finding information relevant to Probation and Welfare Service policy formulation, service development, planning and deployment of resources.
 - To suggest new responses to proof state institutions and services against contributing to the problem of homelessness, marginalisation and disadvantage.

This chapter outlines the policy context of the research. In particular, it highlights aspects of the documents – *Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000); *Shaping the Future: An Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2001-2003* (Homeless Agency, 2001); the *Homeless Preventative Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002); the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (Department of the Health and Children, 2001); the *Irish Prison Service Strategic Statement 2001-2003* (Irish Prison Service, 2001); the *Children Act (2001)* and the *National Children’s Strategy (2000)* – that are relevant to the study of crime and homelessness as well as the *Housing Act 1988*.

The Housing Act 1998

The passing of the *Housing Act (1988)* placed responsibility on local authorities, for the first time in Irish history, to provide housing for all homeless people within their jurisdiction. The definition of homelessness laid out in this Act covers a broad range of circumstances, from sleeping rough to staying with families and friends, and has been adopted for the purposes of this research. It defines a person as homeless if:

- (a) there is no accommodation available, which in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, or
- (b) he is living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a) and he is, in the opinion of the Authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources (Section 2, Housing Act 1988).

A number of recent policy documents have reflected the need for housing for marginalised groups as well as an awareness of the relationship between crime and homelessness. These include *Homelessness – An Integrated Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government 2000), *Shaping the Future- An Action Plan on Homelessness in Dublin 2001-2003* (Homeless Agency, 2001), *the Homeless Preventative Strategy* (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002) and *the Youth Homelessness Strategy* (Department of Health and Children, 2001).

Homelessness - An Integrated Strategy (2000)

In order to ensure an effective response to homelessness, the Cross Department Team on Homelessness under the aegis of the Department of Environment and Local Government, developed the strategy document, *Homelessness: An Integrated Strategy (2000)*. It outlined proposals for local authorities and health boards to draw up action plans for the delivery of services to homeless persons, by both statutory and voluntary agencies on a county basis. Secondly, it proposed that local authorities are to have responsibility for the provision of accommodation for homeless persons including hostel

and other emergency accommodation as part of their overall housing responsibility and that the health boards will be responsible for the health and in house care needs of homeless persons. The third proposal was for the establishment of local homeless persons' centres operated jointly by local authorities and health boards in consultation with the voluntary bodies, throughout the county. Finally, it proposed that homeless action plans are to be prepared for those assessed as 'homeless'. In relation to this, local authorities are to provide a certain proportion of their lettings of suitable new or existing housing units to homeless people to enable them move into either a sheltered or independent housing environment.

Specifically in relation to homeless ex-prisoners the Integrated Strategy recommended that:

Prison management and the Probation and Welfare Service should, through sentence management and a pre-release review process, ensure that prisoners are released with appropriate accommodation being made available for them. Where a situation does arise where a prisoner is being released but is without accommodation, prior arrangements should be made to ensure that appropriate emergency accommodation is available (Department of Environment and Local Government, 2000:39).

Recognising the fact that many ex-prisoners experience homelessness on release, the Strategy goes on to recommend that, the Probation and Welfare Service should examine the need for half-way and other sheltered accommodation for ex-offenders to ensure their re-integration into society (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000:39).

Shaping the Future - Housing Action Plans (2001-2003)

Homeless action plans were subsequently drawn up in each county by the relevant local authorities, with the aim of providing an integrated delivery of services by all agencies dealing with homelessness. The action plan for the Dublin region incorporating Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is entitled *Shaping the Future (2001-2003)*. It outlines aims, objectives and actions for the provision of a range of homeless services, from outreach teams to settling people in the community. It refers to people leaving institutions, rather than leaving the prison system specifically. In its listed performance indicators for the prevention and elimination of homelessness it includes;

- the number of people discharged from institutions (and by institution) directly into accommodation for homeless people;
- the number of people discharged from institutions (and by institution) directly onto the streets.

The Homeless Preventative Strategy 2002

The *Homeless Preventative Strategy (2002)* is a co-ordinated strategy between the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Education and Science. The Strategy, among other things aims to prevent homelessness among patients leaving hospital, mental health care and custody. It outlines a series of

objectives to meet the needs of homeless ex-prisoners, as well as specific actions for the Probation and Welfare Service, to address the accommodation needs of people leaving the prison system who are homeless (Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2002). These include:

- A specialist unit to be established by the Probation and Welfare Service to assist with offenders who are homeless on release from custody;
- The Prison Service, together with the Probation and Welfare Service, to build and operate transitional housing units as part of their overall strategy of preparing offenders for release;
- Additional Probation and Welfare staff to be provided to assist homeless offenders and to help them with resettlement;
- A programme to be put in place by the Probation and Welfare Service and the VECs to ensure that all prisoners who are pursuing educational courses will be able to continue them following their release.

Youth Homelessness Strategy 2001

The aim of the *Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001)* developed under the Department of Health and Children is 'to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies, where a child becomes homeless to ensure that he/she benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at re-integrating him/her into his/her community as quickly as possible'. The Strategy sets out a number of objectives under the broad headings of preventative measures and responsive services. Objective 4 is particularly relevant to the needs of children and young people in the criminal justice system. It stipulates that:

Aftercare services for children leaving foster care and residential care, and other services provided by a health board such as supported lodgings and for those leaving centres for young offenders, will be strengthened so that children are supported in making the transition to living independently or returning to their families.

The objectives set out to respond to youth homelessness include;

- The prompt provision of emergency responses to homeless children (Objective 5);
- A comprehensive assessment of children who become homeless to be carried out as the basis for an individual action/care plan (Objective 6);
- The provision of a range of accommodation arrangements for children who are unable to return home as part of an integrated response to the child's needs (Objective 7);
- The provision of a range of supports to meet children's health, educational and recreational needs based on each child's action/care plan and aimed at reintegrating the child into his/her community as quickly as possible (Objective 8).

The Irish Prison Service Strategic Statement 2001-2003

Strategy 7 of the *Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement* aims to help prisoners maintain their relationships with family and community. In particular 7.5:

To continue and extend the on-going dialogue with the Probation and Welfare Service and at least two local authorities on the provision of post-release accommodation to prisoners against the background of the current difficult housing situation.

The Children Act 2001

Section 143 of the *Children Act (2001)* stipulates that ‘the court shall not make an order imposing a period of detention on a child unless it is satisfied that detention is the only suitable way of dealing with the child’.

In relation to aftercare on release from a detention school Section 208 of the *Children Act (2001)* states that ‘where a child is released from a children detention school on the completion of his or her period of detention, the child may, with his or her consent, be placed under the supervision of a Probation and Welfare Officer if the Director of the school considers, after consultation with the Principal Probation and Welfare Officer, that to do so would further assist the child’s reintegration into society and help to prevent the child from committing further offences’.

The National Children's Strategy 2000

The *National Children's Strategy (2000)* is an interdepartmental initiative that aims to further the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children. The Strategy identified the need for the development of a National Strategy on Youth Homelessness. One of its own objectives is that ‘children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs’.

Homeless Proofing

The problem of homelessness in Ireland has traditionally been responded to by the development of services (such as accommodation) specifically for this group, distinct from general social services. Only recently has the issue been causally related to general social and housing policy (O’Sullivan, 1996). This was noted in the Homeless Agency action plan, *Shaping the Future (2001)*, which states:

Homelessness has continued to be regarded as something apart – much like homeless people themselves – and responses have tended to be ‘special’ and separate, rather than mainstream, with little focus on developing an understanding of the problem or how to prevent it (Homeless Agency, 2001).

In response to this, Objective 3.2 of the plan, Homeless Proof Policies, is:

To homeless proof existing mainstream policies and ensure that all policies become responsive to the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and active in the prevention of homelessness.

Homeless proofing policies are particularly important in relation to individuals who come into conflict, or are at high risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system, especially in light of what is known about the relationship between crime and homelessness (Ramsay, 1986). In essence, a potential benefit of homeless proofing policies may be a reduction in the numbers of individuals appearing before the courts and in prison.

Structure of the Report

A review of the relevant literature is presented in Chapter 2 - it aims to set the context

for the research by identifying and discussing the main themes relating to defining homelessness, the notion of homelessness as a process, causation factors and the implications of homeless offenders for the criminal justice system. The remainder of the report is divided into three main sections. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the research design and methodologies and addresses the ethical and procedural issues arising from the research. Chapters 4-6 present the findings in relation to the Court, Probation and Welfare Service and Detention School records - these represent the official statistics on homelessness available in the criminal justice system. Chapter 6 also examines some of the issues relating to youth homelessness in the context of the findings from Detention School records. Chapter 7-8 presents the findings from the prison survey and in-depth interviews with prisoners. In the prison survey chapter (Chapter 7) the number, profile and progression routes of prisoners are addressed. Chapter 8 builds upon the findings from Chapter 7 by discussing the key themes emerging from the qualitative in-depth interviews with prisoners about their experiences of homelessness. Chapters 9-10 provide a perspective from those working with homeless offenders. Chapter 9 documents the findings from focus groups with custody and community based Probation and Welfare Officers while Chapter 10 presents the findings from a consultation process with Local Authorities, the Eastern Region Health Authority and the Homeless Agency. Chapter 11 draws together the key findings in support of the recommendations made for homeless people in the criminal justice system.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Homelessness amongst individuals in the criminal justice system has a number of direct implications for the system at all levels, from the first point of contact with the police, to arrest, prosecution and charge through to release from prison. Despite the numerous research studies on homelessness in the general population in Ireland, little research has focused on those homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in the criminal justice system. This review begins by examining the definition of homelessness, the difficulties associated with defining homelessness, and the notion of homelessness as a process. It then places the study in context by providing a basic profile of the homeless population in Dublin. Following this, the third section examines the causal factors relating to homelessness, while the fourth section discusses the research relating to crime and homelessness and the routes into the criminal justice system for homeless people. The fifth section concentrates on the impact of homelessness on the criminal justice system and considers strategies for diversion; a multi-agency integrated partnership approach and homeless proofing. It concludes by arguing that homelessness is complex issue that requires multi-agency partnerships to effectively address the issue.

1. Defining Homelessness

There is no clear definition of homeless beyond the notion of being without a home. However as Anderson (1997) points out, the concept of 'home' is often ignored or neglected in discussions of homelessness. Wardhaugh (2000:111) describes homelessness as a spatial phenomenon - 'to be homeless is by definition to be a person without a place of one's own, to be someone who is dis-placed or out of place'. Clapham *et al.* (1990) explain homelessness as a relative concept, socially constructed in terms of the norms and values of specific societies and groups within those societies. In Ireland, the social construction of homelessness has been translated into legislation by the *Housing Act (1988)*. The Act sets out a definition of homelessness, outlining in Section 2 that a person is regarded as homeless by the relevant local authority if:

- (a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, or
- (b) he is living in a hospital; county home, night shelter or other such institution and is so living because he has no accommodation of a kind referred to in paragraph (a) and he is, in the opinion of the authority, unable to provide accommodation from his own resources.

The *Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001)* identifies that one of the main differences between youth and adult homelessness is 'that the majority of children under the age of 18 have a place of residence from which to operate; ... in essence, when a young person becomes homeless, it is because they can no longer operate from this base' (Department of Health and Children, 2001:11). Reflecting the differences between adults and young people's experiences, the Forum on Youth Homelessness adopted the following definition:

Those who are sleeping on the streets or in other places not intended for night-time accommodation or not providing safe protection from the elements or

those whose usual night-time residence is a public or private shelter, emergency lodging, B&B or such, providing protection from the elements but lacking the other characteristics of a home and/or intended only for a short stay.

The Forum included within this meaning 'young people who look for accommodation from the Eastern Health Board Out of Hours Service' and 'those in insecure accommodation with relatives or friends regarded as inappropriate, that is to say where the young person is placed at risk or where he or she is not in a position to remain' (Department of Health and Children, 2001:11).

1.1 Defining Homelessness: The Difficulties

Interpretation of the Meaning: In the case where concrete definitions exist (e.g. Housing Act 1988) difficulties arise in how they are interpreted (cf. MacNeela, 1999:3). Even amongst the homeless population, confusion exists regarding what constitutes homelessness. Anderson (1997) argues that imposed definitions of homelessness from the various sides of the political spectrum often fail to take account of whether individuals in various circumstances perceive themselves as homeless. The point is best illustrated by example from Carlen's (1996) research on young homeless people for the Three Cities Project. She found that all of the young people were sleeping rough, staying in homeless hostels or temporarily with friends at the time of interview. Despite this, only 67% described themselves as homeless. Those who did not perceive themselves as homeless often interpreted 'homelessness' as 'rooflessness' or described how they were employed or enrolled in education. As Carlen (1996:104) describes, such differences in the interpretation of the concept indicates that the term 'homelessness' is 'encrusted with layers of other significations relating to (lack of) social ties and (lack of) social respectability'.

1.2 Impact on Identity

Another difficulty associated with the term 'homeless' is the impact it has on the individual's identity. Tajfel (1982) described social identity as:

That part of the individual's self concept which derives from the knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (ibid, 1982).

Personal identity, on the other hand, relates to:

Quantifiable characteristics of the individual, typically expressed as traits whose values are rendered through comparisons of self and others, *especially in group members* (Farrington & Robinson, 1999).

Research has shown that homelessness leads to a loss of both social and personal self identity, self worth and self efficacy (Buckner *et al.*, 1993). Furthermore, research suggests that the external labelling of an individual as homeless can negatively affect their ability to address their homeless status. A qualitative study of 30 homeless men found that, 'the extent to which alternatives to homelessness were perceived depended on the construction and deconstruction of a collective culture and identity of homelessness' (Halleborne, 1997). Snow & Anderson's (1993) study of homeless street people found that on initial experience of homelessness, the self esteem of the individual declines.

A qualitative study of 29 homeless people by Boydell *et al.* (2000) suggested that homelessness led to a loss of identity. This loss related to established identity, caused by the lack of a permanent address, as well as a loss of personal identity, caused by the psychological impact of having no home. They found that both the newly and chronically homeless exhibited a strong sense of pride in their previous lives. The study also found that being homeless caused experiences of social discomfort, a sense of stigma and a devalued self. They concluded that becoming homeless poses a serious threat to an individual's identity.

1.3 Homelessness as a Process

The housing experience of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system is likely to be interspersed by episodes in institutions such as prisons, young offender institutions and detention schools. In other words, they may move from homelessness to custody and/or become, or return to homelessness on release. Homelessness in this scenario is often not a singular event but becomes a complex process of crime, homelessness and imprisonment. A growing body of literature on homelessness in the general population (Anderson & Tulloch, 2000; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2000) identifies the notion of homelessness as a process and not as a situation. They describe it as 'the notion that individuals and households may move between being homeless, poorly housed and adequately/well housed' (Anderson & Tulloch, 2000:4). In essence, the experience for homeless individuals in the criminal justice system is the same as the general homeless population. The one exception is that as well as potentially moving from being homeless to different types of accommodation arrangements, the process of their homelessness is complicated and in some cases exacerbated by periods of institutionalisation in custody.

2. The Profile of Homelessness in Dublin

Approximately three-quarters of homeless people in Ireland are situated in Dublin, 95% of them in Dublin city (Homeless Agency, 2001). The figures from the *Counted In Report on Homelessness in Ireland (2002)* found that 89% of all homeless people are in the Dublin City Council local authority area (Williams & Gorby, 2002). The majority (81%) of the single persons households in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment were male. These figures reflect trends in the international literature highlighting the predominance of single males in the homeless population (Gill *et al.*, 1996; McGilloway & Donnelly, 1996). The implication of single status for homelessness is described:

As a consequence of an offender's marital status, his/her singleness ... s/he is denied access to the only form of independent mainstream housing that s/he might reasonably expect to secure, local authority housing; and lacking the economic resources to do so, cannot find accommodation elsewhere in mainstream housing (Paylor, 1995:172).

While the prevalence of females in the homeless population is lower than males, it is important to acknowledge their existence as a sub-group of the population. According to the *Counted In (2002)* assessment, females tend to be younger than their male counterparts in the single person households category with 39% of females in this category under 18 years old, compared to only 19% of males (Williams and Gorby, 2002). Most worryingly, in relation to this group is the evidence suggesting that homeless women's experiences of homelessness are characterised by risk of involvement in

prostitution and a tendency towards depression (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992).

A total of 140 independent homeless persons under 20 years of age were identified in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment. In addition, in the 'households with children' 1,140 dependent children were distributed across 640 homeless households. Two-thirds of these households were headed by one parent only (Williams & Gorby, 2002:31). These findings are very significant in light of the literature suggesting that youth and child homelessness increases the likelihood of homelessness in later life (CASE, 2000).

Involvement in crime is positively correlated with length of time on the street:

Compared to those with short street careers and those in shelters, youth who were on the street for lengthy periods and who were living on the street were significantly more likely to have gone hungry, participated in theft, used drugs, and been incarcerated (McCarthy & Hagan 1992:426-27).

In the context of this study it is particularly noteworthy that approximately one-quarter of all homeless single men (24%) and homeless single women (23%) in Dublin had spent 3-5 years homeless (Williams & Gorby, 2002:51) and the average time homeless for single homeless people was 28.6 months for men and 25.1 months for women.

3. Causes of Homelessness

It is widely acknowledged that, above all, poverty is often the most common underlying cause of homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Homeless Agency, 2001). Hickey's (2002) study on homelessness amongst ex-offenders found that they were likely to be from socially and physically deprived areas¹. Reductions in the availability of social housing, and other economic conditions such as changes in the benefits system are acknowledged in the literature as contributing to homelessness (Third & Yanetta, 2000). The National Coalition for the Homeless in the United States (1999) describes how the destruction of single-room-occupancy housing from 1970 to the mid 1980s was a major factor in the growth of homelessness. In Ireland, many people have become homeless due to the shortage of affordable housing for low income households. The escalating cost of private rented accommodation has been a prohibitive factor in accessing suitable accommodation (Homeless Agency, 2001). Hickey (2002) describes the situation with private rented accommodation, as 'increasingly inaccessible, and even with employment may be difficult to afford, as there is a significant scarcity of private rented accommodation at the lower, budget end of the market' (ibid, 2002:13).

Some of the literature in the field categorises homeless people in two ways - those who are living in poverty and then experience a crisis which leads them into homelessness and those who have mental illness, alcohol dependence or drug addiction. Homelessness therefore is caused by a complex interaction of personal, social and economic factors. In essence as the following discussion highlights there appears to be no standard equation or definitive list of individual factors that leads to homelessness. What is important according to the Homeless Agency (2001) is an ability to understand the causes of homelessness. This understanding is central to informing effective responses to people who are homeless and to developing strategies that will prevent homelessness from

¹ The measure is based on the Deprivation Index developed by the Small Area Health Research Unit, Trinity College Dublin.

occurring in the first place. The research points to a number of indicators of risk of homelessness. It is worth noting however, that while there is wide agreement about the association between certain variables and homelessness, there is no agreement about causality, primarily because of the large number of variables. The following section draws on the national and international literature in discussing these main issues. In examining some of the risk factors associated with homelessness the most noteworthy aspect is that many of them begin and/or emanate from childhood or early adolescence. It would appear therefore that the triggers to youth homelessness are also similar to those that lead to homelessness in adult life.

History of Care: Individuals with a previous history of care as children are over represented in the homeless population. Studies from the UK and the US found higher rates of homelessness amongst people with a history of care than those in the general population as a whole (Anderson et al., 1993; Anderson & Tulloch, 2000; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Metraux & Culhane, 1999; Third & Yanetta, 2000). Almost one-third of street homeless single people had spent time in local authority care (Randall & Brown, 1999). In Ireland, Kelleher et al. (2000) found a similar link between leaving care/special schools and homelessness as well as crime and homelessness.

History of Abuse: A history of physical and/or sexual abuse has been linked to an increased risk of homelessness (Anderson et al., 1993; Bruegal & Smith 1999; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000, Jones, 1993; Wardhaugh, 2000). Randall & Brown's (1999) research found that 40% of homeless young people reported having experienced violence or abuse. The *Counted In* (2002) assessment found that homeless females (in the households with children category) were likely to have experienced domestic abuse and/or abuse as a child.

Family Conflict: Family disputes and conflict² are recognised both as a trigger and a direct cause of homelessness for young people (Smith et al., 1998). Indeed CASE (2000:19) describes family conflict as 'the most dominant starting point for peoples' route into homelessness, regardless of age'. According to research presented in the CASE (2000) report, family conflict is not just one of the strongest triggers for young homelessness people in the immediate term, but it is also linked to increased risk of homelessness in the future³.

Age of First Becoming Homeless: Many young people first run away from home and/or experience homelessness due to an abusive situation or family conflict. Homeless young people are particularly vulnerable to street life especially to certain aspects such as drugs and prostitution (CASE 2000:22). Preventing young people becoming homeless is central to avoiding long term homelessness. Research suggests that young people familiarise themselves with a homeless way of life within only 2-3 days of living on the streets (Ravenhill 2000 quoted in CASE, 2000:22). The implication is that young people are particularly vulnerable to future homelessness as they quickly learn mechanisms for survival and develop acquaintances within the homeless community.

Social Isolation: A number of groups have been targeted in the literature as being at risk of homelessness. These include care leavers, ex-prisoners, isolated people and those with a

² 'Conflict' in Smith et al's (1998) study refers to constant arguments with a parent, step-parent or sibling, to such a degree that the child either runs away from home, leaves the parental home in an unplanned way or is thrown out by the parent(s).

³ Research participants ranging in age from 20s to 50s identified the beginning of their housing problems to events such as family conflict in childhood and adolescence (CASE, 2000:20).

history of homelessness (Randall & Brown, 1996). Homeless people are also more likely to have impoverished social networks of friends and family (MacNeela, 1999:22). The implication is that those with few or no social networks are most vulnerable to homelessness and those with some or many networks are not. However, a report by CASE (2000) argues that such a simplistic analysis assumes that individuals' social networks are necessarily positive and non-criminogenic.

Alcohol & Drug Mis-use: Research in Holland suggests that 40% of the homeless population are addicted to alcohol and one-third have used hard drugs within the past year (Deben & Greshof, 1997). Similar findings emerged in studies in Northern Ireland, amongst Belfast hostel dwellers - McGilloway & Donnelly (1996) found that almost one-quarter were drug users. Addiction disorders have the potential to contribute to homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless (1999) describe the situation whereby 'those living with below-living wage incomes and just one-step away from homelessness, the onset or exacerbation of an addictive disorder may provide just the catalyst to plunge them into residential instability' (ibid, 1999:1). For others alcohol and drug use begins or even escalates as a result of the stress, poverty and violence of street life and/or becomes part of the process of adapting to the conditions of the street.

Mental Ill Health: The prevalence of severe psychiatric disorder among the homeless has been estimated at between 25% and 50% (Feeney et al., 2000). A study of hostel dwelling men in Dublin reported that 52% of men said they suffered from depression (Feeney et al., 2000). International literature also points to high levels of mental illness in the homeless population (Van de Bogerd, 1993). Similarly, McGilloway & Donnelly (1996) found over one-third of Belfast hostel dwellers had psychiatric problems. Furthermore, Scott (1993) in a review of studies found an incidence of between 30% to 50% in the rate of mental illness amongst the homeless population.

Imprisonment: Previous research suggests that a period of incarceration increases a person's chances of being homeless (Carlen, 1983; Piliavin et al., 1993; Yanetta et al., 1999). Time of release potentially is 'a trigger that leads directly to the streets' (Greater London Research Authority, 2000:7). Carlisle's (1996) findings indicate that 40% of prisoners expected to be homeless on release, with fewer than half able to return to the accommodation they had prior to entering custody. A number of other studies also found that ex-prisoners were unsure where they would be living on release (GLARG, 2000; NACRO, 2001). Paylor (1992) found that less than half ex-prisoners were able to return to their previous address and 40% were released to no fixed abode. Carlisle's (1996) study also found that all of the ex-prisoners living in private rented accommodation prior to imprisonment lost their accommodation on release. All of those staying in hostels, or whose accommodation came with their jobs lost their accommodation. Homelessness, therefore, is an issue for many people released from prison in terms of reintegration and re-offending. Ex-prisoners viewed housing 'as important in providing a secure base from which other problems could be addressed' (GLARG, 2000:41). Difficulties amongst prisoners in finding and maintaining accommodation after release from prison and the replicating cycle of prison and inadequate accommodation in the community was documented in Carlisle's (1996) study. It was reported that the issue of housing and employment on release from prison is exacerbated by delays in benefits (GLRAG, 2000). In addition to the risk factors that increase the likelihood of an individual becoming homeless, a number of 'crisis points' (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000) have also been identified as

triggering homelessness. These include leaving the parental home after arguments; marital or relationship breakdown; widowhood; leaving care; a sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in alcohol or drug misuse; a financial crisis of mounting debts; eviction from a rented or owned home and the absence of adequate support networks.

4. Crime and Homelessness - Routes Into the Criminal Justice System

A number of researchers (Banks & Fairhead, 1976; Ramsay, 1986) have noted a higher rate of reconviction amongst homeless offenders than those with more stable accommodation. In determining the relationship between crime and homelessness a key question relates to whether homelessness leads to offending or vice versa. The multiplicity and complexity of risk factors relating to crime and homelessness highlights the importance of not adopting one causation model. The most accurate assumption to be made is that crime potentially is both a cause and an effect of homelessness. The following analysis develops this point by discussing some of the risk factors associated with crime, as well as the nature and motivation for offending amongst homeless individuals.

The risk factors and triggers associated with homelessness also often underlie the likelihood of offending behaviour. For example, earlier in this chapter it was documented that mental ill health is common amongst the homeless population (Van de Bogerd, 1993). Similarly, high levels of mental ill health have also been documented in the prison population in Ireland and abroad (Carmody & McEvoy, 1996; Centre for Health Promotion Studies, 2000). High levels of drug use are also common amongst the homeless (McGilloway & Donnelly, 1996) and prison population (Centre for Health Promotion Studies, 2000; O'Mahony, 1997). The association between drug use, homelessness and offending is highlighted by findings from a study for Merchants Quay Ireland where it was found that 26% of their homeless drug using clients had served a prison sentence, or had been on remand (Cox & Lawless, 1999). Furthermore, Kelleher et al. (2000:14) describes how a young person leaving care and committed to prison 'is three times more likely to be abusing drugs than a young person not committed to prison' (Kelleher et al., 2000:14).

Ballintyne (1999) argues that while the rate of offending amongst homeless people, particularly rough sleepers was high, the motivation behind it tended to be need as opposed to personal gain. Similarly in her study of young homeless people, Carlen (1996) describes many of the crimes amongst young people as 'strategies of survivalism'. The notion of survivalist or necessity crime is also described by Palenski (1984). Hagan & McCarthy's (1997) study of young homeless people found that living on the streets contributed to youth crime, arrest and imprisonment and earlier research by the same authors (McCarthy & Hagan, 1991) also suggests that young people are more likely to commit crime after becoming homeless as opposed to beforehand.

The evidence also shows that the motivation for criminal behaviour is not always based on the acquisition of material goods. Indeed DiLisi (2000) outlines a number of categories of crime for which homeless people are arrested. These include crimes of violence; nuisance crimes; property crimes; traffic crimes; drug crimes and weapon offences. In relation to public order offences the motivation was described as 'circumstance' (Ballintyne, 1999). While not undermining the significance of such offending it is important

to note that Ballintyne's (1999) 'circumstance' analysis is backed up by literature highlighting high levels of criminal victimisation against homeless people. In Carlen's (1996) study of young homeless people she found that most of the offending was lifestyle crime such as violence or substance abuse, however she describes how it was 'also often precipitated by an assault to which the young person would have been less likely to have been exposed had they not been homeless' (ibid, 1996:135).

Snow *et al.* (1989) outline a number of processes by which homeless people and rough sleepers in particular are more likely to commit an offence. These include engaging in criminal behaviour to survive on the streets; the criminalisation of street life including drinking in public; and the stigmatisation of street homelessness whereby the visibility and suspicion of rough sleepers as potential threats to community safety mean that they may be more likely to be formally processed for offences that may otherwise have been ignored⁵. The first of these processes the 'survivalist' analysis has been discussed above, the focus therefore turns to the issue of criminalisation of street life and the stigmatisation which may lead to increased arrests.

The notion of increased visibility leading to more encounters with agents of the criminal justice system is documented in criminological research (Ballintyne, 1999). Homeless people are forced to spend more time in public space as it is the only arena from which they can execute their daily activities (Holohan, 1997). In essence homeless people encounter many issues in relation to space. As Wardhaugh (2000:111) describes:

'Public' and 'private' are meaningful terms when there is a public and potentially dangerous region to venture into from the safe, privatised domain of the home. For the street homeless, however, the public-private dichotomy has far less relevance. For them, the distinction between public and private is less clear-cut in that they are routinely excluded from many public, as well as most or all private places.

Regardless of the motivation for offending the implication is that many homeless people are likely to end up in the criminal justice system due to a combination of the risk factors, motivations and circumstances of their lives outlined above. Homelessness therefore impacts on all of the agencies in the criminal justice system, in particular the Garda, the Probation and Welfare Service and the Prison Service. The following section examines the impact of homelessness on the operation of the criminal justice system.

5. Homelessness - The Implications for the Criminal Justice System

Police: It is the police who come into most contact with homeless people (Donnellan, 2000). Ballintyne describes the nature of policing the homeless population 'policing people who sleep rough is a regular, recurring demand upon police time and resources' (ibid, 1999:83). With regard to begging, it appears that the most destitute are those who are most likely to engage in such activity:

Begging or asking for money on the street was an alternative source of income for a minority of respondents. Among those living in hostels, only 2 per cent said that they had received income from this source, but 20 per cent of those who were sleeping rough had done so (Anderson, 1997:125).

⁴ In Ballintyne's (1999) 'circumstance' refers to the public nature of the lifestyle of homeless people.

⁵ Ballintyne's (1999) study of rough sleepers documented that they had a high level of contact with the police.

The resource demands for policing result from the frequent but minor nature of offences committed by homeless people.

Probation & Welfare Service: Homelessness is also an issue for those appearing before the courts and receiving community-based sanctions such as a probation bond or community service (Connolly, 2000). In a study of young high-risk probation clients in Northern Ireland (O'Mahony and Seymour, 2001) it was found that living arrangements broke down as a result of involvement with the criminal justice system, breakdown in family relationships, the family unable to tolerate the young person's behaviour, leaving care or a custodial institution, paramilitary threat, community exclusion etc. The relevance of these findings is that they had a number of implications for the Probation Service and individual Probation Officers in terms of managing the probation order and achieving a successful outcome. These included:

- The difficulty for Probation Officers of tracking probation clients living in temporary accommodation (e.g. living in hostels, moving between friends houses etc.).
- The amount of time devoted to dealing with 'crises' such as homelessness at supervision sessions between the Probation Officer and probation client and its adverse impact on the time available to address offending behaviour.
- The difficulties of finding temporary accommodation for some offenders e.g. especially individuals who may have been previously barred from hostels due to aggressive or violent behaviour, or those with drug and alcohol issues. Even where placements were found they frequently broke down due to the probation client breaking the rules of the hostel. Indeed in a guide to effective probation practice *Evidence Based Practice*, Chapman & Hough (1999) argue that effective probation supervision must incorporate and work in partnership with other services including housing and employment agencies to reduce the risk of re-offending amongst probation clients.
- Probation clients with unstable living arrangements (particularly those leaving care or previously having been in custody) were over-represented in the offender group who did not complete their probation order. It could be argued that homelessness increases the likelihood of non-compliance with community-based court orders and essentially impacts on the extent the Probation Service can effectively manage offenders in the community.
- Due to the reasons highlighted above it is suggested that inappropriate or inadequate resources to deal with the issue of homelessness amongst those on community-based sanctions places offenders at increased risk of breach proceedings for non-completion, custody and re-offending.

These findings highlight that homelessness has the potential to impact on the effective and efficient operation of the Probation and Welfare Service.

Prison: Carlen (1983) argues that homeless people are over-represented in the prison population for two main reasons. Firstly, they have a higher reconviction rate than domiciled offenders and secondly their housing status may be instrumental in a court's decision to remand them to custody and sentence them to imprisonment. According to the *Annual Report of the Irish Prison Service (2002)* a total of 9,716 persons entered the prison system in 2002, of them 39.8% of persons provided a Dublin address. Males accounted for 90% of all committals and 61% of all prisoners both male and female were

less than 30 years. As described in the introductory chapter, quantifying the percentage of homeless individuals in the prison system is difficult; this is due to the diversity across the statistics available and the fact that prisoners are often reluctant to report being homeless in prison for fear of stigmatisation and/or discrimination therefore under-reporting is common (Baldry, 2001).

It was documented earlier in this chapter that imprisonment is identified as a risk factor for homelessness because of the likelihood of losing accommodation while in prison and as a result of the experience of institutionalisation. In addition, the evidence suggests that the numerous risk and trigger factors associated with both crime and homelessness impact on how well prisoners fare on release. In a study of homeless offenders (GLARG, 2000) professionals were most likely to predict post-release homelessness amongst prisoners based on personal (e.g. insecurely housed before prison, substance misuse problems etc.) rather than sentencing factors.

In the GLARG study, a distinction was noted in the social circumstances and relationships⁶ between those who knew where they would be living upon release and those who did not. It emerged that those with supportive family and other relationships were returning to their previous home whereas those with unstable housing arrangements prior to imprisonment were being released into similar circumstances. As if to further highlight the cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment the same research found that some of the study participants had been in a similar position on their release from previous sentences. Essentially they had never been afforded the opportunity to resolve their problems whilst in prison.

The implications of these findings for the prison service are that homeless individuals are likely to return to the system on an ongoing basis for relatively minor crimes. It appears that they enter into a cycle of homelessness, unemployment, poor family relationships, community alienation and minimal service provision which allows little opportunity to break the cycle. At a broader level the implications of these findings are that the relationship between crime, homelessness and imprisonment is not simplistic, rather it is a complex process consisting of adverse living circumstances, social disadvantage, poverty and criminogenic risk factors and triggers.

5.1 Diversion: Homeless People in the Criminal Justice System

The following section of the review examines the notion of diversion at each level of the criminal justice system from time of prosecution through to release from custody. It argues that effective diversionary strategies in the criminal justice system have the potential to reduce the number of homeless individuals entering and re-entering the system. In light of the previous discussions in this chapter that identified the multiplicity of offenders' needs it is argued that strategies to divert homeless individuals from the criminal justice system will only be successful if supported by the provision of appropriate support services including housing provision.

Diversion from Prosecution: Ballintyne's (1999) study of rough sleepers suggests that police have an important role in diverting homeless people from the criminal justice system particularly for minor offences such as drinking in public, begging and disorder. He

⁶ The importance of maintaining family relationships is highlighted by the research produced by groups working with ex-prisoners (e.g. Jamieson and Grounds, 2001; NACRO, 1998) and studies of reintegration programmes in the United States (LeClair, 1988; Fair 1988).

suggests that the police can do this by directing individuals to appropriate facilities to meet their needs. Ballintyne (1999) argues that to implement a diversionary strategy police need to be trained and educated about the needs of homeless people. In addition, the provision of appropriate services for homeless people is an essential element to execute this strategy, for example, it may be that day centre provision with 'wet' facilities or a sufficient number of 'wet' hostels will enable police to re-direct individuals off the streets.

The evidence suggests that appropriate non-criminal justice orientated support services for homeless people impacts on involvement with crime. For example, Hagan & McCarthy's (1997) study found that young homeless people in Toronto had fewer arrests and were less involved in crime than a similar population in Vancouver. The rationale presented for this difference related to the nature of services provided to the young homeless in both cities - in Toronto services were support orientated, whereas the services in Vancouver were directed more towards crime control and enforcement.

Diversion from Custody: The NESF Report *Reintegration of Prisoners (2002)* suggests that one of the most effective ways of promoting an offender's reintegration is to reduce the risk of marginalisation in the first place. The report argues that assisting individuals to remain in the community increases their likelihood of abstaining from offending in the long-term. Community-based sanctions provide such an opportunity to the offender if the content of the sanction is targeted to his/her criminogenic needs. Failure to provide appropriate intervention to meet these needs often results in an unsuccessful outcome for the offender and service provider (Chapman & Hough, 1999; May 1999).

Post-custody Diversion and Community Re-entry: Reintegration advocates (Altschuler & Armstrong, 1999; Travis and Petersilia, 2001) argue that it is essential that preparation for release begins during the time an offender spends in prison and continues on release in order to have any impact on resettlement and a reduction in re-offending. Altschuler & Armstrong (1999:2) describe the process of preparing for community reintegration as 'reintegrative confinement'. Reintegrative confinement emphasises:

- Preparing confined offenders for re-entry into the specific communities to which they will return;
- Making the necessary arrangements and linkages with agencies and individuals in the community that relate to known risk and protective factors;
- Ensuring the delivery of required services and supervision.

In order to divert individuals post-custody it is necessary to implement plans for reintegration as advocated in the document *Management of Offenders: A Five Year Plan (1994)* and reiterated in the *Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement (2001-2003)*.

The 1994 document set out proposals for Positive Sentence Management, defined as:

Making available to offenders a range of services and facilities aimed at helping them to cope with their sentences, to preserve their physical and mental well-being and to prepare them as far as practicable for, early structured release under supervision, if justified and earned (Department of Justice, 1994).

The *Irish Prison Service Strategy Statement (2001-2003)* outlined its planning assumption on Positive Sentence Management:

The elaboration of positive sentence management will involve a new orientation in

the delivery of services to prisoners and a new emphasis on prisoners taking greater personal responsibility for their own development through involvement in the process of deciding which programme/treatments they should follow. The end result should be a new prisoner-centred, multi-disciplinary approach to working with prisoners with provision for initial assessment, goal setting and periodic review to measure progress.

To reiterate further the importance of pre-release planning for reintegration and reducing re-offending, Ramsay (1986) found that over a two-year period after release from prison that less than a third of prisoners who had homes to go to were reconvicted, compared with 69% of those with no home⁷.

5.2 Multi-agency Response

Regardless of the level of contact an individual has with the criminal justice system a substantial body of literature highlights the importance of addressing the comprehensive range of social factors which lead to crime in order to impact and promote desistance from offending. As Ramsay (1986) describes, one of the most basic of these needs is housing:

Neither possession of a job nor having somewhere to live is necessarily going to rehabilitate anyone, but, without either or these, a man's chances of "going straight" are very slim indeed.

For homeless offenders, however, the provision of temporary or permanent accommodation is not sufficient to solve the homeless problem (or indeed their offending) unless the underlying issues that led to homelessness are also dealt with (Dane, 1998). In the same research, Dane (1998) described one of the key factors leading to repeat homelessness as the failure of a tenancy and/or 'revolving door syndrome'⁸. The issues underlying the 'revolving door syndrome' include debt, inability to manage money, increased alcohol use and mental health issues. To effectively divert individuals from the criminal justice system therefore requires an integrated and comprehensive approach to dealing with the multiplicity and complexity of issues involved. It is in addressing the issue of homelessness amongst those who come before the courts and in the prison population that the necessity of integrating homeless people into mainstream services is best highlighted. Such action would involve multi-agency partnerships with the Probation and Welfare Service as well as the local authority, health board and statutory, voluntary and community groups.

The development of new proofing measures for the criminal justice system and specifically for the Probation and Welfare Service in order to ensure any policy or practice does not contribute to the problem of homelessness is crucial to addressing the inter-related complexities of crime, homelessness and social exclusion. However, homeless proofing the agencies of the criminal justice system will be of little use in tackling the issue of homeless individuals coming before the courts and in prison without similar strategies being adopted by other agencies including local authorities, the health boards, social services and statutory, voluntary and community groups working in the community and prison context.

⁷ This Home Office research was based on a total of 600 prisoners.

⁸ This refers to a situation whereby people alternate between sleeping rough and hostel, B&B or other forms of temporary housing; or between hostel and permanent accommodation.

Conclusion

This review has set out the background to the study by examining the definition of homelessness, the difficulties associated with defining homelessness and the notion of homelessness as a process. Following from this, the causes of homelessness were identified, before going on to examine the relationship between crime and homelessness and the implications for the criminal justice system. The final sections examined the concept of diversion in relation to homeless people coming before the courts and in prison. The overall argument presented is that crime and homelessness is a complex relationship that requires the intervention of a wide range of agencies from the criminal justice system to local authorities, the health boards and other support services to work in partnership. Diversion will only be a useful concept for moving people out of, or preventing them from returning to the criminal justice system if it is supported in practice by the appropriate support services in the community from housing provision, to mental health programmes and drug treatment. The following chapters build upon this review by presenting the findings from the extensive fieldwork for this study in the Courts, the Probation and Welfare Service, Detention Schools and the Prisons.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the research methodology which was adopted to achieve the objectives of this study. It details the research methods and instruments which were employed and the ethical and procedural issues arising. Conducting research in the area of homelessness is problematic given the lack of consensus around the definition of homelessness. The difficulty is compounded when researching homeless individuals in the criminal justice system whom are often likely to provide the address of a family member or friend when in conflict with the law (Murie, 1998) rather than disclose their homeless status. Homeless individuals appearing before the courts and in prison are often aware that there is a reduced likelihood of them receiving bail or temporary release from prison if they have no fixed abode. In order to overcome these difficulties and provide an accurate account of the number, profile and progression routes of homeless people in the criminal justice system, a number of research methodologies were employed. These included the collection and analysis of records from the Probation and Welfare Service, the District Courts (including the Children's Court and Drug Treatment Court), Circuit Court and the Detention Schools in the Dublin Metropolitan area; a prison survey; in-depth qualitative interviews with prisoners; focus groups with custody and community based Probation and Welfare teams and consultation with a range of stakeholders.

1. Design of the Research Instruments

The following section describes the design of the research instruments for the prison survey, the in-depth interviews with prisoners and focus groups with Probation and Welfare Officers.

Prison Survey Questionnaire: Following a review of the national and international literature on crime and homelessness, an initial questionnaire was designed for the study. It was a structured questionnaire with predominately fixed response questions however, as outlined below, there were a small number of open-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information from all individuals in the prison sample regardless of their homeless or housing status prior to imprisonment. The rationale for this strategy was firstly to be in a position to make comparisons between those who had never been homeless and those who had, and secondly to examine the issue of 'risk of homelessness' in the prison sample. The questionnaire was made up of two main sections (see Appendix A for full detail). The first part (Section 1-5 inclusive) was carried out with all prisoners. The second part (Section 6-12 inclusive) was completed only with those prisoners who said they had been previously homeless. The following section outlines the broad themes of the questions:

Section 1-5 (Completed with all Prisoners in the Sample)

- Basic demographic data
- Informal support structures
- Housing status prior to imprisonment
- Local community
- Anticipated problems on release
- Homelessness (likelihood of homeless on release, important factors to them avoiding homelessness on release and if they had ever been homeless).

Section 6-12 (Completed with Prisoners with a History of Homelessness)

- Experience of Homelessness
- Accessing Housing
- Homelessness and the Community
- Homelessness and Victimization
- Alcohol, Drugs and Homelessness
- Homelessness and Health
- Crime, Imprisonment and Homelessness

As mentioned above there were a small number of open-ended questions used in the questionnaire. The purpose of these was to allow the prisoner an opportunity to express their own opinions and views about their homeless experiences.

Guidance and feedback was sought from the Probation and Welfare Service, the Irish Prison Service and other organisations (e.g. Pathways, EX-PAC) on initial drafts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with a group of service users at the Pathways project. Final amendments were made to the questionnaire following a staff training day in preparation for the prison based fieldwork (see below).

Focus Guides for Prisoners: The literature review played an important role in establishing a framework for this aspect of the research (see Appendix B). However, a strong focus was also placed on inductivity during the course of the interviews. The guides were semi-structured and the subject focus differed, depending on the subjective experience of the interviewee.

Focus Guides for Probation and Welfare Staff: A review of the relevant literature and consultation with homeless service providers and staff at the Probation and Welfare Service Research Unit, Probation and Welfare Officers and Managers within the Service informed the design of the guides used during the focus groups with custody and community based Probation and Welfare Officers (see Appendix E and F).

2. Data Collection

2.1 Probation and Welfare Service Records

The purpose of this aspect of the research was to determine the number and profile⁹ of homeless people referred to the Probation and Welfare Service by the Courts in the Dublin area. A six week period between 19 May and 27 June 2003 was chosen to examine the records of all those referred to the Probation and Welfare Service and the subject of a Probation report furnished to the Dublin Metropolitan Courts.

According to the 'Court Diary' of the Probation and Welfare Service, there were 643 cases¹⁰ of individuals previously referred, and for whom pre-sanction or progress reports were due for submission to the courts, over the six week period between 19 May to 27 June 2003. The initial request for a pre-sanction report from the Courts are recorded on

⁹ It was originally intended that this analysis would allow the researchers to determine the progression routes of homeless people in the criminal justice system however as the chapter 5 on Probation and Welfare Records outlines this was not possible due to the high numbers of adjournments.

¹⁰ This consisted of 275 (A Forms), 310 (B Forms) and 58 cases where it was not identified if cases were A or B.

an 'A Form' and subsequent requests for progress reports are recorded and tracked on a 'B Form' (to the point of outcome or judicial decision). It had been anticipated that a comparison would be made between the original A and B form for each offender. Specifically, it was expected that the researchers could check if an individual's housing status had changed from the time he/she were first referred to the Probation and Welfare Service (Form A) through to the outcome (recorded on Form B). However, given the limitation of a six week data collection period combined with a significant amount of unavailable records (Form A) a decision was taken to focus only on the B forms. Of the 643 Probation and Welfare Service cases in the court diary 275 were Form A, 310 were Form B and 58 were not identified as A or B forms. In total however, the records of 429 B Form cases were examined and analysed by the researchers. The difference in the number of B Form cases recorded in the court diary and the numbers that were actually generated is explained by a number of factors. These include an omission from the court diary in the Probation and Welfare Service; cases where reports were generated in an outlying court and therefore the initial request for a pre-sanction report did not present at Probation and Welfare Headquarters or as occurred in a number of cases in this research (n=58), the case was not identified as A or B in the court diary.

Data gathered from the B form included court location, date of birth, address, offence, probation report proposals, court outcome and details of the court decision. The researchers inputted the data on a weekly basis at the Probation and Welfare Service Headquarters. As well as identifying those cases that were of 'no fixed abode' the researchers cross referenced the data with addresses in the Homeless Agency Homeless Directory and with the list of all Bed & Breakfast accommodation in Dublin available specifically to the homeless population. This enabled them to provide the most accurate estimation of homeless people in the Probation and Welfare record sample¹¹.

2.2 Court Records

The analysis of court records incorporated the District (including the Children's Court and Drug Treatment Court) and Circuit Courts in Dublin. Computerised court record data were gathered from the District Court office for the same six period as the Probation and Welfare records (19 May – 27 June 2003). The purpose of this aspect of the research was to determine the number and profile (age, gender, accommodation, offence and outcome) of homeless people appearing before the courts.

Computerised data consisting of 8,725 individuals (12,354 charges) were forwarded to the researchers from the District Court. It provided information for all those cases that appeared before the District Courts in the six week period, with the exception of summons cases.

Court records from the Children's Court and Drug Treatment Court are not yet computerised therefore the researchers visited the Courts and inputted the data into an SPSS file for analysis. Information was gathered for all those at the Drug Treatment Court (47 individuals and 294 charges). In the Children's Court, data were collected only for the cases finalised in the six week period (140 individuals and 345 charges).

¹¹ It should be noted however that it was not possible to identify or verify the legitimacy of all private addresses provided on the database, therefore there is a high likelihood that a number of homeless individuals provided addresses of previous residency or an address of a family or friend.

Data from the Circuit Court contained information on all those cases (882 individuals and 1748 charges) that had passed through the courts in a six week period. Data from the Circuit Court were collected from 05 May to 27 June 2003 to allow for the two week recess in the Circuit Courts in June 2003.

2.3 Detention School Records

Demographic information was collected for the population of the three detention schools included in the study (n=55). The researchers visited each of the schools and accessed the data directly from staff. In one of the detention schools, staff also provided the researchers with follow-up data on ex-residents of the school (n=22). This data provided a useful source of information in determining the progression routes of young people following their release from detention.

2.4 Prison Survey

A prison survey was carried out in all of the Dublin prisons including Mountjoy, the Dóchas Centre, the Training Unit, St. Patrick's Institution, Arbour Hill, Cloverhill and Wheatfield prisons.

The researchers accessed the list of all prisoners recorded on the PRIS system (excluding those on temporary release) on 01 August 2003. The list contained 1,561 persons. A simple random sampling framework was chosen to select cases. An initial sample was drawn up as well as a substitute sample to take account of participants who may be unavailable, released, at court or refused to take part.

241 prisoners were interviewed for the main study representing 15.43% of the prison population. Of the sample of 241 only 11 were women. A booster sample of 39 was chosen to bring the total number of women to 50 and allow more meaningful analysis of the data. In effect, this meant that a total of 280 prisoners were interviewed. Table 1 outlines the number of interviews completed in each prison.

Table 1 Number of Interviews

| Prison | Number |
|---------------------------|---------------|
| Mountjoy | 64 |
| Dóchas Centre | 50* |
| St. Patrick's Institution | 30 |
| Training Unit | 14 |
| Arbour Hill | 21 |
| Wheatfield | 58 |
| Cloverhill | 43 |

Note: 11 women prisoners were selected in the random sample of the total prison population. A booster sample of 39 women was also selected to increase the total number of women prisoners interviewed to 50.

The data collection took place between 05 and 22 August 2003. Before each interview commenced the researcher read out an information letter to the prisoners and established that they understood what was being said and were agreeable to taking part (see Appendix D). Researchers recorded the interviewees' responses on the survey questionnaire. Qualitative data emerging from open-ended questions on the survey questionnaire were recorded verbatim.

2.5 In-depth Interviews with Prisoners

The aim of this aspect of the research process was to provide rich descriptions and explanations on the relationship between crime and homelessness. In-depth interviews took place in Mountjoy Prison, the Dóchas Centre, St. Patrick's Institution, Arbour Hill and the Training Unit in June-July 2003. Table 2 illustrates the profile of these interviewees.

Table 2 Profile of Interviewees (Qualitative Interviews)

| | |
|--|--|
| Number of Interviewees | 10 |
| Gender | Male (8) – Female (2) |
| Age Profile | 17 - 57 years |
| Children: | Yes (4) – No (6) |
| Marital Status | Single (8) – Common law wife (1) – Separated (1) |
| Previous experience of homelessness | Yes (8) – No (2) |
| Fear of homelessness on release | Yes (10) |

A total of ten prisoners were interviewed, eight were male and two were female. Their ages ranged from 17 to 57 years. Both female interviewees were aged 23 years. Of the ten interviewees, eight were single, one was separated and one had lived with a common law wife prior to imprisonment. Four interviewees had children. Eight interviewees had previous experience of being homeless and all of them (10) expressed concern over the risk becoming homeless in the future. The interviewees with no history of homelessness were serving life sentences. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. To protect the identity of each prisoner, only their age, gender and location were disclosed on the tape.

2.6 Focus Groups with Probation and Welfare Officers in Prisons and the Community

Focus Groups with Probation and Welfare Teams in Mountjoy, the Dóchas Centre, the Training Unit, St. Patrick's Institution, Arbour Hill, Cloverhill and Wheatfield prisons were held between May and July 2003. The purpose of these focus groups were to identify the specific issues pertaining to different client groups within the prison system and discuss potential barriers and solutions to addressing these problems (see Appendix E). At the end of August 2003 two focus groups were held with Probation and Welfare staff based in the various communities across Dublin. The purpose of these focus groups was to identify the gaps in provision for homeless offenders in the community as well as discussing the impact of homelessness on effective probation supervision (see Appendix F).

2.7 Consultation with Stakeholders

The researchers consulted with a wide range of other stakeholders in the process of compiling this research report. Stakeholders include the Homeless Agency, the Eastern Region Health Authority, Local Authorities in Dublin City, South Dublin, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Fingal, the Northern Area Health Board (including the Out of Hours Service), Oberstown Boys School, Oberstown Girls School, Trinity House, the Step Down Unit at Trinity House, Sancta Maria Hostel, Turas Nua and a range of service providers under the aegis of Merchant's Quay, Focus Ireland and Dublin Simon.

3. Ethical Issues

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the potential vulnerability of the research subjects, the researchers were mindful of abiding by principles of good ethical practice at all stages of the research. The research design was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Irish Prison Service. The study was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines of the British Society of Criminology.

To protect the identity of individuals, criminal justice records were anonymised, the names were removed and numbers inserted. However, for the Court and Probation and Welfare Service analysis it was necessary to have the address and date of birth of each individual. Data containing personal information was stored on secure files with security passwords attached. All data for the detention schools was accessed by school staff, the data was completely anonymised and did not include detail of name, address or date of birth (age only).

With regard to the prison survey, prisoners were assured that the study was confidential in nature. No names or personal information that could identify them were recorded on the questionnaire. They were informed that they did not have to answer any question(s) that they did not feel comfortable with, and they had the right to stop the interview at any time.

A training day was organised by the lead researchers at the Centre for Social and Educational Research, DIT in June 2003. The purpose was to prepare the research team (two lead researchers and two research assistants) for the fieldwork. The training included specific sessions on research ethics and researching vulnerable groups (see Appendix C for a full outline of the content of the research training day).

4. Data Analysis

Data from the Courts, Probation and Welfare Service and the Prison survey were analysed using the SPSS package. Responses to open-ended questions on the prison survey were recorded verbatim and analysed thematically. The qualitative data arising from the in-depth interviews with prisoners were analysed using a method of thematic content analysis involving three main stages including data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Discussion arising from the focus groups and consultation process were written up during and after sessions and were also analysed thematically.

Conclusion

The sensitive nature of this research topic was a strong consideration for the researchers from the onset and was the guiding principle throughout the whole of the research process. At the beginning of this report, the difficulties of quantifying the numbers of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system was documented - through a combination of official records and information elicited from interviews this research has sought to respond to the central research question about the number, profile and progression routes of homeless individuals coming before the courts and in prison in Dublin. The following chapters outline the findings in detail.

CHAPTER 4

PREVALENCE OF HOMELESS PERSONS APPEARING BEFORE THE COURTS IN DUBLIN

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the prevalence of homelessness amongst individuals appearing before the courts in the Dublin Metropolitan area. The analysis is based on the court data for all individuals appearing before the District (including the Children and Drug Treatment Courts) and Circuit Courts in the Dublin Metropolitan area over a six week period between 19 May and 27 June 2003¹². Data were gathered and analysed on the age, gender, address, nature of offence, number of charges and case outcome.

Individuals of 'no fixed abode' were identified directly from the records. The addresses of all individuals appearing before the courts during this period were cross-referenced with the addresses listed in the Homeless Agency's *Homeless Directory (2002-2003)* to identify those living in emergency, transitional and supported housing.

In order to be granted bail, a defendant before the court must provide an address. Therefore, it is safe to assume that some homeless people will provide the address of a family member or friend, rather than describe themselves as being of 'no fixed abode.' In this way it is unlikely that the official court record data, like other official records, will fully account for all those homeless individuals appearing before the courts. It therefore needs to be treated with extreme caution. Overall however, these data are important. They provide information on those individuals who identify themselves as homeless within the system and furthermore highlight the discrepancy that exists between official levels of homelessness and the levels emerging from other research methods such as a prison survey (see Chapter 7).

The first section of the chapter identifies the number of individuals appearing in each court and the number of charges against them. The second section provides an analysis of the merged data of identified homeless people before all courts. It includes a demographic breakdown of age, gender, homeless status and number of offences. The third section examines the nature of the charges against all homeless people presenting to the District court, the proportion of cases with an outcome, and the outcome by offence category. Finally, the nature of the charges against homeless people presenting to the Circuit court are presented in section four.

I. Number of Cases before the Courts

As Table I demonstrates there were a total of 9,794 cases included in the analysis. A total of 9,654 individuals passed through the District (including the Drug Treatment Court) and Circuit Courts over the research period and 140 children and young people had their cases finalised within the same period. 8,725 individuals appeared in the District court with a total of 12,354 charges and 882 appeared in the Circuit court with a total of 1,748 charges. There were 47 cases on the Drug Treatment Court records and this group had 294 offences. Young people in the Children's Court (140) had a total of 345 charges.

¹² The Circuit Court data was gathered from 05 May to 27 June to allow for the two week Circuit Court recess in June 2003. The District Court records excluded all summons. In the Children's Court data were collected only on those individuals whose cases had been finalised within the six week period. Records in the Children's Court are not computerised and therefore the task of manually examining all records exceeded the time framework for this research.

Table 1 Court by Number of Individuals and Number of Charges (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| Court | Number of individuals | Number of charges |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| District Court | 8,725 | 12,354 |
| Circuit Court | 882 | 1,748 |
| Drug Treatment Court | 47 | 294 |
| Children's Court | 140 | 345 |
| Total | 9,794 | 14,741 |

2. Homeless Individuals before the Courts

Within the sample of 9,794 people appearing before the courts (Circuit and District Courts including Drug Treatment Court and Children's Court), 159 people were identified as homeless. This represents 1.6% of the total sample. However, if the cases from the Children's Court are excluded (given that these cases only represent those who reached a final outcome in the six week period) it can be seen that 1.54% of those who appeared before the District (including the Drug Treatment Court) and the Circuit courts were identified as homeless.

Table 2 Homeless Population by Court (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Total Population | Number of Homeless People | Percentage of Homeless People |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| District Court | 8,725 | 129 | 81% |
| Circuit Court | 882 | 18 | 11% |
| Drug Treatment Court | 47 | 2 | 1% |
| Children's Court | 140 | 10 | 6% |
| Total | 9,794 | 159 | 100 |

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the homeless population by court. It suggests that 81% of homeless people presented to the District court, 11% to the Circuit court, 1% to the Drug Treatment Court¹³ and 6% to the Children's Court. Court records identified that homeless persons represented only 1.5% of cases in the District court, 2% in the Circuit court and 4% for the Drug Treatment Court. 7% of cases finalised in the Children's court were homeless.

¹³ The Drug Treatment Court is not available to NFA cases therefore the number homeless represents those staying in emergency, transitional or supported housing only.

Table 3 Homeless Persons appearing before the Courts (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Total Sample | Homeless Sample |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Number of people | 9,794 | 159 (1.6%) |
| Number of charges | 14,741 | 711 |
| Average number of charges per person | 1.5 | 4.5 |

The average number of charges for each individual in the total population was 1.5. However, the average number for homeless persons was 4.5 (see Table 3). This is perhaps unsurprising given the evidence presented in Chapter 2 that suggests that there are a number of processes by which homeless individuals are more likely to commit an offence (Snow *et al.*, 1989) and come into contact with the police (Ballintyne, 1999).

Table 4 Age of Homeless Cases (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Number | Percentage |
|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| 16 to 19 years | 19 | 12 |
| 20 to 29 years | 60 | 38 |
| 30 to 39 years | 36 | 23 |
| 40 to 49 years | 27 | 17 |
| 50 years or over | 16 | 10 |
| Total | 158* | 100 |

* Data on age was available for 158 of the 159 homeless cases

Only 12% of the homeless cases were aged between 16 and 19 years however it is very important to note that only a small proportion of cases were represented from the Children's Court and this obviously impacts on the total number of homeless children and young people appearing in these statistics. The most common age group for the identified homeless cases was 20 to 29 years (38%). Just under one quarter were aged 30 to 39 (23%) years and 27% were 40 years or over. While no direct comparison can be made due to the differing categorisation of age data, it appears that homeless individuals appearing before the courts tend to be younger than those in the general homeless population (Williams & Gorby, 2002).

Table 5 Gender of Homeless Cases (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Number | Percentage |
|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Male | 93 | 79 |
| Female | 24 | 21 |
| Total | 117* | 100 |

* Data was available on gender for 117 of the 159 cases. The difficulty of determining gender from an individual's forename, by court staff may possibly account for some of the missing data in relation to gender on court records.

As Table 5 suggests males made up almost four-fifths of the sample (79%) while females consisted of just over one-fifth of those homeless before the courts.

Table 6 Homeless Status (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Number | Percentage |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Emergency hostel | 70 | 44 |
| No fixed abode | 68 | 42 |
| Transitional housing | 17 | 11 |
| Domestic violence refuges | 4 | 3 |
| Total | 159 | 100 |

The most common living arrangements for the homeless sample were emergency hostel accommodation (44%) and 'no fixed abode' (42%). 11% were staying in a transitional housing and 3% stayed at a domestic violence refuge. Comparing the court data information with data in the general homeless population is difficult due to the way the information is presented. In the *Counted In (2002)* assessment the study is divided into single person households, households with children and couples only households. The court data does not provide data on the marital status of individuals. However, because homeless individuals are largely represented in the single person households it is useful to examine the trends in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment. With regard to accommodation type the broad trend was reflected, in that single people in the general homeless population identified hostel accommodation as the most important form of accommodation (53%) with sleeping rough the second most common option (16%). While a direct comparison cannot be made, it would appear that there is a much higher proportion of individuals before the courts sleeping rough (42%) than reflected in the statistics for the general homeless population.

Women were more likely than men to stay in emergency accommodation than on the streets. Over 70% of homeless women compared to 43% of homeless men were staying in emergency accommodation. While 43% of men were of no fixed abode the records indicated that this was the homeless status of only four women (17%). This pattern reflects the findings of the *Counted In (2002)* assessment. For the single person household 'male service users are shown to have a much higher tendency to sleep rough compared

to females in this group while the opposite applies to B&B accommodation' (Williams & Gorby, 2002:30).

Table 7 Number of Charges against Homeless People (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| One | 18 | 11 |
| Two to five | 84 | 53 |
| Six or more | 57 | 36 |
| Total | 159 | 100 |

Table 7 suggests that only 11% of homeless people had one charge against them, over half (53%) had between 2 and 5 charges and over one-third (36%) had between 6 and 10. Again these findings reflect the evidence presented in the literature review in relation to the processes that lead to higher levels of offending amongst homeless individuals (Snow et al., 1989), and a greater likelihood of contact with the police (Ballintyne, 1999).

3 District Court Data: Analysis of Charges and Outcomes

Table 8 below presents the findings on the charges against homeless people. All charges that were recorded fewer than four times were summarised under the heading 'other.' The table suggests that the most common charges made against this group included intoxication in a public place (30%), threatening, abusive, insulting behaviour in a public place (24%), theft (21%), bail - failing to appear on the date set (15%) and failure to comply with a Garda directive (13%). Other offences included failing to produce visa/registration certificate (8%), criminal damage (7%), begging (6%), handling stolen property (5%), trespassing (5%), loitering for the purposes of prostitution (3%), obstruction of peace officer (3%), burglary (3%) and other (25%). The most noteworthy issue emerging from this breakdown of the offences for homeless people (see Table 8) is the extent to which many offences are linked to living in public space. What is significant is that existing in public space is linked with an increased risk of coming to the attention of the criminal justice system (Wardhaugh, 2000). The implication of these findings is that more needs to be done to divert homeless individuals from the court system especially given the relatively minor nature of many of the offences. This theme will be developed further in subsequent chapters.

Table 8 Charges made against Identified Homeless Population (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| Charge | Percent |
|---|---------|
| Intoxication in a public place | 30 |
| Threatening/abusive/insulting behaviour in a public place | 24 |
| Theft | 21 |
| Bail - Failing to appear on the date set | 15 |
| Failure to comply with garda directive | 13 |
| Alien failing to produce visa/registration certificate | 8 |
| Criminal Damage | 7 |
| Begging | 6 |
| Handling stolen property | 5 |
| Trespassing | 5 |
| Loitering for the purposes of prostitution | 3 |
| Obstruction of Peace Officer | 3 |
| Burglary - Intent and Full | 3 |
| Other ¹⁴ | 25 |

3.1 Outcomes (Sentence) for Offences

Outcome information was only available for individuals appearing in the District court. Of the 129 homeless people in the District Court sample, a final outcome was reached in only 16 cases (12%). There were 37 charges included in these 16 individual cases.

As Table 9 demonstrates (see over) almost one quarter of the offences were struck out (9 cases) and one-fifth dismissed (8 cases). Just over one-fifth (8 cases) resulted in imprisonment and/or detention, the outcome was a fine for six of the charges, taken into consideration (4 cases) a Peace Bond (1 case) or a Probation Bond (1 case). It is difficult to draw conclusions from this data given the small numbers involved. It is noteworthy however, that almost one quarter of all offences dealt with, were dismissed. There are a number of potential reasons for dismissal including dismissal on merit and dismissal under the Probation of Offender's Act.

¹⁴ Charges coded, 'Other' here included: Assault, Unauthorised interference with an MPV, Possession of drugs and/or for the purpose to sell or supply, Refusal to give name and address, Larceny - under €6250, Robbery, Drunk and a danger to traffic, Possession of a knife etc, Making gain or causing loss by deception, Drunk driving, Possession of certain articles, Breach of the peace, Using a false instrument, Refusal to allow fingerprints be taken, Road traffic related, Violent behaviour in Garda station, Entering building with intent to commit offence, Urinating in public place

Table 9 Outcome (Sentence) from the District Court (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Frequency |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Strike out | 9 |
| Dismissed | 8 |
| Imprisonment | 8 |
| Fine | 6 |
| Taken into consideration | 4 |
| Peace Bond | 1 |
| Probation Bond | 1 |
| Total | 37 |

Table 10 (see over) presents a breakdown of outcome categories by charges. Due to the small numbers involved it is difficult to draw conclusions about sentencing outcomes for homeless individuals. It does however, provide some insight into the types of offences committed and subsequent sanctions received by homeless people. ,

Table 10 Outcome by Charge (19 May – 27 June 2003)

| | Strike out | Fine | TIC | Peace Bond | Probation Bond | Imprison | Dismissed | Total |
|--|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| Intoxication in a public place | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Failure to appear for bail | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 6 |
| Failure to comply with Garda directive | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Begging | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Theft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Threatening Behaviour | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| Criminal Damage | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Alien | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Breach of Peace | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Violent Behaviour in a Garda Station | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 9 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 37 |

4. Circuit Court Data: Analysis of Offences

There were 22 charges made against the 18 identified homeless people presenting before the Circuit Court. Data forwarded from the Circuit Court did not have the offence recorded but rather the Act under which the offence was categorised. The most common were charges under the *Non Fatal Offences Against The Person Act (1997)* and *Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994*, the *Criminal Justice Act (1994)* followed by the *Larceny Act (1990)* and the *Misuse of Drugs Act (1984)*. Table 11 presents these data. 'Other' charges include criminal damage, fire arms and offensive weapons.

Table 11 Charges Made Against Identified Homeless Sample (05 May¹⁵ – 27 June 2003)

| Charge | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Non fatal offences on person Act | 8 | 36 |
| Criminal Justice Act | 6 | 27 |
| Larceny Act | 3 | 14 |
| Misuse of Drugs Act | 2 | 9 |
| Other | 3 | 14 |
| Total | 22 | 100 |

While the numbers are small and therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions from these data it does suggest that a small number of homeless people commit more serious offences. Overall, it appears that the majority of offences committed by homeless individuals are minor in nature, however in terms of effectively working with homeless individuals in the criminal justice system it is important to acknowledge that a small number of homeless people have the potential to commit more serious offences.

Conclusion

There were 9,794 individuals included in this aspect of the analysis. Of those 9,654 appeared before the District (including the Drug Treatment Court) and Circuit Courts and 140 children had their cases finalised in the Children's Court over the six week research period.

The analysis of the court records suggests that 1.54% of all those appearing before the District (including the Drug Treatment Court) and Circuit courts (with the exception of summons cases in the District Court) are homeless. If the numbers for the Children's Court are included, the figure for the total sample is 1.6%. While the data on the Children's Court focused only on those cases that were finalised in the six week period (n=140) it is noteworthy that in 7% of cases children and young people were homeless at the time of sentence.

¹⁵ As noted earlier, Circuit court data were collected from 05 May to 27 June 2003 to allow for the two week recess in June.

Hostel accommodation was identified as the most common accommodation (44%) for homeless individuals before the courts, however this was closely followed by 'sleeping rough' (42%). A comparison with the accommodation arrangements for single person households in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment (Williams and Gorby, 2002) suggests that those homeless individuals in the court sample were more likely to be sleeping rough than those in the general homeless population in Dublin.

Overall, the findings from the court records reflect the general literature suggesting that homeless individuals commit a greater number of offences than the general population because in addition to the general motivational factors (e.g. addiction) they are at higher risk of offending due to occupying public space (Wardhaugh, 2000) and due to a survivalist motivation (Carlen, 1996). According to the District Court records the offences committed by homeless people are largely of a minor nature and can be broadly categorised into theft and public order offences. These findings have particular implications in terms of the role of agencies in diverting homeless individuals away from the criminal justice system. While highlighting the relatively minor nature of offences committed by homeless individuals, it is important to recognise that a small number of homeless people commit more serious offences (as documented in the Circuit Court records). In terms of planning service delivery consideration needs to be given to this small but significant group of offenders.

CHAPTER 5

PREVALENCE OF HOMELESS PERSONS REFERRED TO THE PROBATION AND WELFARE SERVICE IN DUBLIN

Probation and Welfare Service data consisted of requests for pre-sanction and progress reports on individuals appearing before the courts. As documented in the methodology, the initial request for a pre-sanction report from the Courts is recorded on an 'A Form' and subsequent requests for progress reports are recorded and tracked on a 'B Form' (to the point of outcome or judicial decision). In total, according to the Probation and Welfare Service 'Court Diary' held at the Service's Headquarters in Dublin, there were 643 cases¹⁶ of individuals for whom reports were requested or referrals were being tracked through the courts over the six week period between 19 May to 27 June 2003. The total number was made up of 275 Form A cases, 310 Form B cases and 58 cases that were not identified in the diary as either Form A or B cases.

Initially it had been anticipated that a comparison would be made between the original Form A and Form B of each offender to check if an individual's housing status had changed from the time s/he were first referred to the Probation Service. However, due to limitations of time and data it was only possible to focus on individuals who were being tracked through the system (B forms). In total, 429 B Forms were examined and analysed¹⁷. This chapter presents an overview of the prevalence of homelessness among this sample of 429 individuals. Data available included court, date of birth, address, offence, probation report recommendation, court outcome and details on the court decision.

Among this sample of 429, 40 were homeless and 389 were not identified as homeless from the information available. This group were identified through the conduct of a cross analysis of addresses in the Homeless Agency *Homeless Directory (2002-2003)*, as well as from the list of all Bed & Breakfast accommodation in Dublin available specifically to the homeless population. This group represents 9.3% of the total group. The purpose of the chapter is to provide an indication of the number, basic profile, offence profile, report recommendations and court outcomes for those homeless individuals referred to the Probation and Welfare Service.

¹⁶ Address data were available for the full sample of 643 individuals in the Court Diaries. However, analysis of these data revealed an incidence 'no fixed abode' for only 16 individuals. As is outlined later in this chapter, a total of 23 people were identified as being of no fixed abode in the sample of 429 Form Bs. This suggests that incidence of no fixed abode in the court diary is under-represented. For this reason, the address data contained in the Court Diaries are not included in this analysis.

¹⁷ The difference in the number of B Form cases recorded in the court diary (310 cases) and the numbers that were actually generated (429 cases) is explained by a number of factors. These include an omission from the court diary in the Probation and Welfare Service; cases where reports were generated in an outlying court and therefore the initial request for a pre-sanction report did not present at Probation and Welfare Headquarters or as occurred in a number of cases in this research (n=58), the case was not identified as A or B in the court diary.

Table 1 Age and Gender of Homeless Probation Referrals

| Age | Male | Female | Total |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 15-18 years | 7 | 0 | 7 |
| 19-29 years | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| 30-39 years | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 40 years or more | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| Total | 23 (57%) | 17 (43%) | 40 (100%) |

As Table 1 shows, almost three-quarters of homeless individuals (29 of 40 cases) in the Probation and Welfare records were under 30 years. This reflects a common theme identified in the previous chapter where it was shown that there are higher proportions of young homeless individuals (under 30 years) in the homeless criminal justice population, than in the general homeless population. A breakdown, according to gender, reveals that approximately three-quarters of homeless males and females were in the 15-29 year old category.

While the numbers are small and therefore caution must be exercised in terms of interpreting the findings it is particularly noteworthy that while females represented just over one-fifth of referrals to the Probation and Welfare Service, the male to female ratio within the homeless sample had a much high proportion of females (43%) (17 of 40 cases). Overall, women represent less than one-fifth of the category of homeless single person households (Williams & Gorby, 2002). The significance of this finding is that it suggests, homeless women may be at greater risk of ending up in the criminal justice system than their non-homeless counterparts. The high numbers of women appearing in the homeless statistics for the Probation and Welfare Service will have particular implications for service delivery in terms of developing and responding to the needs of homeless women.

Table 2 Homeless Status

| Address Provided | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| NFA | 23 | 58 |
| Emergency hostel | 3 | 7 |
| Bed and Breakfast | 11 | 28 |
| Transitional Housing Unit | 3 | 7 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Data recorded on Probation and Welfare Service records suggests that 58% of the homeless cases (23 of 40 cases) are of no fixed abode, 35% (14 of 40 cases) are living in hostels or B&Bs and a very small proportion (7%) (3 of 40 cases) are staying in transitional housing. When the numbers are compared with the numbers of single person households in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment it appears that those coming to the attention of the Probation and Welfare Service are much more likely to be sleeping rough. In the *Counted In (2002)* assessment, less than one-fifth (16%) were sleeping rough (Williams & Gorby, 2002) compared to over half (58%) of those on probation records. The percentage of those sleeping rough in the Probation and Welfare records (58%) is closer to that noted in the Court records (42%) documented in the previous chapter.

There were 11 individuals staying in B&B accommodation, it emerged that the majority of these (8) were women. While the numbers involved were small and therefore caution must be exercised, this reflected a similar trend identified in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment and the court records when it was found that males were more likely to be of no fixed abode than women (Williams & Gorby, 2002). While this trend emerged, it was also noteworthy that almost half (8) of the homeless women on the Probation and Welfare Service records were sleeping rough. The implications of the above findings for the Probation and Welfare Service are of particular concern, especially in light of research that found links between homelessness and the rate of re-offending amongst offenders under community supervision¹⁸ (May, 1999). For a full analysis of the impact of homelessness on supervising homeless individuals in the community refer to Chapter 9.

Table 3 Offences Committed by Homeless Probation Referrals

| Offence | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|------------|------------|
| Larceny | 12 | 34 |
| Public Order | 9 | 26 |
| Drugs Possession | 3 | 8 |
| Criminal Damage | 2 | 6 |
| Assault | 2 | 6 |
| Other | 7 | 20 |
| Total | 35* | 100 |

*Offence data was available for 35 of the 40 identified homeless Probation and Welfare Service cases.

Offence data was available for 35 of the 40 identified homeless Probation and Welfare Service cases. It suggests that the two most common offences among this group were larceny (34%) and public order offences (26%). The public order offences included, 'intoxication in a public place', 'drunk and disorderly' and 'threatening/abusive/offensive behaviour.' These findings again reflect the general themes from the literature (Ballyntyne, 1999; Snow et al., 1989; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) that offending acts amongst homeless individuals are pre-dominantly of a minor nature. In essence, these findings are also in line

¹⁸ This research was carried out by the Home Office and focused on individuals under community supervision in the UK.

with the court record data documented in the previous chapter which identified intoxication in a public place, threatening/abuse/insulting behaviour in a public place and theft as the three most common offences amongst the homeless sample.

Table 4 Proposal set out in Probation and Welfare Officer’s Report by Homelessness Status

| Proposal | Homeless | Not Homeless | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Adjournment | 11 (36%) | 102 (36%) | 113 (36%) |
| Not suitable for PWS supervision | 7 (22%) | 16 (6%) | 23 (7%) |
| Probation Bond | 5 (16%) | 56 (20%) | 61 (20%) |
| None | 4 (13%) | 38 (13%) | 42 (13%) |
| Remand | 2 (7%) | 7 (2%) | 9 (3%) |
| Supervision during deferment | 1 (3%) | 2 (1%) | 3 (1%) |
| No further PWS involvement | 0 | 13 (5%) | 13 (4%) |
| CSO | 0 | 33 (12%) | 33 (11%) |
| Other ¹⁹ | 1 (3%) | 13 (5%) | 14 (4%) |
| Total | 31* | 280** | 311 |

*Information on the proposal set out in the Probation and Welfare Officer’s Report was available in 31 of the 40 homeless cases.

**Information on the proposal set out in the Probation and Welfare Officer’s Report was available in 280 of the 389 non-homeless cases.

An adjournment was proposed for an equal proportion of both the homeless and non-homeless sample (36%). It appeared that the homeless sample were more likely than the non-homeless sample to be considered as ‘not suitable for probation supervision or intervention by the Probation and Welfare Service’. That said, caution must again be exercised given the relatively small number of cases (n=31) in the homeless sample. Furthermore, there appeared to be little difference in the extent of proposal for a Probation Bond amongst both groups. None of the homeless sample were proposed for community service compared to 12% (n=33) of the non homeless sample (see Table 4). This could, perhaps, be due to no community service reports being requested by the courts on homeless people. Furthermore, the guidelines for proposing a community service order suggest that a stable accommodation base is necessary.

¹⁹ This represents all those that emerged as 2% or less in the total category. These include committed to detention school, continued PWS supervision, leniency, dispose, deferred sentence and continue on bail.

Table 5 Details of Court Decision by Homelessness

| Recommendation | Homeless | Not Homeless | Total |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Adjournment | 22 (73%) | 231 (71%) | 253 (71%) |
| Order/bond made | 6 (20%) | 76 (23%) | 82 (23%) |
| Not listed | 2 (7%) | 2 (1%) | 4 (1%) |
| Bench Warrant | 0 | 17 (6%) | 17 (5%) |
| Total | 30* (100%) | 326* (100%) | 356 (100%) |

* Details of the court decision were available for 30 of the 40 identified homeless clients.

** Details of the court decision were available for 326 of the 389 identified not homeless clients.

Adjournments dominated court decisions amongst both the homeless and not homeless group. Therefore, it was not possible to deduce if there were any differences in sentencing practice for those who were homeless and those who were not. To enable such findings to emerge the B form records would need to be tracked to their completion – this was not possible within the six week period of probation record data collection. Furthermore, as outlined in the methodology section caution also needs to be exercised when examining these data given the high levels of missing data especially in relation to probation recommendations and court outcome.

Conclusion

This section of the analysis focused on the prevalence of homelessness amongst referrals to the Probation and Welfare Service. Data were collected on 429 of these cases. Having identified cases of no fixed abode and cross referenced the data with the Homeless Agency's *Homeless Directory (2002-2003)* and a list of B&B accommodation available to homeless persons in Dublin, it emerged that 9.3% of the sample (40 cases) were homeless. The majority (73%) of those homeless were under 30 years; however there was also a sizeable minority over 30 years (27%). One of the most noteworthy findings to emerge related to the number of women represented amongst the homeless sample in the Probation and Welfare records – 43% of the homeless sample consisted of women even though women represented only just over one-fifth of all those referred to the Probation and Welfare Service.

The most common offences committed by the homeless sample were larceny (34%) and public order (26%). These findings reflect the general trends in the court records (Chapter 4) and the literature on offending amongst homeless individuals (Ballintyne, 1999).

Overall, it appears that those homeless people who come into contact with the criminal justice system are more likely to be sleeping rough. Over half (58%) of those homeless on Probation and Welfare Service records were sleeping rough. This level is far higher than for those in the general homeless population where it was found that under one-fifth (16%) of single person households slept rough (Williams & Gorby, 2002). Reflecting an existing occurrence amongst the homeless population (Williams & Gorby, 2002) it emerged that males were more likely than females to be sleeping rough and

females were more likely to access B&B accommodation. That aside, it is of particular concern that almost half of the homeless women (8) coming to the attention of the Probation and Welfare Service in Dublin over a six week period were sleeping rough. The implications of these findings suggest that those referred to the Probation and Welfare Service are often the most marginalised offenders appearing before the courts for relatively minor offences.

In terms of proposals from the Probation and Welfare Service it was found that homeless individuals were more likely to be deemed 'unsuitable' for Probation and Welfare intervention. That said, there was little difference in the numbers in both groups who received a recommendation for a Probation Bond. Finally, the most obvious difference emerged between the two groups in terms of the numbers who were proposed for community service. As noted earlier however, this may be due to no community service reports being requested by the courts for homeless people and/or due to the guidelines stipulating the necessity of stable accommodation for the imposition of such an order. These findings are particularly important as they suggest that more needs to be done to support and assist homeless individuals on community-based sanctions. However, as will be argued later in the report such action requires the support of a range of agencies including those involved in housing provision and delivering services to those with high-support needs.

CHAPTER 6

DETENTION SCHOOLS & YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

In attempting to quantify the number of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system in Dublin the study aimed to gather information about young people in detention schools in the Greater Dublin area. From the outset, it was decided to focus only on those schools with a Probation and Welfare staff presence. The following account documents findings in relation to young people sentenced or on remand in three of the detention schools in the study catchment area. The first section provides basic demographic information on the age, nationality, area of residence prior to committal, accommodation status prior to committal and whether the young person had a previous history of care, custody and/or Probation and Welfare Service involvement. The second section focuses on a sample of ex-residents from one of the detention schools. This was made possible because a tracking system is in place to follow up young people on release at the school. The system is designed to collect data at the time of release, six months later and a final interview one year later. The purpose of this section is to provide an indication of what happens to young people on release from detention schools both in terms of their housing status and subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system. The third section draws on the emerging themes from the consultation process with service providers to young homeless people in the community, Probation and Welfare staff working with young people and detention school staff.

I. Profile of the Current Population

There were 55 young people dispersed throughout the three sites although full data were not available for all cases.

Table 1 Age (n=55)

| Age | 13 years | 14 years | 15 years | 16 years | 17 years |
|--------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number | 5.5% (3) | 14.5% (8) | 58% (32) | 20% (11) | 2% (1) |

Over half (58%) of the young people were 15 years, 20% (11) were 16 years, 14.5% (8) were 14 years, 5.5% (3) were 13 years and 2% (1) was 17 years. With the exception of one case all of the 55 young people in the three detention schools were Irish nationals.

Table 2 Area of Residence Prior to Committal

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Dublin | 45% (25) |
| Waterford/Tipperary/Limerick/Cork | 31% (17) |
| Louth/Kildare/Offaly/Carlow/Westmeath | 15% (8) |
| North & West (Donegal/Mayo/Galway) | 7% (4) |
| Northern Ireland | 2% (1) |
| Total | 55 |

Almost half (45%) of the young people were living in Dublin prior to committal, 31% (17) were living in Waterford, Tipperary, Limerick and Cork, 15% (8) lived in the Louth/Kildare/Offaly/Carlow/Westmeath regions, 7% (4) resided in the North and West of the country and one young person (2%) had lived in Northern Ireland prior to committal.

1.1 History of Care/Custody and Probation and Welfare Service Involvement

As outlined in the literature review, those with a previous history of care are over-represented in the homeless population (Randall & Brown, 1999; Anderson & Tulloch, 2000). Of the young people in detention schools for whom information was available the vast majority (87%) had a previous experience of a care and/or custodial setting.

Service providers working with young homeless people in the community also identified the link between a history of care and an increased likelihood of homelessness. The following comment made by a social worker during the consultation period further highlighted the issue:

A lot of young people are already in a care situation before becoming homeless either in a foster, residential or detention placement, in supported lodgings or living with extended family. If they have a history of care the reasons for homelessness are often complex and relate to the reasons why they ended up in care, for example, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse or family difficulties and problems.

Acknowledging the link between care and homelessness the *Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001)* recommends that every effort should be made in helping young people reintegrate into their community (Department of Health and Children, 2001). This recommendation is particularly relevant to this group especially in light of the difficulties described by service providers and detention school staff about resettling young people in the community. For example, one service provider directly working with homeless young people identified that placements in health board care often break down at 16 and 17 years leading to a situation where 'youngsters hit the street and become quickly enmeshed in the street culture'. Another linked institutionalisation to an increased likelihood of those in care or detention school becoming homeless:

Some young people are not capable of a level of thinking needed to sustain

themselves in semi or independent living. How do you move easily to independent living when you've been institutionalised since you were 12?

The data provided indicated that in three quarters of cases (41 of the 55 cases), the Probation and Welfare Service had some prior intervention with the young person. However, it is important to note that such intervention did not necessarily constitute Probation and Welfare Supervision.

Table 3 Accommodation Status Prior to Detention

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Home | 34 (62%) |
| Health Board Care | 9 (16%) |
| Foster Care/Parents | 2 (3.5%) |
| Homeless | 1 (2%) |
| Finglas Children's Centre | 6 (11%) |
| St. Joseph's | 2 (3.5%) |
| St. Patrick's (remand) | 1 (2%) |
| Total | 55 |

According to detention school records almost two-thirds (62%) of young people lived at home prior to committal, nine cases (16%) were in health board care and six cases (11%) were in Finglas Children's Centre. Of the remainder there were two young people (3.5%) in foster care, one young person (2%) was homeless, two were in St. Joseph's (3.5%) and one had been on remand in St. Patrick's Institution.

In the *Youth Homelessness Strategy (2001)* the key differences between youth and adult homelessness are described. The main difference is 'that the vast majority of children under the age of 18 have a place of residence from which to operate; this may be their home, or an alternative form of accommodation supplied by a health board or a voluntary agency. In essence, when a young person becomes homeless, it is because they can no longer operate from this base' (Department of Health and Children, 2001:11). In the same way, staff at the detention school identified that it was rare for children to enter the system homeless but that their family and living circumstances potentially placed them at risk of homelessness – 'it is often not that children do not have a home to go to but rather that the home situation is not always suitable'. Indeed, in two of the detention schools, staff predicted that most of the young people were at risk of homelessness on release. For example, in one school, staff identified two-thirds of the current population as at risk of homeless and while in another it was rated at 80%.

2. Progression Routes following Detention School

The following section documents the progression routes of young people when they leave detention school. It is based on information gathered from post-release follow-up

interviews, undertaken by staff at one of the detention schools in the catchment area, with 22 ex-residents who had left the centre between six and eighteen months previously.

Information on age was available for 21 cases – of them nine were 19 years, two were 18 years, five were 17 years and five were 16 years.

Table 4 Location Post Detention School

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Home | 9 |
| Rented Accommodation | 1 |
| Probation Hostel | 1 |
| St. Patrick's Institution | 4 |
| Prison | 7 |
| Total | 22 |

When the follow up interview took place, nine young people were living at home, one was in rented accommodation, one was in a Probation hostel, four were in St. Patrick's Institution and seven were in adult prison (Wheatfield, Cloverhill, Midlands, Spike, Cork Prison). Overall it appears that within six to eighteen months of leaving detention school 50% of young people (11 cases) were in prison or another place of detention. In many respects, these findings reflect the literature on young people leaving health board care or detention schools. Kelleher et al's (2000:12) study found that one-third of young people leaving health board care and over half of those released from detention schools experienced homelessness or periods in a detention centre during the six months after leaving the institution.

Table 5 Type of Accommodation Post Detention School

| | |
|---|------------|
| Home only | 4 |
| Rented Accommodation | 1 |
| Home, St. Pats and/or Prison | 11 |
| Health Care/Probation Hostel and Prison | 2 |
| Prison only | 1 |
| Total | 19* |

* Data was available on Post Detention School accommodation for 19 of the 22 cases.

An examination of the records found that young people who had left detention school were likely to move frequently in and out of the criminal justice system. As outlined in Table 5, only four young people had lived at home *only* (i.e. they had no other placements in care or custodial settings) and one lived in rented accommodation since leaving detention school. There were 11 cases where the young men had spent time at home as

well as St. Patrick's and/or adult prison. In fact, in the majority of cases young men had spent time in a combination of St. Patrick's and adult prison. There were a further two cases that moved between health board care or a probation hostel and prison. The records suggest that one went straight from detention school to St. Patrick's and on to Wheatfield prison. The most common progression route for about half of this group was to move between home, prison or another place of detention. The implication of this finding is of particular concern – it suggests that without the relevant support structures to facilitate the transition from detention school to the community, young people move quickly into the adult custodial system.

This concern is further substantiated by the data²⁰ suggesting that eighteen of twenty young people had committed subsequent offences since leaving detention school. This represents a reconviction rate of 90%. The most common offences were theft, joyriding, vandalism and assault and two-thirds of those who re-offended committed four or more offences.

3. Young People, Crime and Homelessness – Consultation with Service Providers

In terms of examining the wider issue of young people, homelessness and the criminal justice system the following section presents the key themes that emerged from the consultation with detention school staff, Probation and Welfare Officers and service providers working with young people in the community.

3.1 Diverting Young People from the Criminal Justice System

A resounding theme amongst service providers for young homeless people, Probation and Welfare Officers and some staff in the detention schools was the need to prevent young homeless people from entering the criminal justice system. However, as service providers outlined it is difficult to prevent young homeless people becoming involved in criminality given the strong street culture that exists amongst young people in Dublin:

For practical reasons services are based in the city centre, the offshoot is that a culture of street children exists in the city centre. These young people run wild around the city. At first it is all very welcoming, there is the whole love-bombing process and new children become immersed very quickly. But the longer they are on the streets the heavier their addictions become and the more they become involved in criminality. Young people on the streets have frequent court appearances for offences such as handbag snatches, joyriding and assault. Older children have younger ones 'running' for them, doing drug runs, things like that.

From consultation with service providers, it was apparent that the majority of young homeless people accessing emergency services²¹ in the city centre had contact with the criminal justice system. Not only this, but perhaps unsurprisingly, given that youth homelessness is a risk factor associated with adult homelessness (CASE, 2000) service providers described the progression routes of young homeless people as drifting into

²⁰ Data with regard to re-offending were available in twenty cases.

²¹ One service provider described how there was about 11-12 children on the streets of Dublin at any one time – according to what was described it appears that there are a core group of eight young people and three to four of these young people would be long-term users of the emergency homeless services.

adult homelessness:

Very few go home off the streets, they come and go between residential care, custody, supported lodgings and foster care. Many drift into adult homelessness at 18.

3.2 Diverting Young People from Detention Schools

The strong homeless street culture amongst young people has implications for the Probation and Welfare Service in terms of supervising these young people. As one Probation and Welfare Officer described:

The street culture amongst homeless young people is very strong and does not motivate young people to engage in Probation and Welfare supervision.

There was a general perception amongst many of those working with this group of children that more should be done to support young people in the community. Concern was expressed about the use of the criminal justice system, particularly detention schools for young people. A view expressed was that the criminal justice system is used 'as a means of securing placements for children at risk'. Indeed, in at least one detention school, staff said that they would be surprised if any of the children detained had previously had the benefit of Probation and Welfare Service supervision before detention. Another staff member identified the need for a special residential unit to deal with challenging (not criminal) behaviour as a means of diverting young people away from the detention school system.

3.3 Reintegrating Young People Post Detention School

There was a general consensus amongst staff in detention schools that the transition back to the community was problematic for young people. As one staff member described 'the gap from here to home is huge, there are a range of issues, it is about bridging the gap'. In two of the three detention schools a 'Step Down' unit was in place to facilitate the reintegration of young people however the need to have on-going support based in the community to support young people was also identified. A number of other issues were identified including:

- The need for appropriate accommodation to place young people on release - a detention school staff member described how 'most children return home but there is a huge dearth of places for those children who have no where to go'.
- Continuity of care from the Health Board - Another issue raised was the very limited services to children leaving secure care and custody. A view was expressed that the health board needed to maintain contact with the young person while in detention school in order to maintain links to the community and plan for release. However, as described in the following quotation this did not always happen:

Children are under the care of the health board until they are 18 years however when they go to detention school the health boards often close the case, when they leave and find themselves homeless after a short period the Out of Hours service is their only option.

- A general perception amongst staff in detention schools and staff working with homeless young people in the community was that hostels were often reluctant to take young people with a history of offending or detention school.
- School exclusion was identified as another issue in terms of reintegrating young

people following release from detention school. This issue is particularly important given the strong links between school exclusion, marginalisation and re-offending (Graham and Bowling, 1995).

Finally, at all levels throughout the system, detention school staff and service providers identified the need for:

- Better service provision – there was a perception that at present ‘young people fitted into services rather than services adapting to young people’s need’.
- Multi-disciplinary teams to work intensively with vulnerable groups such as the street homeless and young people leaving detention schools.
- Formalised links between homeless services for young people, the Health Boards and the Probation and Welfare Service:
 - Contact and communication with the Probation and Welfare Service about young offenders could be better; it happens at an individual level but not organisationally – there is a need for a joint approach between justice and the Health Board supported by homeless services.
- Formalised links between homeless service providers, the Health Board and the Irish Prison Service particularly Young Offender Institutions such as St. Patrick’s Institution.

Conclusion

As part of the process of establishing the numbers of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system, this aspect of the research focused on young people in detention school. It emerged that while almost two-thirds (62%) of young people came into detention school from home, over 80% had a current or previous history of care or detention. In light of the research evidence (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000) linking a history of care to an increased likelihood of homelessness, it appears that young people in the detention school system are particularly at risk of homelessness. This deduction was further confirmed by staff in two of the schools who identified two-thirds and 80% of the current population respectively as at risk of homelessness. Furthermore, the experience of institutionalisation and the difficulties of reintegration were further identified by staff as potential triggers to homelessness for young people. Indeed, the instability of accommodation was highlighted by findings from those who had already left detention school where it emerged that 50% of them (11 cases) had moved between home and custody in the 6-18 month period since leaving custody. The implication of this finding is that these young people are not only at risk of homelessness but also of further involvement with the criminal justice system. Indeed, it was found that 18 of 20 (90%) of those who had left detention school re-offended in the follow-up period (6-18 months) and most committed a range of offences.

In order to set the issue of youth homeless in the context of the criminal justice system a number of service providers, Probation and Welfare Officers and staff attached to the detention schools were consulted. They identified the progression routes of young homeless people into the criminal justice system and the difficulties of diverting young people away from the streets and the criminal justice system. Acknowledging the high support needs of these young people, they identified the need for multi-disciplinary teams and inter-agency partnerships to address the needs of this group.

This chapter has focused on the issue of youth homelessness and identified the progression route from youth, to adult homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system. The following chapter builds on these themes in the context of presenting the findings from the Prison Survey.

CHAPTER 7

PRISON SURVEY

This chapter documents the findings of a prison survey focusing on housing and homelessness carried out with 241 prisoners in all Dublin prisons in August 2003. The method of asking prisoners directly about their experiences or otherwise of homelessness sought to overcome the reporting difficulties encountered by criminal justice personnel in the Courts, the Probation and Welfare Service and the Prison Service. The first section of this chapter presents the findings for all prisoners included in the research. It provides an overview of the number and profile of homeless prisoners as well as highlighting the key differences between those who have never been homeless and those with a current and/or previous history of homelessness. The second section focuses only on those with a current or previous history of homelessness documenting the progression routes of prisoners into homelessness and the criminal justice system. Throughout this chapter those who were homeless prior to committal are referred to as 'homeless on committal' or 'currently homeless' in order to differentiate between those who were 'previously homeless' i.e. had a history of homelessness but were not homeless at the time of committal on this occasion.

I. Number and Profile of Homeless Prisoners

Table I Breakdown of Prison Sample by Homeless Status

| | |
|--|------------|
| Never homeless | 46% (112) |
| Previously homeless (not on committal) | 29% (69) |
| Currently homeless (homeless on committal) | 25% (60) |
| Total | 241 |

Analysis of the research data found that 46% of prisoners had never been homeless, 29% had previously experienced homelessness but were not homeless on committal into prison, while 25% of prisoners were homeless at the time of entering the prison system. In total, 54% of all prisoners in the sample had experienced homelessness prior to their current imprisonment.

Reflecting the broad trends in Irish prison statistics the majority of all prisoners were sentenced (82%), 18% were on remand²² and the status of two was unknown. Of those who were homeless on committal to prison just over one-fifth were on remand (22%) and the remainder were sentenced.

The sample was made up of 95% males and 5% females. It consisted of Irish nationals (90%)²³, European non-nationals (5%) and non-European non-nationals (5%). In terms of those homeless on committal to prison the vast majority (55 of 60 cases) were Irish

²² It is important to note that the inclusion of Cloverhill Remand Prison in this study is likely to impact on the overall status of the prison sample.

²³ 1.2% identified themselves as Irish National (Traveller) however the percentage may be under-representative due to the reliance on self-identification during the interview.

national²⁴, three were non-European non-nationals and two were European non-nationals.

1.1 Age of Prison Sample

12% of the total prison sample were 19 years or younger. 47% were aged between 20-29 years, 24% were 30-39 years, 11% were 40-49 years and 6% were 50 years of age and over. In total, 59% of the prison population were under 30 years at the time of interview. These findings are similar to those in the *Annual Report of the Irish Prison Service (2002)* which identified that 61% of prisoners were less than 30 years of age.

Of those who were homeless on committal to prison (n=60), it was found that 54% (32) of them were less than 30 years of age, 28% (17) were between 30-39 years and 18% (11) were 40 years or over. The main difference in the age profile of the prison sample and the general homeless sample relates to the number of individuals over 40 years represented in both groups. In the *Counted In (2002)* assessment 45% of single person households were aged 40 or over (Williams & Gorby, 2002) compared to only 18% of those in the prison sample. This is largely explained by the role of age as an important factor in the commission of crime (Farrington, 1986) and the pre-dominance of younger prisoners in the prison system (NESF, 2002).

1.2 Gender and Marital Status of Prison Population

Women made up only a small proportion of the prison sample, of the 241 cases in the sample only 11 (4.6%) were women. However, as outlined in the methodology chapter a booster sample was selected to increase the total number of women prisoners to 50 cases. When this booster of women prisoners was analysed it emerged that half had been previously homeless and one-third were homeless on committal.

61% of all prisoners were single, 30% were either married or co-habiting and 9% were separated, divorced or widowed. Single prisoners accounted for 65% of those homeless on committal.

1.3 Children

Prisoners who were parents accounted for 59% of the total sample. Of them, 39% had one child, 36% had two to three children and 25% had four or more children. Overall, 57% were living with at least some of their children prior to their imprisonment on the current occasion. 60% (36) of prisoners homeless on committal were parents. A comparison between those homeless and those not homeless at the time of entering the prison system found that the former group were significantly less likely to have their children living with them prior to imprisonment compared to those who were not homeless. Only one-third of homeless parents compared to two-thirds of other parents had at least some of their children living with them before coming into prison. This is perhaps unsurprising given the often unsuitable living arrangements created by the homeless experience. Of even greater concern is the findings from research suggesting that the majority (96%) of parents in prison 'found it difficult or very difficult to keep up a relationship with their children while they were in prison' (CSER, 2002:54).

²⁴ This figure did not include any Irish nationals who identified themselves as Irish National (Traveller).

1.4 Education and Employment (n=240)

Similar to findings in previous research (O'Mahony, 1997) 70% of prisoners had left school before the age of 16 years. In fact over one-quarter (27%) had left between the ages of 7 and 13 years, with 43% dropping out between 14 and 15 years old.

Those who were homeless on committal to prison were much more likely to have left school early. A total of 43% of those homeless on committal compared to only 21% of the remainder of the sample left school between the ages of 7 and 13 years.

Overall, 53% of prisoners were unemployed at the time of committal to prison, 34% were employed full-time, 7% were employed part-time, 5% were in full-time education or training/apprenticeship, and in one case the prisoner was retired. The rate of unemployment is significantly lower than the 88% of the sample who were identified as unemployed prior to committal in O'Mahony's (1997) study of prisoners in Mountjoy. The difference is explained by the varying profiles of prisoners within each of the different prisons across Dublin. Indeed, further analysis revealed that the rate of unemployment differed drastically in the different institutions²⁵.

It was found that only 12% of those homeless on committal were employed full-time prior to imprisonment compared to 41% of the rest of the population. While those with a previous history of homelessness were more likely to be unemployed on committal (57%) than those who had never been homeless (40%), a comparison between the occupational statuses of these two sub-groups found no significant relationship between the variables.

1.5 Family Support

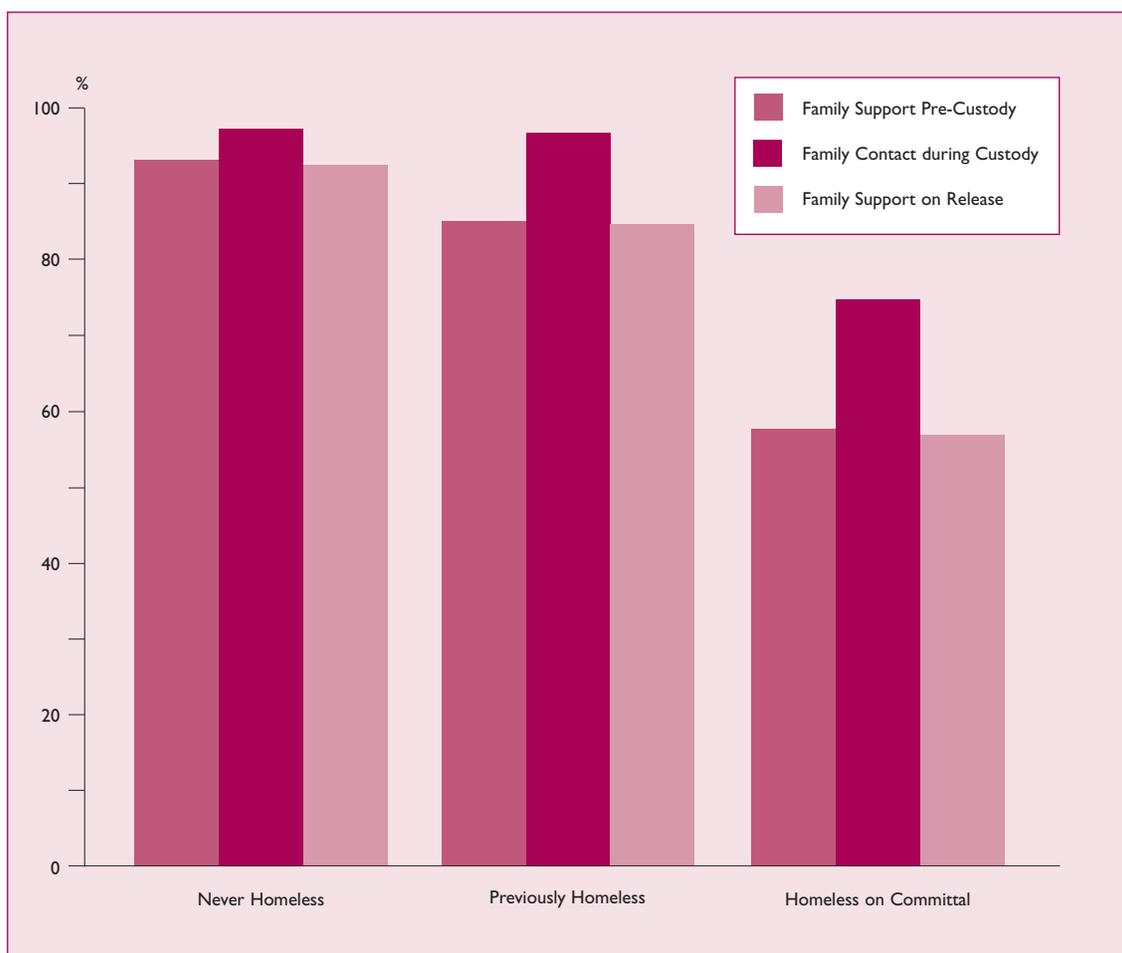
A large proportion of prisoners (81%) reported that they received 'good support'²⁶ from their family prior to imprisonment and 91% had some form of contact with their family while in prison with only a small number reporting no contact. 81% also thought they would have the support of their family on release.

However, differences emerged amongst prisoners in the extent of support and contact they received from family before, during and after imprisonment. At all three stages and as illustrated in Figure 1 those homeless on committal were significantly less likely to report levels of family support than the remainder of prisoners in the sample.

²⁵ For example 71% of prisoners interviewed in Mountjoy were unemployed at the time of committal compared to 43% in the Training Unit, 47% in Dóchas, 38% in Arbour Hill, 36% in Wheatfield, 49% in Cloverhill and 60% in St. Patricks Institution.

²⁶ Prisoners were asked 'Before coming to prison on this occasion did you receive good support from your family?'

Figure 1 Family Support Before, During and After Imprisonment



Only 57% (34) of those homeless on committal compared to 85% (58) and 93% (104) respectively of those previously or never homeless had family support prior to imprisonment. While in prison, 75% (45) of those homeless on committal had family contact however this was significantly lower than either those who were previously (96% (65) or never homeless (97% (108)). Furthermore, only 58% (35) of those homeless on committal compared to 85% (58) and 92% (103) respectively of those previously or never homeless thought they would have the support of their family on release.

Table 2 Nature of Family Contact in Prison

| | Total | Never Homeless | Previously Homeless | Homeless on Committal |
|---------------|-------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Visits | 81% | 88% | 93% | 57% |
| Letters/cards | 60% | 68% | 67% | 40% |
| Phone-calls | 83% | 92% | 82% | 68% |

81% of all prisoners said they got visits from their family, 60% received letters or cards and 83% remained in telephone contact with family members. The findings in Table 2 demonstrate that those who entered the prison system homeless were significantly less likely to have family visits, letters or cards from family or to keep in telephone contact with family members than other prisoners. This is not surprising given the differences reported in family contact between those homeless on committal and other prisoners.

1.6 Peer Support

Two-thirds of all prisoners said that they received good support²⁷ from friends before imprisonment and 60% said they had contact with friends since coming to prison. 43% received visits from friends, 38% got letters or cards and 37% remained in telephone contact with friends.

Those homeless on committal were again significantly less likely to report that they had good support from friends prior to imprisonment. Indeed only 45% (27) thought they had good support from friends prior to imprisonment compared to 73% (132) of the remainder of the sample. Those homeless on committal were also less likely to say that their friends were in contact with them while in prison than other prisoners in the sample, the difference however was not significant. However, there was an association between homelessness on committal and the support of friends on release – only one-third of those homeless on committal compared to almost two-thirds of the remainder of the sample said they would have the support of friends on release.

1.7 Geographic Distribution of the Prison Sample

A large proportion of the prison sample (61%²⁸) were living in Dublin prior to imprisonment. The remainder were dispersed throughout the country and abroad with clusters in Louth/Meath (particularly Drogheda and Dundalk) 7% (17), the Midlands (Athlone, Laois, Longford and Offaly) 5% (11), Kildare 3% (8), Cork 3% (8), the North-West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Monaghan) 3% (7), Galway 3% (6), Waterford 2% (5) and other areas (Carlow/Kilkenny, Clare, Tipperary and Kerry) 5% (11). In addition 2% (4) were from Northern Ireland, 6% (16) were from outside Ireland (including the UK, Holland and South Africa).

1.7.1 Geographic Distribution of Homeless People on Committal

Analysis of the data found that 88% (53) of those homeless on committal were living in Dublin before going into custody. Three cases were from outside Ireland (one from the UK and two from other countries) and there was one homeless committal from Galway, Kildare, the Midlands and Waterford respectively.

Further analysis of the data identified that 40% (24) of those homeless on committal lived in Dublin city centre (Dublin 1 or 2) prior to imprisonment. This in effect means that 69%

²⁷ Prisoners were asked 'Before coming to prison on this occasion did you receive good support from your friends?'

²⁸ Of those who were living in Dublin prior to imprisonment there were clusters of prisoners in Dublin 1 (30), Dublin 11 (19), Dublin 7 (13), Dublin 12 (12), Dublin 22 (11), Dublin 24 (11), Dublin 17 (7), Dublin 5 (7), Dublin 8 (7), Dublin 10 (7), Dublin 2 (5), Co. Dublin (5) and other postcodes (14). Almost one-quarter (24%) of prisoners living in Dublin stayed in Dublin 1 or Dublin 2 (city centre).

of prisoners living in the city centre (Dublin 1 and 2) prior to imprisonment were homeless. The remainder of those homeless on committal were from Dublin 11, (7 cases); Dublin 7, (4 cases); Dublin 12, (3 cases); Dublin 17, (3 cases); Dublin (other postcodes) (3 cases); Dublin 5, (2 cases); Dublin 8, (2 cases); Dublin 10, (2 cases); Dublin 24, (2 cases); Co. Dublin, (1 case) and outside Dublin (7 cases).

It is noteworthy (see Table 3) that while only 12% of those homeless on committal to prison were from outside Dublin, an analysis of those previously homeless (n=68) found that 37% (25) were from outside Dublin. What this finding may suggest is that when homeless, individuals gravitate towards Dublin, in particular Dublin city centre. This is further highlighted by the fact that 40% of those homeless on committal were staying in Dublin city centre prior to imprisonment in comparison to only 7% of those previously homeless.

Table 3 Geographic Distribution Breakdown of Prison Sample

| | Total | Homeless on Committal | Previously Homeless | Never Homeless |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Dublin City Centre | 15% (35) | 40% (24) | 7% (5) | 5% (6) |
| Other Areas of Dublin | 46% (112) | 48% (29) | 56% (38) | 40% (45) |
| Outside Dublin | 39% (93) | 12% (7) | 37% (25) | 54% (61) |
| Total | 240 | 60 | 68* | 112 |

*There were 69 cases that were classified as 'previously homeless' – information was available on 68 of these cases.

1.8 Address Changes Prior to Imprisonment

Having three or more addresses in the year before imprisonment has been identified as a risk factor for homelessness (Andrews & Bonta, 1995). Given the high levels of homelessness in the prison sample it is perhaps not surprising to find that 37% of all prisoners had had three or more address changes in the year before they came into prison.

Table 4 Three of More Address Changes in the Year before Imprisonment

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Never Homeless | 12% |
| Homeless on Committal | 77% |
| Previously Homeless | 44% |

However, there were significant differences between the groups in terms of the numbers who had three or more addresses in the previous year prior to imprisonment (see Table 4). Those who had never been homeless appeared to have relatively stable living

arrangements in the year before coming into prison because only 12% had moved address three or more times in comparison to 77% of those homeless on committal and 44% of those previously homeless.

Overall the variable 'three or more address changes in the year prior to imprisonment' was strongly related to homelessness. In fact, those who had a current or previous history of homelessness accounted for 85% of all of those in the prison sample who said they had three or more addresses in the previous year prior to imprisonment.

Table 5 Accommodation on Committal

| Accommodation Type | All Prisoners (n=239*) | Prisoners Homeless on Committal (n=60) |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Live with parents | 30% | n/a |
| Rent from the council | 12% | n/a |
| Rent from a private landlord | 12% | n/a |
| Stay temporarily with family and friends | 12% | 25% |
| Own home | 11% | n/a |
| Sleeping rough | 8% | 32% |
| B&Bs | 4% | 15% |
| Homeless hostels | 4% | 14% |
| Partner's accommodation | 4% | n/a |
| Transitional or supported housing | 1% | 5% |
| Other | 2% | 9% |

* Information on pre-committal accommodation was available in 239 of 241 cases.

The most common living arrangement for prisoners was to live with their parents 30%, rent from the council 12%, rent from a private landlord 12%, stay temporarily with family and friends 12% or own their own home 11%. 8% were sleeping rough, 4% respectively were staying in B&Bs and homeless hostels and a similar number (4%) were living in their partner's accommodation before imprisonment. Only 1% stayed in transitional or supported housing and 2% stayed in other locations including an army barracks, a voluntary housing association, a caravan or a residential treatment centre. The significance of these data is that it highlights the high numbers in the prison sample who enter the prison system with unstable or temporary accommodation.

As Table 5 suggests, those who said they were homeless on committal to prison were mostly likely to be sleeping rough (32%), staying temporarily with family and friends (25%), staying in a B&B (15%), a homeless hostel (14%), transitional/supported accommodation (5%) and other places e.g. a squat (9%). As expected, given that the majority were either sleeping rough, staying in hostels or B&Bs or temporarily with family or friends, there was

a significant association between those currently homeless and the type of pre-committal accommodation.

1.9 Quality of Accommodation

Over half the total prison sample (54%) rated their accommodation prior to imprisonment as good, 30% considered it average and only 16% said it was bad (see Table 6). A strong association was identified between dissatisfaction with accommodation and homelessness on committal to prison as Table 6 highlights, the majority of those who rated their accommodation as bad were those homeless at the time of entering the prison system. Almost half (47%) of those homeless on committal rated their accommodation as 'bad' compared to only 7% and 4% respectively of those previously or never homeless.

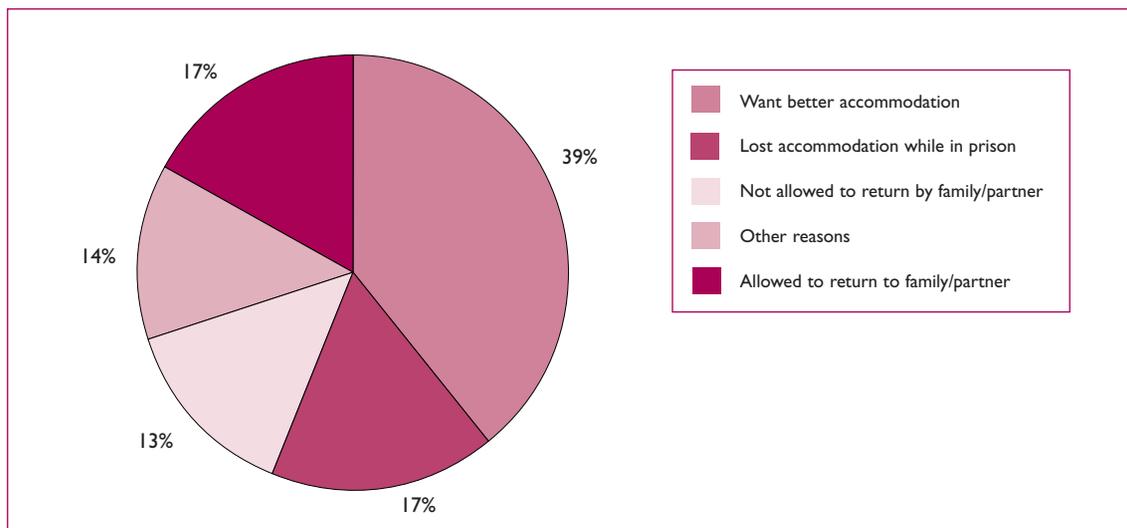
Table 6 Quality of Accommodation according to Homeless Status

| | Total Group | Homeless on Committal | Previous Homelessness | Never Homeless |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Good | 54% | 23% (14) | 56% (38) | 71% (79) |
| Average/Ok | 30% | 30% (18) | 37% (25) | 25% (28) |
| Bad | 16% | 47% (28) | 7% (5) | 4% (5) |
| Total | 100% | 100% (60) | 100% (68) | 100% (112) |

1.10 Housing on Release

44% (106) of prisoners did not think they would be returning to their pre-custody accommodation. Of them 39% (44) had never been homeless, 38% (26) were previously homeless and 60% (36) were homeless on committal.

Figure 2 Reasons for Not Returning to Pre-Custody Accommodation



Of those who were not returning, 39% said the reason was because they wanted to get better accommodation. 17% had lost their accommodation due to imprisonment while 13% said they were not allowed to return home by their family or because of a relationship breakdown with their spouse/partner and 14% gave other reasons including not being allowed to return by the community, anti-social behaviour, wanting to stay in Ireland, overcrowding in the family home, the family home sold or the family having moved while they were in prison. In contrast to the above reasons it was found that 17% were not returning to their previous accommodation because their family or partner was allowing them to return to the home or because they had arranged a place to stay on release.

It is noteworthy that in addition to the prisoners who were homeless on committal (60) there were 70 prisoners (44 never homeless and 26 previously homeless) who said they were not returning to their pre-custody accommodation. With the exception of a small minority (14) that were moving to their family or partner's home, most (56) were not returning to their accommodation because they had either lost it through imprisonment, were not allowed to go back by their family or community or because they wanted to get better accommodation. This effectively meant that almost one-third of those who had accommodation prior to imprisonment were unable, prohibited or chose not to return to this accommodation and were therefore potentially at risk of homelessness.

Table 7 Know Where You Will Live

| | Total Number | Homeless on Committal | Previous Homelessness | Never Homeless |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Yes | 51% (54) | 42% (15) | 62% (16) | 52% (23) |
| No | 49% (52) | 58% (21) | 38% (10) | 48% (21) |
| Total | 100% (106) | 100% (36) | 100% (26) | 100% (44) |

Those who said they were not returning to their pre-custody living arrangements (n=106) were asked if they knew where they would live on release. As demonstrated in Table 7 it emerged that just under half (49%) of them did not know where they would live on release. This was a pattern broadly reflected in all three categories of never homeless (48%), previous homeless (38%) and homeless on committal (58%).

To conclude and in attempting to quantify the number of prisoners at risk of homelessness on release, Table 7 shows that 10 of those who were previously homeless and 21 of those who had never been homeless said they did not know where they would live on release. In other words there were 31 cases whom had accommodation pre-release but did not know where they would live on release. The measure of 'know where you will live on release' is not an accurate measure for determining the risk of homelessness on release for those who were homeless on committal because a 'yes' response could mean they will return to the streets or move elsewhere. However, an analysis of the other variables provides a more accurate estimation. As stated earlier 60 individuals entered the prison system homeless, 22 said they would be returning to the living arrangements they had prior to custody (homelessness). Of the remainder (38) when asked why they were not returning to their pre-custody living arrangement

(homelessness) only seven said it was because they were moving to their family or partner’s accommodation on release. Essentially this meant that in 53 cases (88%), those homeless on committal had no where to go on release. Combining this figure with those that did not enter the prison system homeless but who did not know where they will live on release (31), the total amounts to 84 cases or 35% of the total sample. Of the 84 cases almost two-thirds (63%) were homeless on committal, 12% were previously homeless and 25% had no history of homelessness.

Table 8 Likelihood of Homelessness on Release

| | Total Number | Homeless on Committal | Previous Homelessness | Never Homeless |
|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Very Likely/Possible | 39% (95) | 83% (50) | 36% (25) | 17% (19) |
| Not Likely | 61% (146) | 17% (10) | 63% (43) | 83% (93) |

This estimation of 35% is further substantiated by asking prisoners about their perceived likelihood of homelessness of release. In total, 39% thought it was ‘very likely’ or ‘possible’ that they would be homeless on release. As expected, a strong association was identified between homelessness on committal to prison and the likelihood of homelessness on release. 83% of prisoners that were homeless on committal thought it was very likely or possible they would be homeless on release compared to only 36% of those with a history of homelessness and 17%²⁹ who were never homeless. These findings demonstrate that those homeless on committal were most likely to anticipate they would be homeless on release.

1.11 Problematic Issues on Release

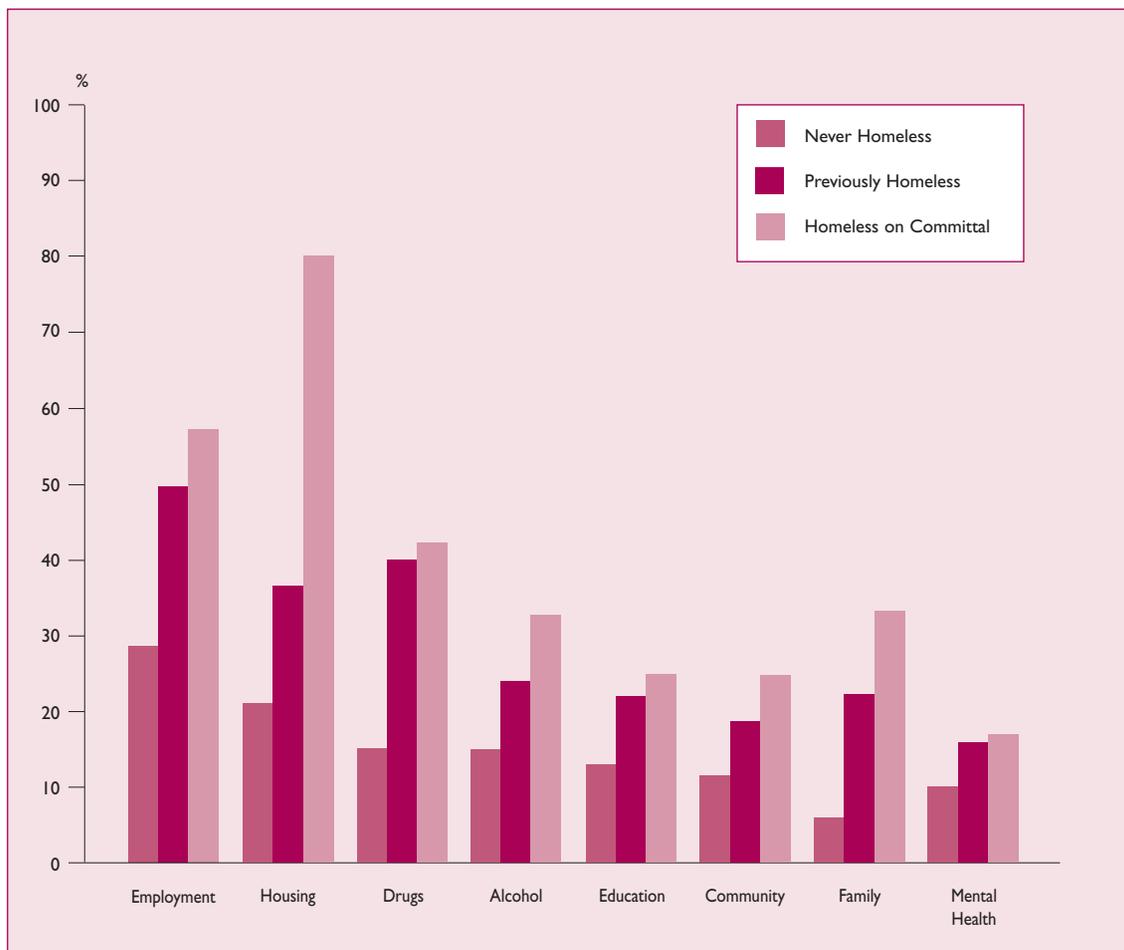
In order to contextualise the issue of housing and accommodation in the wider plethora of issues facing prisoners on release they were asked to rate their perceptions of a number of problems on release. As Table 9 highlights, next to employment (42%), housing (40%) was rated as one of the most common problems anticipated by prisoners on release. This was followed by drugs (29%), alcohol (22%), education problems (18%), family problems (17%), problems with the community (17%) and mental health (13%).

²⁹ There was no significant association in terms of the likelihood of homelessness on release when a comparison was made between those with a history of homelessness and those never homeless.

Table 9 Perceptions of Problems on Release

| | Total | Homeless on Committal | Previously Homeless | Never Homeless |
|-----------------|-------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Employment | 42% | 29% | 50% | 57% |
| Housing | 40% | 21% | 37% | 80% |
| Drugs | 29% | 15% | 40% | 42% |
| Alcohol | 22% | 15% | 24% | 33% |
| Education | 18% | 13% | 22% | 25% |
| Community | 17% | 12% | 19% | 25% |
| Family Problems | 17% | 6% | 22% | 33% |
| Mental Health | 13% | 10% | 16% | 17% |

Figure 3 Problems on Release According to Homeless Status



1.11.1 Housing

Over one-fifth (21%) of those who had never been homeless thought housing would be a problematic issue for them on release. Those who had previously experienced homelessness were more likely to rate housing as problematic on release (37%). It is difficult to ascertain if this is because of their previous experiences of homelessness and the difficulties associated with accessing housing or due to their personal circumstances and difficulties. A significant association was identified when those homeless on committal were compared with the remainder of the sample; it was found that 80% of those homeless on committal compared to only 27% of the remainder of the sample viewed housing as problematic on release.

1.11.2 Family Relationships

One-third of those homeless on committal compared to only 12% of the rest of the prison sample rated family relationships as problematic on release. This is perhaps to be expected given earlier findings highlighting the significantly lower levels of family contact and support amongst those homeless on committal. The issue of family relationships being problematic on release was also rated more frequently amongst those with a previous history of homeless with 22% identifying it compared to only 6% of those who were never homeless.

1.11.3 Education and Unemployment

Almost one-fifth (18%) of the total sample viewed education as a problematic issue on release. While those homeless on committal were more likely (25%) to rate it as a problem on release there was no significant difference noted when compared to other prisoners.

While unemployment was viewed as a problematic issue on release for 42% of the total population, there were significant differences between those who had never been homeless and those who had with 29% of those never homeless and 57% and 50% of those currently and previously homeless identifying it as a problematic issue on release. Prisoners highlighted the particular difficulties of accessing employment when homeless:

Money and educational difficulties are the main causes of me being homeless, it's impossible to find employment; other things will fall into place if you have that (Male, 025, Aged 25, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy Prison, sleeping rough on committal).

You haven't a chance of getting a job when you're homeless. If I do rob and get the money there's no point because I'll only lose the flat when I go back in. I can't get out of the circle of crime because of not having somewhere to live. No one will take you on when you live on the streets (Male 250, Aged 34, Remand prisoner, Cloverhill, sleeping rough on committal).

1.11.4 Community

The community where they had lived prior to imprisonment appeared to be important

to all prisoners in the sample because 71% wanted to return there on release and the majority (87%) thought they would be able to. It was noteworthy therefore that 17% of the total sample thought the community would be problematic for them on release. It was found that those homeless on committal were more likely to rate the community as problematic (25%) although a comparison between those currently and previously homeless found no significant difference between the two groups.

77% of those currently or previously homeless said they lived in a high crime area³⁰. Furthermore, one-third of this group of prisoners (current and previously homeless) said they were not accepted in their local areas prior to imprisonment and almost the same proportion (32%) said they experienced action against them by individuals and/or community groups in the area.

The action included warnings, beatings, being told to leave the area³¹, shootings and refused services in the area. It was common for prisoners to mention that they had received multiple threats and a combination of actions including warnings, beatings and told to leave the area. According to the prisoners who had experienced action against them, the main reasons for the action included offending, drugs and other reasons. While approximately 40% had such action taken against them on one occasion; it was more common for prisoners to receive multiple actions against them by individuals in their communities. The significance of these findings relates to the fact that such individuals may be unable or prohibited from living in their communities on release.

Given that the community for many homeless people consists of the streets and other public places, those homeless on committal were asked about their experiences on the street and if they received hassle or harassment from anyone on the street. In total, 70% had experienced such action. Homeless prisoners were most likely to identify the Gardaí as a source of hassle on the streets:

I used to beg and get grief from passersby. Guards would pick you up and charge you for vagrancy (Male 062, Aged 23, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, sleeping rough prior to committal).

Over one-quarter (28%) of those homeless on committal said they were victimised while homeless. The most common incidences against them included physical assault and theft and to a much lesser extent sexual assault. Two-thirds had been victimised by someone unknown to them, however one-third were victimised by someone known to them:

I lost the vision in my left eye when I was homeless. I was sitting down waiting to put my name down for a bed, I was attacked by three drunken homeless people (Male 055, Aged 50, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living in short term hostel accommodation before prison).

1.11.5 Alcohol and Drugs

One-third of those homeless on committal expected that alcohol would be problematic for them on release in comparison to just under one-quarter (24%) of those previously homeless and less than one-fifth (15%) of those never homeless. Over three-quarters (78%) of those homeless on committal said they drank alcohol prior to imprisonment

³⁰ 80% (48) of those homeless on committal to prison said they lived in a high crime area, as did 74% (50) of those previously homeless.

³¹ In only one case did the person specifically mention the Local Authority was involved in the eviction.

with almost two-thirds of homeless drinkers saying that the streets, parks and public places were the most common location for them to drink and the same proportion saying drinking caused problems in their lives. The only significant difference between the homeless on committal group and those previously homeless related to the location of drinking - only one-third of those previously homeless compared to almost two-thirds of those homeless on committal said they mostly drank alcohol in public places. The significance of this finding is that homeless people drinking in public areas are potentially at increased risk of being arrested, an experience reflected on by some prisoners:

The guards tell you to move on or they charge you with drunk and disorderly and public order offences (Male 059, Aged 36, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, sleeping rough on committal).

Drugs were viewed as a problematic issue on release by 29% of the total sample however there were significant differences between those never homeless and those with a current or previous history of homelessness. Only 15% of those never homeless compared to 42% of those prisoners homeless on committal and 40% of those with a previous history of homelessness perceived that drugs would be a problematic issue on release. Prisoners outlined the problems they were likely to experience with drugs on release particularly the difficulty of addressing their drug problem in the absence of having a stable place to stay:

If I got a place, a chance to do it up, get sorted, if I don't get a place, I'll end up back on drugs (Male 043, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy Prison, Aged 38, staying in B&B on committal).

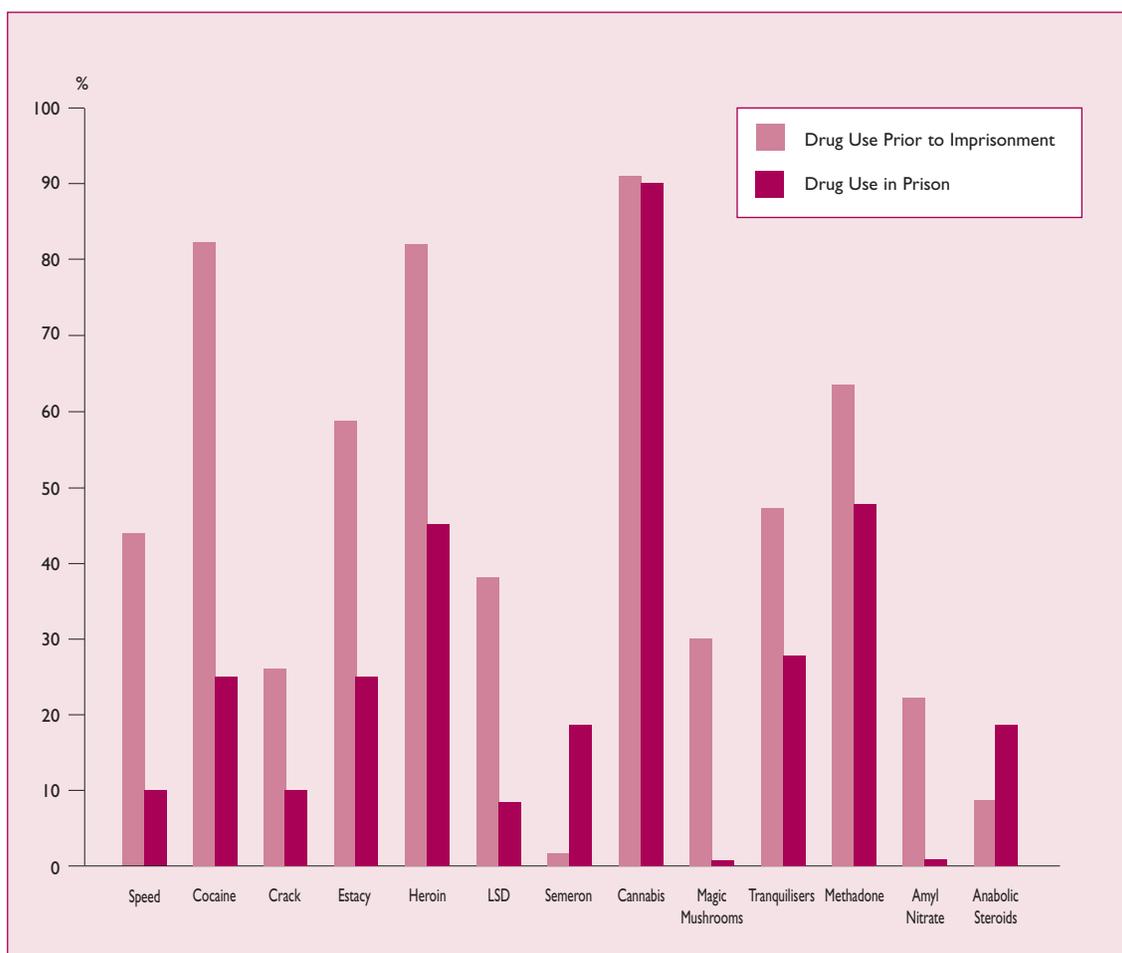
If you don't have somewhere to stay, you're going to end up losing everything and ending up on drink, drugs and phy (Male 258, Aged 20, Sentenced Prisoner, Cloverhill Prison, living in homeless hostel on committal).

One of the main difficulties anticipated by all prisoners was the lack of treatment and maintenance programmes for drug users in the community:

Sometimes I have left prison strung out but there's no counsellors, no treatment nothing. You have to get out first and then queue for treatment centres (Male 152, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 27, Wheatfield Prison, living with parents on committal).

People that's leaving prison need good support and somewhere to live, people need drug counsellors on the outside to see them once or twice a week to make sure they're not going back to drugs. When people get out, they don't get any drug counselling (Male 280, Aged 17, Sentenced Prisoner, Cloverhill Prison, living temporarily with family/friends).

Figure 4. Homeless Prisoner's Reported Drug Use Prior to and in Prison



Fifty-four of the sixty cases (90%) of those homeless on committal took drugs before imprisonment. When asked about the types of drugs used 44% (24 cases) of drug using homeless individuals had used speed, 82% (44 cases) cocaine, 26% (14 cases) crack, 59% (32 cases) ecstasy, 82% (44 cases) heroin, 38% (18 cases) LSD, semeron³² 2% (1 case), cannabis 91% (49 cases), magic mushrooms 30% (16 cases), tranquilisers 47% (35 cases), methadone 63% (34 cases), amyl nitrate 22% (12 cases) and anabolic steroids 9% (5 cases). Drug use amongst this sub-sample was higher than the level of drug use noted in O'Mahony's (1997) study, where 86% of prisoners claimed to have used cannabis and 66% had used heroin. However, a common trend among both groups was poly-drug use as O'Mahony (1997:95) describes:

They did not use heroin in a narrow or exclusive way. They were, in fact, overwhelmingly poly-drug users who had experience of, at least on an occasional basis, a wide variety of drugs, including stimulants, such as ecstasy and cocaine, hallucinogens, such as L.S.D., and narcotics, such as heroin and phsyetone.

³² Semeron is a pseudo drug commonly used in crime surveys e.g. British Crime Survey. Its purpose is to measure the extent to which individuals exaggerate their drug use. As identified above only one individual claimed to have used the 'drug' before imprisonment and none while incarcerated.

In this study, the majority (82%) of those homeless on committal and drug users said their drug taking caused problems in their lives. The overwhelming problems included family relationships, family problems, crime, and an inability to hold down a job or a flat. It was most common for prisoners to state drugs caused multiple problems in their lives:

Drugs caused me to be homeless and to have the baby taken off me (Female 114, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 25, Dóchas Centre, staying in a homeless hostel on committal).

My da has put up with 25 years of his kids doing drugs and the door getting kicked in by the guards, he's had enough (Male 060, Aged 30, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy Prison, sleeping in a squat on committal).

In total, two-thirds (40 cases) of those homeless on committal reported that they used drugs in prison³³. As Figure 4 suggests, the most common drugs these prisoners reported using were cannabis (36 of 40 cases) (90%), methadone (19 of 40 cases) (48%) and heroin (18 of 40 cases) (45%). In this research it was not possible to differentiate between prisoners using methadone as part of drug treatment (prescribed) or accessing methadone through other networks (un-prescribed). In fact, the high levels of methadone use by prisoners may reflect the extensive access to methadone maintenance in Dublin prisons as part of an overall strategy by the Irish Prison Service to progress the issue of drug treatment and associated services within the prison system. Other drugs prisoners who were homeless on committal reported using included tranquilisers (11 of 40 cases) (28%), cocaine (10 of 40 cases) (25%), ecstasy (10 of 40 cases) (25%), speed (4 of 10 cases) (10%), crack (4 of 10 cases) (10%), LSD (3 cases), magic mushrooms (1 case) and amyl nitrate (1 case). Overall, a comparison between those with a current and previous history of homelessness found no significant differences in the nature of drug use prior to and during imprisonment nor in the extent to which drugs were rated as a problem in their lives. The findings illustrated in Figure 4 are in line with Dillon's findings³⁴ arising from an exploratory study of drug use amongst prisoners when she concluded that:

Once imprisoned, those who continued to engage in illicit drug use greatly reduced the quantity of drugs they used, and the frequency with which they used them, when compared to their drug use in the community (Dillon, 2001:5).

1.11.6 Mental and Physical Health

13% of the total prison sample thought that mental health would be problematic for them on release. A comparison between those currently, previously and never homeless found no significant difference in the incidence of mental health amongst the groups. However when asked specifically about their mental ill-health, just over one-third (35%) of prisoners homeless on committal said they had been previously been diagnosed with a mental health problem reflecting findings in the national and international literature (McGilloway & Donnelly, 1996; Van de Bogard, 1993). Of those who had been diagnosed almost two-thirds had spent time in a psychiatric hospital. Most noteworthy were findings from an analysis of the booster sample for women prisoners (n=50) that suggested two-thirds of women homeless on committal had previously been diagnosed with

³³ It is important to note that prisoners in some institutions more than others self-reported drug use. This is perhaps due to some institutions being designated drug free places of detention.

³⁴ It is important to note that Dillon's (2001) findings are based on just 29 inmates representing approximately 1% of the total prison population.

a mental health problem. These findings support the research evidence that homeless women's experiences are characterised by a tendency towards depression (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992).

Some prisoners linked their mental health problems to their experiences of prison and homelessness:

Crime and prison causes depression. It's very hard to get out of the vicious circle. You need a lot of help and more assessment for released prisoners (Male 012, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 31, Mountjoy Prison, staying temporarily with family and friends on release).

It's difficult to cope and the frustration too, you can be lonely in a crowd of homeless people, you feel like a leper (Male 055, Aged 50, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living in short term hostel accommodation before prison).

Over half 52% of those homeless on committal suffered from a recurring or ongoing physical illness. Hepatitis C was the most common, followed by asthma, HIV and epilepsy. No significant differences emerged between those that were homeless on committal and those with a previous history of homelessness in terms of physical or mental health.

1.12 Probation and Welfare Service Contact in Prison

Those homeless on committal (58%) were less likely to say that they had contact with the Probation and Welfare Service in prison on the current occasion than those previously homeless (70%) although the difference was not significant. They accessed the Probation and Welfare Service in relation to a number of issues including information on drug treatment, alcohol treatment, group work, court reports, family queries etc. Of those who were homeless on committal and did not access the Probation and Welfare Service, the main reason related to a perception amongst prisoners that there was nothing that could be done.

1.13 Provision of Information and Assistance in the Prison System

Those who were homeless on committal were asked about the information or help that they had received while in prison on the current occasion. It was reported amongst those homeless on committal that information and/or assistance was most likely to have been received for education 40%, job skills 28%, drugs 27%, employment/training 22%; and to a lesser extent for alcohol 15%, offending behaviour 15%, money entitlements 8%, housing/homeless services 7% and community groups in the area 2%. In relation to help or assistance with drug treatment it appears anecdotally that most prisoners were referring to the methadone maintenance programme.

The above analysis sought to provide an overview of the prison sample as well as highlight the differences between those prisoners with a current and previous history of homelessness. The following section seeks to map the progression routes of prisoners into homelessness and the criminal justice system.

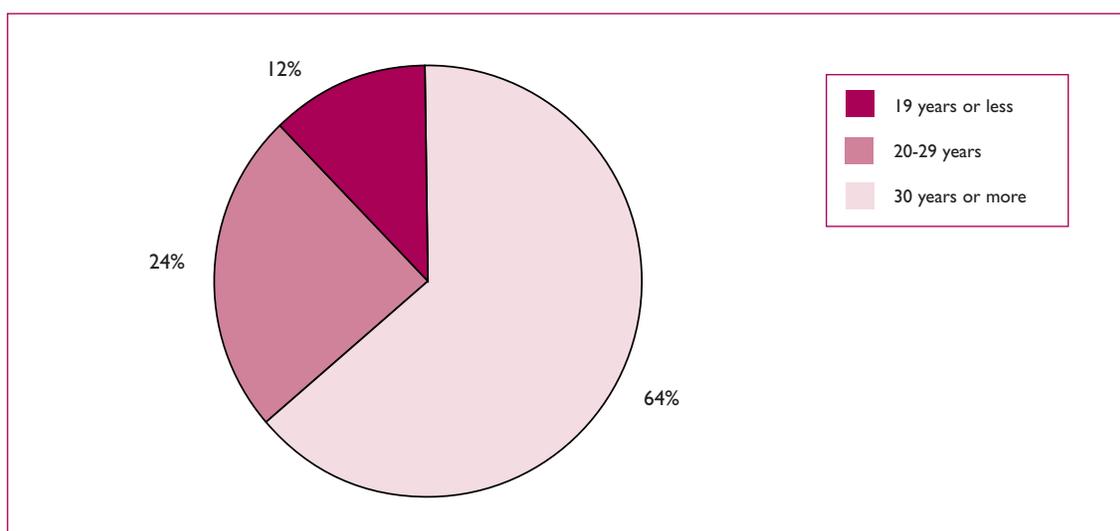
2. Progression Routes into Homelessness for Prisoners

2.0 Progression Routes into Homelessness

In mapping the progression routes of prisoners into homelessness and the criminal justice system this section examines such issues as the age of first experiencing homelessness, the underlying reasons for it, the length of time homeless, the number of occasions homeless, where individuals stayed when homeless and their use of statutory and voluntary homeless services. The second part of the section examines their involvement in the criminal justice system, including contact with the Gardaí and the Probation and Welfare Service as well as the length of time and number of occasions spent in prison. In attempting to understand the patterns and progression routes of homeless prisoners all of those who were previously or currently homeless on committal are included in the analysis. In total, 129 prisoners had a current or previous history of homelessness. Information was available for 128 of these cases unless otherwise stated, where appropriate the analysis outlines the key differences between those homeless on committal and those who were not.

2.1 Age of First Becoming Homeless

Figure 5. Age of First Homeless Period



Almost two-thirds (64%) of prisoners who had a current or previous history of homelessness first became homeless in their teenage years and of these approximately one-fifth became homeless as a child. Almost one-quarter 24% first became homeless between the ages of 20-29 years. Only 12% had first become homeless over the age of 30 years. When a comparison was made between those homeless on committal and those previously homeless no difference was noted between the two groups.

2.2 Reasons for First Homeless Period

All prisoners who were homeless on committal or had been previously homeless (n=128)

were asked to identify the reasons that led to them first becoming homeless.

Table 10 Reasons for First Becoming Homelessness

| | |
|---|------|
| Family Row | 66% |
| Alcohol/Drug Problem | 59% |
| Victim of Domestic Violence | 15% |
| Relationship Problems | 9% |
| No Affordable/Suitable Accommodation | 8% |
| Leaving Prison | 7% |
| Leaving Residential Care/Detention School | 5.5% |
| Pressure from Local Residents | 5.5% |
| Offending | 4% |
| Notice to Quit | 3% |
| Court Order | 2% |
| Leaving a Psychiatric Institution | 1% |

As illustrated in Table 10, the two most common reasons identified by respondents as leading people into homelessness in the first instance were family rows 66% and alcohol/drug use 59%. Family rows as the main reason for homelessness in the first instance is also noted in the literature (CASE, 2000) and in policy documents (Department of Health and Children, 2001). Other reasons noted by respondents included being a victim of domestic violence 15%, relationship problems 9%, no affordable or suitable accommodation 8%, leaving prison 7%, leaving residential care/detention school 5.5% and pressure from local residents 5.5%. To a lesser extent such factors as offending 4%, notice to quit due to anti-social behaviour or non-payment of rent 3%, a court order 2% or due to leaving a psychiatric institution 1% were identified.

2.3 Length of Time Homeless

Of those with a current or previous history of homelessness only 5% had been homeless for one month or less, 22% had been homeless for between two and six months, 16% were homeless from six months up to a year while 20% were homeless for more than one year but less than 3 years. Finally, 36% had experienced homelessness for more than three years³⁵. Overall, over half (56%) of those with a current or previous history of homelessness had been homeless for one year or more.

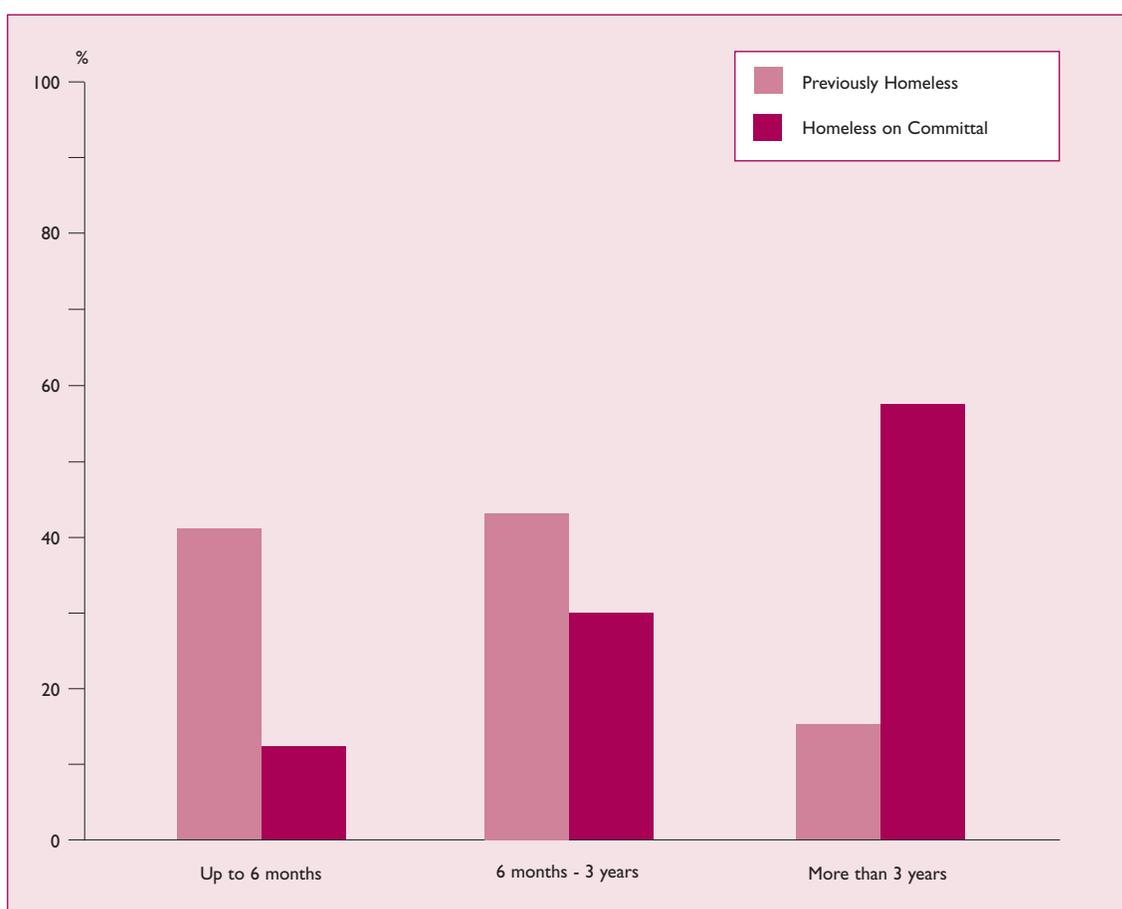
³⁵ In 31 of the 46 cases individuals experienced homelessness for five years or more.

Table 11 Length of Time Homeless

| Length of Time Homeless | One month or less | Two to six months | Six months to one year | One to three years | Three years or more |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| % of those Homeless | 5% | 22% | 16% | 20% | 36% |

While direct comparison is not possible³⁶, it appears that the length of time on the streets was similar for prisoners than it was for the homeless population in general. When homeless people were asked about the cumulative duration of homelessness in the preceding five years as part of the *Counted In (2002)* assessment, it emerged that 31% of all single person households were represented in the 3-5 year category (Williams & Gorby, 2002). The implications of these findings are important, not just in terms of how they impact on reintegration from prison but also in terms of reintegration generally – as the Homeless Agency (2001) point out, the longer someone is homeless the more difficult it is for them to re-integrate into mainstream society.

Figure 6 Differences in Length of Time Homeless (Homeless on Committal and Previously Homeless)



³⁶ In the current study prisoners were asked about the length of time they were homeless in their lives whereas in the *Counted In (2002)* assessment prisoners are only asked about the preceding 3-5 years. Furthermore, the *Counted In (2002)* statistics focus on single person households only.

It appeared that those who were homeless on committal were more likely to have spent longer periods of time (i.e. more than three years) on the street. Of those who were homeless on committal only 12% had been homeless for up to six months in comparison to 41% of those previously homeless. 30% had been homeless for between six months and three years compared in 43% of those previously homeless. Of most significance was the finding that over half (58%) of those homeless on committal had spent more than three years homeless in their lives compared to less than one-fifth 16% of those with a previous history of homelessness. Overall, the findings suggest that the majority of those entering the prison system homeless had a significantly more lengthy experience of homelessness than those in the previously homeless group³⁷. The most important implication of these findings is the evidence presented earlier in the literature review suggesting a positive co-relation between crime and length of time on the streets (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992).

2.4 Number of Times and Pattern of Homeless

Table 12 Pattern of Homelessness (Length and Number of Occasions)

| | Once | 2-9 times | 10 or more times |
|-------------------|------|-----------|------------------|
| Up to 3 years | 25% | 26% | 12% |
| More than 3 years | 16% | 9% | 12% |

One quarter (25%) of those with a current or previous history of homelessness had been homeless for one period of up to three years prior to imprisonment and 16% had been homeless once for a period of three years or more. Just over one-quarter (26%) had been homeless between two and nine times for up to three years while 9% of those moved in and out of homelessness spent more than three years homeless. In total, 12% had been homeless on ten or more occasions for a period of up to three years and the same proportionate (12%) had been homeless on ten or more occasions for more than three years. What Table 12 illustrates is that the pattern of homelessness is not the same for each individual but rather varies in duration and frequency according to individual circumstances.

2.5 Location of Homelessness

All of those who were currently or previously homeless were asked to identify the range of places they had stayed while homeless. The most common locations had stayed were temporarily with family and friends (75%), slept rough (64%), stayed in a car (63%), in a hostel (56%), in a B&B (56%) in a squat (48%), in transitional housing units (6%), and/or in long term supported housing (2%). Other places individuals recalled staying in included hotels, housing associations, a tent, a garage, the back of churches, fields and caravans.

Those homeless on committal were more likely than the previously homeless group to have slept rough and/or accessed homeless accommodation. For example, the majority

³⁷ It is important to note that the time period does not necessarily relate to periods of continuous homelessness.

(83%) of those who were homeless on committal compared to less than half (47%) of those previously homeless had slept rough while homeless. Furthermore, between 60% and 70% of those homeless on committal had previously stayed in a hostel, B&B or squat while homeless, the average for those with a history of homelessness (but not homeless on committal) was 40%. Overall, it appeared that almost equal proportions of those homeless on committal (72%) and those previously homeless (78%) had stayed temporarily with family and friends.

Reasons for Sleeping Rough

Almost two-thirds (64%) of all prisoners with a previous or current history of homelessness had slept rough. The majority gave reasons why they did so. Those who provided reasons for sleeping rough were most likely to say they slept rough because they didn't like hostels 44%, hostels were full 23%, because of issues related to the hostels e.g. being barred from hostels, hostel rules etc. 13%, due to a chaotic lifestyle/drug use 7% or for other reasons 13%.

Prisoners were most critical about the use of hostels in terms of providing for homeless people. These responses were elicited by the interviewer and recorded verbatim on the survey questionnaire. There were a number of reasons why prisoners did not think hostels were appropriate. For some it was due to the condition of some of the hostels:

They're so bad the hostels, people prefer to sleep somewhere else (Male 246, Aged 40, Sentenced prisoner, Cloverhill, living with parents on committal).

Something has to get sorted for people going back to the outside. The hostels in town are bleedin smelly - you go in clean and come out dirty (Male 062, Aged 23, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, sleeping rough prior to committal).

For others it was due to the routine and rules of hostels:

I'd rather sleep in a shed. The rules of hostels remind me of prison (Male 060, Aged 30, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, sleeping in a squat on committal).

My girlfriend had only had a baby and we were on the streets for two months - they wouldn't house us together (Male 061, Aged 24, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, staying in a B&B on committal).

However, one of the main themes that emerged was the reluctance of prisoners to use hostels especially if they were attempting to stay off drugs:

If you want to better yourself you can't be put back into the same type of environment with drug addicts and drunkards. There is no point in releasing a prisoner into a hostel, it's like releasing someone from one prison to another. Every bloke you meet in the hostel you meet in here. A month or two months later, you're back, it's a dead end situation (Male 235, Remand prisoner, Cloverhill, Aged 45, staying in a homeless hostel on committal).

If I'm trying to stay off drugs I prefer to stay out of hostels because they're all using in them (Female 114, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 25, Dóchas Centre, staying in a homeless hostel on committal).

People in the hostels wanted to turn on (inject) in your room (Male 057, Aged 24, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living with parents before prison).

2.6 Homeless Services (Day Services)

Unsurprisingly, a greater proportion of those using homeless day services had been homeless prior to imprisonment. Almost two-thirds (63%) of those homeless on committal compared to one-fifth (20%) of those who were not, had used homeless day services in the last year. The figure for those not using day services may not reflect all of those in the prison sample given that it refers to the last year only. A range of services were mentioned, primarily Focus Ireland, Dublin Simon Community, Merchant's Quay, Failte, the Extension, the Loft, Henrietta Lane, Hollis Row, Brother Lukes, Ana Liffey, Adam and Eves and Portland Row. Those homeless on committal were positive about the provision of homeless day services:

There is no follow-up service for homeless people, nothing is there for all the people hanging out on the streets. The longer they're in the homeless circle the greater the likelihood you'll end up on drugs and committing crime. Only for the voluntary agencies like Focus Ireland, Failte, Simon and Merchants Quay there would be a lot more people in prison (Male 055, Aged 50, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living in short term hostel accommodation before prison).

2.7 Local Authority Housing/Homeless Register/Private Rented

Only those who were homeless entering the prison system were asked if they were on a local authority housing list, had registered as homeless or had tried to get private rented accommodation prior to imprisonment. Over one-third (37%) of those homeless on committal said they were not registered as homeless either because they thought they were not eligible, because they did not know they could be, they thought there was no point, because they perceived they would get reduced benefits if they registered as homeless or due to 'other' reasons.

Almost half (47%) of those who were homeless prior to imprisonment said they were not on a local authority waiting list. The reasons given for not being on the list included a perception that there was no point, they were not eligible, they never thought about it, they were always in prison, they did not know how to go about it or due to 'other' reasons.

As the following quotations describe, prisoners raised a number of issues in relation to the provision of local authority housing including the importance of their needs being taken into consideration, getting another chance with the local authorities and being able to put their name on a housing list while in prison:

There should be more things done and more people to help coming into the prisons. You should be allowed to be on the Corporation list especially people on long-term sentences (Male 027, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, Aged 38, living in local authority accommodation before prison).

The Corporation need to listen more and take more into consideration, it's a waste of time (Female 085, Sentenced prisoner, Aged 34, Dóchas Centre, private rented on committal, previously homeless).

You should be given another chance to prove yourself if you have been black-listed from Corporation Housing (Female 102, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 31, Dóchas Centre, staying in a homeless hostel on committal).

The Corporation should do a lot more to help the homeless, there is one law for refugees and another for the Irish it's not fair (Male 022, Sentenced prisoner, Mountjoy, Age 45, homeless on committal).

Almost two-thirds (63%) of those homeless coming into prison had tried to get private rented accommodation while just over one-third had not. Of those who had not tried, the main reasons related to the fact that such accommodation was too expensive or landlords would not accept supplementary welfare allowance. Other reasons included that the person was on drugs and did not think s/he could hold down a place, always being in prison, satisfied in homeless accommodation, did not know how to go about it and too young to access it.

3.0 Offending Progression Routes

3.1 Involvement with the Criminal Justice System from a Young Age

Over one-third (37%) of those homeless on committal had previously been in residential care and almost the same proportion (40%) had spent time in detention schools. These findings were higher than those identified in O'Mahony's (1997) study of Mountjoy prisoners when only 13% of prisoners said they had spent time in institutionalised care. These findings are to be expected given the evidence presented in Chapter 2 and 6 linking a history of care and/or detention with an increased risk of homelessness (Anderson *et al.*, 1993). Three-quarters of those homeless on committal had previously been in St. Patrick's Institution and the same proportion had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service in the past. There was no significant difference between those currently and previously homeless in terms of their involvement in the care and criminal justice system from a young age demonstrating that overall those currently and previously homeless were very likely to be involved with the criminal justice system from a young age.

3.2 Level of Involvement of Homeless Individuals with Criminal Justice Agencies in the Last Five Years

3.2.0 Number of Times Arrested by the Gardaí in the Last Five Years

Prisoners that were homeless on committal were asked about their involvement with the criminal justice system (with the Gardaí, the Probation and Welfare Service and the Prison Service) in the five years before they came into prison on the current occasion. Of those homeless on committal and where the information was available (n=56) less than one-fifth (16%) had been arrested by the Gardaí up to four times, only one quarter (25%) were arrested between five and fifteen times, a further quarter (25%) had been arrested between 20 and 40 times and just over one-third (34%) said they had been arrested more than fifty times in the five years prior to imprisonment.

3.2.1 Number of Times on Probation and Welfare Supervision in the Last Five Years

In the five years prior to imprisonment on this occasion just under half (47%) of those homeless on committal to prison had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service. Just over one-quarter (27%) had received one to two periods of supervision and one-fifth (20%) said they had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service three or more times in the five years prior to imprisonment. There was no significant difference between those currently or previously homeless in terms of the numbers under Probation and Welfare service supervision.

3.2.2 Number of Times in Prison in the Last Five Years

It is very significant, in terms of prior involvement with the criminal justice system, that of those homeless on committal and where the information was available (n=55), there were only four cases of individuals (7%) who had not been in prison in the five years before they came to prison on this occasion. The majority (69%) had been in prison between one and five times in the five years before they came to prison on this occasion and almost one quarter (24%) had been in prison six or more times in the five years prior to imprisonment on this occasion. These findings clearly highlight that a high proportion of those homeless on committal move in and out of the prison system on a frequent basis. In fact, almost two-thirds (64%) had been in prison more than twice in the five years prior to their current sentence or period of remand. There was no significant difference in the pattern between those currently and previously homeless suggesting that this group also followed a similar pattern.

Regardless of the number of times those homeless on committal moved in and out of the custodial system it was clearly identified that this group of prisoners spent significant periods of time in prison over their lives.

Table 13 Total Time Spent in Prison

| | Less than 1 year | 1-2 years | 2-5 years | 5-10 years | 10 or more years |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| % of those homeless on committal | 8% | 14% | 24% | 24% | 30% |

Only 8% of those homeless on committal had spent less than one year in prison and 14% had spent between one and two years in prison in their lives. Almost one-quarter (24%) had spent between two and five years in prison and the same proportion (24%) had spent five to ten years. Finally, 30% had spent ten years or more in custody. The pattern was similar for those previously homeless. In essence, the majority (78%) of those prisoners homeless on committal had spent more than two years in prison their lives and over half (54%) had spent five years or more in prison:

I have spent the most of the past 10 years in prison – I haven't spent one Christmas or one birthday out of prison since 1993 (Male 06, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 25, Mountjoy, staying in girlfriend's accommodation on committal).

These findings are particularly alarming in light of previous findings suggesting that over half of those homeless on committal were less than 30 years of age.

Table 14 Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

| | Homeless on Committal | Previously Homeless |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| No. times arrested by the police in the last five years | 43 | 47 |
| No. times on probation in the last five years | 2 | 3 |
| No. times sent to prison in the last five years | 4 | 6 |
| Total time spent in prison in your life | 8 years | 5 years |

According to the information elicited from those currently and previously homeless (see Table 14), they were arrested an average of 43 and 47 times respectively in the five year period prior to the current period of imprisonment. In total, those homeless on committal and those previously homeless said they had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service an average of twice and three times respectively over the last five years. The homeless on committal group were sent to prison less times (4) than those previously homeless (6). While it is difficult to speculate the reason for this given the many different variables at play including length of sentence, seriousness of crime et cetera, it is noteworthy that those homeless on committal had already spent an average of eight years in prison over their lives in comparison to those previously homeless who had spent an average of five years in prison. The finding that those prisoners homeless on committal had spent an average of 8 years in prison has particular implications for their reintegration. Given that 54% of them are under 30 years it suggests that in addition to their other difficulties associated with homelessness, institutionalisation may be a particular problem.

3.3 The Link between Crime and Homelessness

According to those prisoners homeless on committal the category of crimes they most commonly committed were property crimes (56%), crimes of violence (15%), drug crimes (10%), nuisance crimes (5%), weapons offences (3%) and other crimes (11%). It appeared that in line with general crime trends those homeless on committal were most likely to be convicted of acquisition crimes than crimes of violence or any other category of crime (for a full analysis of offence breakdown refer to the analysis of Court and Probation and Welfare Service records)

Three-quarters (75%) of those who said they were homeless on committal compared to over half (53%) of those previously homeless said that homelessness was one of the reasons they get into trouble with the police. Of particular concern was the view articulated by some prisoners during interview that they committed crimes to get into prison and off the streets:

I have nowhere to live, at least if I commit crime I've a roof over my head in prison and a bed to sleep in. I completed a ten year sentence in October 2002 and I got released

onto the streets. I had nowhere to go and I just went back to crime. Prison is keeping me alive. Only for prison I'd be dead long ago. I'd be sleeping on the streets and with the virus (HIV) I wouldn't last long (Male 229, Aged 32, Remand prisoner, Cloverhill, sleeping rough on committal)

Even prisoners, who were no longer homeless themselves, identified the use of prison as respite from the streets:

I see a lot of people getting out of here with nowhere to go, they go straight to the street, do the same crime and come back in again, it's like a merry-go-round (Male 05, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 24, Mountjoy, living with parents on committal).

Some lads are probably better off in here (prison) off the streets. At least they are getting fed, they've a roof over their head and they're off drugs, it's an awful thing to say because nobody is better off in prison locked up. Some fellas haven't got the coping skills to get things sorted out - they go out of here and back on the gear (heroin) - an awful lot have no other option, they've no support, no work, no other option. Some people just can't do it, they've been living rough from a young age (Male 158, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 38, Wheatfield, living with partner on committal).

From what prisoners, homeless on committal said, it was clear that the cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment was one that they very much wanted to break but the reality of this actually happening was much more difficult and problematic:

I'm sick and tired of coming into prison, getting arrested for sleeping rough, I want my own apartment, they could do with more help in the prison (Female 086, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 41, Dóchas Centre, staying in a B&B on committal).

You haven't a chance of getting a job when you're homeless. I can't get out of the circle of crime because of not having somewhere to live. No one will take you on when you live on the streets (Male 250, Aged 34, Remand prisoner, Cloverhill, sleeping rough on committal).

3.4 Homelessness and Reintegration

Prisoners with a current or previous history of homelessness were asked at the end of the survey if they wished to express any opinions or views about the issue of homelessness. What emerged from an analysis of this information was a very clear indication that prisoners viewed housing and support as central to the process of reducing re-offending and reintegration:

I think there should be a lot more help for prisoners, a lot of lads go out to nothing, they've nothing to look forward to, they need help, it would benefit them and benefit society itself because they wouldn't be re-offending (Male 159, Sentenced Prisoner, Wheatfield, Aged 27, renting from a private landlord on committal).

It was clear that prisoners viewed the transition from prison to the community as a difficult process:

There is no support after leaving prison, it's a drastic change (Male 036, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, Aged 33, renting from the council on committal).

As the following account documents a number of key issues consistently emerged in relation to both prisoners' experiences of leaving prison and the necessary strategies required to alleviate the hardship and difficulties for those prisoners homeless or at risk of homelessness on release from prison. These issues include the need for pre-release planning and support, information about the process of accessing accommodation, better housing provision and follow-up support on release.

Prisoners with a current or previous history of homelessness described the experience of leaving prison without somewhere to live:

When you get out you get handed a few pounds, they don't give a f..k - they don't care if you have an address, once you tell them you have one no questions are asked. I had no where to go, I ended up sleeping in my friend's house, girlfriend's house, hopping from pillar to post (Male 152, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 27, Wheatfield, living with parents on committal).

When you're released from prison you get a bag with your clothes, a voucher for a train and no money. I went on a Friday and was told to go to James St but it was closed.

3.4.1 Pre-release Information, Planning and Support

Overwhelmingly, prisoners were of the view that help and support before they were released was necessary to access housing and to prevent re-offending:

They should be helping prisoners to help them before they get out. A lot of them are going straight back to the streets and once they hit the streets it's only a matter of time before a return journey back to jail (Male 161, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 42, Wheatfield, living in partner's house on committal).

As a starting point, prisoners thought information provision was essential:

I need information, to be pointed in the right direction, to have people making a link (Male 028, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, Aged 28, homeless on committal).

More could be done should be more information (Male 029, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 27, Mountjoy, staying temporarily with friends and family on committal).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that they had prior experience of homelessness, those who were previously homeless were most reflective about the need for information for homeless prisoners:

The blokes that are homeless don't have a clue what to do or where to go. They need more information about what to do and where to go they don't even have basic information - a booklet should be put together (Male 066, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 27, Training Unit, living with girlfriend on committal).

It should be made more easier, a lot of them who have been on drugs don't know where to go and get a flat when they get out. A lot just stay in a hostel and end up back on drugs. They're not being put right about where to go and who to see (Male 245, Remand prisoner, Aged 33, Cloverhill, living with parents on committal).

In addition to information provision, a need was identified for pre-release work to access

housing and other support for prisoners:

Somewhere set up before you leave, somewhere to get sorted, you won't get it just going straight to sleeping rough, somewhere where a person can help themselves, a base to work from (Male 031, Sentenced Prisoners, Aged 44, Mountjoy, sleeping rough on committal).

Accommodation needs to be sorted before you leave, also help with drink and drugs (Female 090, Aged 32, Dóchas Centre, staying with family/friends temporarily on committal).

Prisoners had a number of suggestions to facilitate the process of accessing housing prior to release. These included:

An assessment process to examine needs:

Proper assessment of each individual is needed six months before they get out. The Governor should oversee it and organise it with welfare, the chaplain and prisoners families. There should be some sort of meeting with prisoners' families to verify stories and to check out the support available. There's some in here that are lost they've no hope because they've nothing to go out to. Lads are only out a week and they're back in (Male 158, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 38, Wheatfield, living with partner on committal) (long-term prisoner)

A central focal point to deal with housing in prison:

Need a body set up to deal with housing in prisons, to base with agencies (Male 08, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 43, Mountjoy, staying in a long-term hostel on committal).

Pre-release Programmes:

Prisoners need a programme set up for them for pre-release so that they have somewhere to go instead of the streets and counselling needs to be set up before they get out of here because I keep coming back because there's nothing there for me, when I get out I haven't got the help here to help me when I get out (Male 230, Remand prisoner, Aged 30, Cloverhill, sleeping rough on committal).

Day release to Access Accommodation:

Get day release to look for accommodation get early release if accommodation becomes available (Male 010, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 28, Mountjoy, living in transitional/supported accommodation on committal).

3.4.2 Housing Provision

At an overall level prisoners thought more accommodation needed to be provided:

More accommodation for prisoners when they are released (Male 09, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 28, Mountjoy, staying temporarily with family and friends on committal).

They identified a range of housing options reflecting differing needs including independent living, supported accommodation and half-way houses:

A half way house to get started would be good (Male 186, Sentenced Prisoner,

Aged 33, Wheatfield, living temporarily with family and friends on committal).

It's very important to have more supported accommodation; it really helps people (Female 104, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 25, Dóchas Centre, staying in supported housing on committal).

Support from the Corporation and to be able to put your name down for a house while in prison (Male 027, Aged 38, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living in local authority accommodation before prison).

3.4.3 An Improved System and Better Services

Not only did prisoners identify the need for greater and more varied housing provision but they also identified the need for improvement within the current system of emergency accommodation provision:

It's not nice getting pushed around - if the people in the B&Bs don't like you - you have no rights that's it - the people in Charles St. don't listen you're just moved on again (Male 056, Aged 27, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, staying in B&B accommodation before prison).

The hostel scene is very bad, you're treated very bad, you don't want to go to them (Male 010, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 28, Mountjoy, living in transitional/supported accommodation on committal).

3.4.4 Lack of Follow-up Support Services

Finally, prisoners identified the need for follow-up support on release from prison particularly in relation to drug treatment:

There is no follow-up service for homeless people, nothing is there for all the people hanging out on the streets. The longer they're in the homeless circle the greater the likelihood you'll end up on drugs and committing crime (Male 055, Aged 50, Sentenced Prisoner, Mountjoy, living in short term hostel accommodation before prison).

They shouldn't put people back onto streets. There should be some aftercare, and a methadone programme, to help you stabilise, even pointed in the right direction (Male 218, Remand Prisoner Aged 33, Cloverhill, sleeping rough on committal).

More opportunities, education and otherwise and support for ex addicts leaving prison (Female 127, Remand Prisoner, Dóchas Centre, Aged 23, staying temporary with family and friends on committal).

Blokes get out and if they don't have a place to live they go back on drugs (Male 066, Sentenced Prisoner, Aged 27, Training Unit, living with girlfriend on committal).

Conclusion

The findings in this section of the report set out the number, profile and progression routes of homeless offenders in Dublin prisons and places of detention. It emerged that

over half (54%) of the prison research sample had experienced homelessness prior to their current period of imprisonment. Furthermore, 25% of the sample was homeless at the time of committal on the current occasion. In addition to those who entered the prison system homeless, it was found that almost one-third of those who were not homeless on committal reported being unable or prohibited from returning to their pre-custody accommodation and were therefore at risk of homelessness on release. Based on an in-depth analysis of the variables it appears that 35% of the total prison sample is at risk of homelessness on release and 40% of the total sample thought housing would be a problematic issue on release.

While the overall analysis reflects the heterogeneous nature of the prison population some common themes emerged in relation to the profile and risk factors associated with homelessness. Over half (54%) of those homeless on committal were under 30 years and 46% were 30 years or over and this group of prisoners were most likely to be single. Compared to other prisoners in the sample they were much more likely to have left school before 13 years of age and to be unemployed on committal. They had significantly less support and contact with their family and friends prior to and during the custodial experience. They were also less likely to rate family and friends as sources of support on release.

The majority (88%) of prisoners homeless on committal lived in Dublin with a large proportion (40%) living in Dublin city centre. Almost one-third (32%) of prisoners homeless on committal were sleeping rough before coming into prison and 25% stayed temporarily with family and/or friends, with only 15% and 14% respectively saying they stayed in B&Bs or hostels. These findings indicate that many of those homeless on committal existed outside the homeless services system and relied primarily on the informal support structure of the homeless community or family and friends.

It emerged that 64% of those currently and previously homeless had their first experience of homelessness between the ages of 13-19 years. The most common reasons for becoming homeless in the first instance related to family rows, alcohol and drug use. The fact that such a high proportion of individuals became homeless as teenagers and continue to experience homelessness provides important pointers for strategies to divert young people from the streets as well as from the criminal justice system. Similarly, with regard to the use of alcohol and drugs the evidence suggests that early intervention in terms of addressing such addictions and problems is essential to alleviating the cycles of crime and homelessness that emerge in this research.

Homeless people who end up in the prison system are likely to have experienced homelessness for long periods of time, indeed over half (56%) of those with a current or previous history of homelessness had spent one year or more homeless in their lives. Those who were homeless on committal were significantly more likely to have spent lengthy periods homeless, indeed 58% of this group had been homeless for three years or more.

While approximately three-quarters of those currently or previously homeless had stayed temporarily with family or friends when homeless, it emerged that the former group were significantly more likely to have slept rough and stayed in hostels than the latter group. This finding is indicative of a number of things. Firstly, given that those

homeless on committal are likely to have been homeless for longer periods of time it is possible that the likelihood is greater that they would access a variety of 'homeless options' such as sleeping rough etc. Secondly, it may be indicative of the limited support structures available to homeless individuals from family and friends. This is a strong possibility, given the differences between family and peer support between those homeless on committal and those previously homeless noted above, and the fact that one-third thought family issues would be problematic for them on release.

The vast majority (90%) of those homeless on committal used drugs prior to imprisonment. Next to cannabis, heroin was the most common drug used and the analysis suggests that poly-drug use was common amongst this group. It is noteworthy that prisoners reported a reduction in their drug use in prison in comparison to their intake in the community. Over one-third (35%) of prisoners homeless on committal said that they had mental health problems. Of particular interest is the difference noted between male and female prisoners, with two-thirds of the latter group identifying that they had mental health problems.

In line with the general prison population those homeless on committal became involved in the criminal justice system at a young age with 75% of males having previously spent time in St. Patrick's Institution. Both those who were currently and previously homeless had had extensive prior involvement with the criminal justice system – the key difference however was the former group were significantly more likely to have spent a longer period of time in prison over their lives.

Three quarters of prisoners homeless on committal thought homelessness was one of the reasons they got into trouble with the Gardaí. Of particular concern were the views expressed by some prisoners that they used prison as respite from the streets – in other words they committed crimes in the hope that they would be remanded and/or sentenced to custody. These findings clearly demonstrate that without access to accommodation and a range of support strategies including drug treatment, the cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment is unlikely to be broken.

CHAPTER 8

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRISONERS

The findings in this chapter present the findings from in-depth interviews with 10 prisoners about their experiences of homelessness or concerns about future homelessness. The findings are therefore entirely based on prisoners' perceptions of their situation. As outlined in the methodology chapter interviewees were pre-dominantly male (8). They ranged in age from 17 to 57 years. Eight were single, one was separated and another lived with a long term partner (common law wife). A total of four had children. Eight of the interviewees had previous experience of homelessness and all expressed concern that they would be homeless on release.

I. Progression Routes into Homelessness

All interviewees with a history of homelessness came from economically deprived areas, and grew up in low income families. Interviewees described problems in the family home, drug and alcohol use, parent's or own loss of local authority or private rented accommodation as causative factors in first becoming homeless. One interviewee described how his family home broke down when he was five years old. This resulted in a very chaotic and unstable life for him for the subsequent years:

I've been in and out of homes since I was about five. My parents separated when I was about four and when I was about five my ma was ill, so she went into hospital. My da wasn't able to look after me so I went to a foster home for the first couple of weeks and then I went to live with my aunty in [city]. From there I was living with my nanny and then back with my da and then back with my ma and then back with my da again and then back to [city] again. I ran away when I was 13 from my ma's because she was trying to get me locked up as I was out robbing cars, doing drugs an' all. I left [city] again.

Another interviewee described how a similar experience led to the immediate experience of him sleeping rough as a child:

At the start my father died, my mother was drinking ... so I found myself going out with them (friends) because I didn't really have any other choice. I began to ramble around the streets of Dublin with them and I would stick with them ... I began to sleep around the streets then, skippers they would have been called back then, old houses, derelict ... We would get cars and get into those, maybe get a blanket somewhere or an overcoat.

Other experiences related to difficulties in the family home included:

I was living at home with my Ma and my Step Da and I wanted to live with my real Da and then the two of them, they went against me and wanted me to move out.

Another interviewee described how their accommodation arrangement previous to becoming homeless belonged to a partner. When the relationship broke down, they became homeless:

I was living with a girl at the time, for a five year period I was in a relationship. Then there were difficulties with alcohol and with drug use as well. There was difficulties with the relationship itself.

Another interviewee described how her mother left her local authority owned home to move in with the interviewee's step father. When this relationship broke down, they found themselves unable to move into their previous home, which was now occupied by squatters. She went on to note:

They (local authority) couldn't get the squatters out so they billed my mother for all the rent that had built up and the (local authority) said they will not house her unless she pays. Something like €2,300. My mother ... didn't have the money at the time and she didn't have any relatives that could give her the money so she was going from hostel to B&B all the time ... So I was basically homeless all my teenage years. I never had a stable home.

For other interviewees, offending behaviour and drug use played a larger role in their initial experience of homelessness. For example, one interviewee, aged 17 years, described how his offending behaviour led to him leaving the family home, saying that, 'The guards started on about being home early.' He also noted that his mother had died and that he did not want to live with his father.

In summary, it emerges that interviewees typically came from economically deprived areas and have experience of significant instability in their family home when growing up. Experience of homelessness as a child was common. Drug use and offending behaviour were also associated with initial experience of homelessness.

2. Remaining Homeless

Once homeless, interviewees described various accommodation arrangements, from staying with friends to sleeping rough. A strong theme to emerge was a disinclination among interviewees to use emergency hostel accommodation, with many stating they would prefer to sleep rough. One reason for this was the perception that hostel accommodation was unsanitary and generally undesirable:

Hostels are horrible. I don't know why they opened them up, because it's disgraceful, it really is. The ... is like a mental institution. It's very frightening ... the place is filthy.

No one wants to live in a hostel.

Hostels, I never liked staying in them and that hasn't really changed much.

One interviewee described how he felt that sleeping rough provided him with greater safety, as he usually did so with someone he knew. He noted:

You're safer on the streets I think ... There's always somebody around you ... you'll always bump into somebody else on the street, like bed down together.

The role of informal support among people sleeping rough was noted by another interviewee, who stated:

I was going to B&Bs ... on me own so I wasn't into it, so what I was doing was going back to the homeless places like down at the Central Bank in around town.

Another interviewee described a greater sense of anonymity in sleeping rough, noting that:

I never wanted people knowing I was homeless.

Interviewees also expressed the view that hostel accommodation was unsafe:

I was robbed a few times. ... I woke up one time and my jacket and my runners were gone ... the next morning, I had no shoes to go out in. Somebody just took them. When you go to ... any hostel, where you take your clothes off to go into bed, you have to hide them or put them under your pillow. If someone is going to take them, they have to move your head to get them.

Finally, the operation of strict curfews and regulations was noted as another disincentive for staying in emergency accommodation:

I didn't like hostels, I wouldn't like to stay in hostels, I'd rather be out on the street ... The hassles, you're thrown out at a certain time in the morning and you know you ... have to sleep in your clothes...

Some interviewees had experience of staying temporarily with family and/or friends. While this accommodation status was described as being more desirable than sleeping rough or using emergency accommodation, it emerged that this status led to feelings of insecurity for the individual, and was highly undesirable as a long term option:

I used to stay in friend's houses, different areas. I always stayed in people's houses all the time ... I would never stay for a long period of time, it would probably be only a day or two ... it would never be a couple of weeks.

I don't like being under compliment in someone else's home ... when you're living with someone else you can't ... go in and throw your feet up on the coffee table and switch on the telly ... its not your place. Don't get me wrong, I paid my way wherever I was, food and board, but still it's uncomfortable, it's horrible for someone to have to go through that, especially for so many years.

While sleeping rough emerged in many senses to be a preferred alternative to using emergency accommodation, many fears of personal safety were related to this, with one interviewee noting that:

You live in fear of that, ... that somebody is going to rob you or rape you. You don't know what's going to happen.

Sleeping rough, emergency accommodation and staying temporarily with family and friends emerged as most common living arrangements for interviewees when they were homeless. Overall, emergency accommodation was considered the least preferred option of the three. Reliance on informal support, be it on the street or staying with friends transpired as a very important factor in coping with homelessness.

3. Barriers in Accessing Services

Overall, there was a sense among these interviewees that homeless and housing services in general were not available to them. On applying for homeless status to their relevant housing authority, interviewees shared a perception that they were discriminated against. In relation to perceived discrimination, one interviewee noted:

Because my mother has a reputation with the Corporation, it hasn't blacklisted me, but when I had my child, I went in and put my name down and my child is six now,

I haven't been even offered anything. It's like a vicious circle, it's just going round and round.

Interviewees also described feelings of frustration and confusion over the operation of both homeless and housing waiting lists, and a perception that local authority accommodation was not a realistic housing option for them:

The Corporation just stick your name on a list and leave you there. No point in telling me anything different, because I seen it with my own eyes. My mother has five kids and is homeless and she was going up to the Corporation and got nothin'.

I was on a housing list, I don't know which one ... I went back a few times but they just kept saying to me there is nothing coming up ... they weren't listening to me ... I was only 19-20 at the time ... I was confused ... they were telling me things I couldn't understand. Instead of just saying, 'look there is nothing there,' they were coming out with mad stuff. The whole thing is a shambles.

3.1 Homeless Services

Positive experiences with relevant services were recounted by interviewees, and highlight the significant role such services can play in assisting the individual to address factors of their life that can lead to offending:

I grew up very fast, I had to, being on the streets. I grew up very fast ... the one thing I did learn there was, for years and years I wanted to be older, I wanted to act older. Now I don't want to get any older. I want to be 17 ... not be older than my age, just take my time.

I was lucky really, because if Simon had not been there I would have been back on the street, like some people I knew were for 20 or 30 years, and that is not a life and I wouldn't wish it on anybody.

The ... was a lovely community and I liked that ... it wasn't a hostel, there wasn't rules and regulations, although there were some do's and don'ts.

However, it emerged that interviewees often felt excluded from such services, and that the potential positive impact that could be made on often chaotic and unstable lifestyles did not occur. One interviewee, aged 17 years, noted how being less than 18 years resulted in exclusion from emergency services, such as an outreach programme. This led to him lying about his age in order to access such a service:

I started seeing that there wasn't places available so it was first come, first serve ... I was fourteen at this stage, 14 going on 15 so I was sort of in the middle, so I usually got a place. But there was plenty of times when I didn't and I was left out. When you're left out, then you can't get access to blankets because you're under 18 ... even if you do get put up, you have to lie about your age.

Access to social welfare rights also emerged as problematic. One interviewee described how she preferred to stay with friends and family than use emergency accommodation or sleep rough. However, this was denied also to her:

Because we were homeless we were going to the homeless section ... when I was

staying with people they were saying they wouldn't pay me because I was staying with someone, but I was saying I can't stay unless I pay money ... I kept getting caught in catch 22. They weren't paying me unless I slept on the street ... there was nothing I could do.

Due to this perceived exclusion from homeless services, as well as the strong perception that those homeless services available, such as emergency accommodation, did not respond to their needs, a reliance emerged on informal support structures. One interviewee, aged 17 years, noted the importance of his relationship with other young people when he was sleeping rough. He described a community of young homeless people, who relied on each other for support:

There used to be 15-20 young fellas and young ones between the age of 12 and 18. That's your family, sort of, when you're on the streets, everyone looks after each other. But the way it was, if one person was left out the whole lot would go. At that stage there was 19 beds available (in Out of Hours) and lets say there was 23 people going through, one of them paid, two or three of them got left out, there was no place for them, maybe 10, 15 out of the rest of the group, they would leave the beds and go with them. There was nobody really throwing them out.

However, life on the streets was described as isolating, unsafe and very chaotic. Coping with what were previously basic responsibilities, such as hygiene and childcare, suddenly became fraught with difficulty. Moreover, as interviewees remained homeless, they described how their lives became more and more chaotic, as escaping from this reality became less and less possible. As one interviewee put it:

I had no choice. I had to. It was either that or die. It was the only option I had. This was my life, I couldn't change it, because nobody would listen to me, nobody would help me ... I was stuck, I can't really explain it.

This section has highlighted the difficulties interviewees faced in accessing homeless services that responded to their needs, leading to a reliance on informal support from family and friends. For those who did not have family and/or friends to stay with temporarily, they chose to sleep rough. In this case, a reliance emerged on informal support from other people sleeping rough. In relation to access to housing from local authorities, interviewees shared experiences of perceived discrimination, as well as confusing and off-putting red tape.

4. Drug/Alcohol Use, Crime and Homelessness

Typical offences interviewees had been involved in varied from public order incidents, such as begging and intoxication in a public place, to criminal damage, assault and armed robbery³⁸.

All interviewees with a history of homelessness noted that they had either a drug or alcohol dependency when they were homeless. For these interviewees, it emerged that their history of offending behaviour was causally linked to their substance dependency. This is one of the strongest and most consistent themes to arise from these data. For

³⁸ Two interviewees were accessed from Arbour Hill prison, which has a prison population predominantly of sex offenders. One of these interviewees had been homeless prior to imprisonment.

example, when interviewees were asked to describe the type of offences they had been involved in, comments included:

I started shoplifting every day ... to keep my habit going. I started doing a lot of things I wouldn't normally do. I went down to seven stone. I had abscesses all over my arms, I was in an awful way. I was not very far from the graveyard.

I had stopped robbing for a good while, I had started to sort myself out and then I went downhill again. I was drunk one night and I went on the rampage. I was fighting with a Security Guard and I got arrested for that and criminal damage.

One interviewee associated his offending behaviour with being homeless and unemployed:

You felt like, well I'm not going to get a job tomorrow, but if I steal, I might just get the money to put towards a flat or something like that ... one definitely did go hand in hand with the other ... people tell you, you have to pick yourself back up ... although it is common sense, when you're in a homeless situation, you're kind of clouded and its very hard to apply common sense to your life.

Another interviewee described how he related some offending behaviour, in particular assault, to his life on the streets. On this recounted occasion, he describes how an incident of assault occurred from his attempt to protect another person sleeping rough from a perceived attacker:

The oul' fella that did approach that young one that night, I jumped down and I ended up mugging him, for the sake of mugging him. Because he was going to ... I just knew he was up to something.

Introduction to crime occurred for interviewees at a young age. This interviewee became involved in crime to fund his drug use:

(I) started off (robbing) slowly. Young ones my own age, around Halloween were looking for fireworks and all that. I used to make loads of money doing that. Robbing cars and breaking into cars.

Overall, it emerged that young interviewees experienced a particularly strong association between drug use and offending behaviour. It also emerged that the lifestyle associated with being homeless, which was described as chaotic, unstable and insecure, was also a causal factor in offending behaviour. One interviewee described a sense of independence in being homeless as a young person. He related also the importance of peer support, that made it difficult to access more formal support services, even including drug detoxification and rehabilitation programmes:

You don't have to answer to anyone. You're not living at home with your ma. You don't have to see your social worker, you only go ... if you need something, like money or food or clothes or something like that. You can do what you want really. We robbed money for drugs and drink and what have you. Your social worker tells you there's a residential placement and you'd think most people would be jumping for joy, but most people don't want to leave their friends then. You have this close knit group of friends, you don't want to leave that sort of scene. That's where all your friends are, so you just keep moving with them.

He later went on to note that as he grew older, the advantages of this lifestyle decreased

as he became heavily dependent on heroin:

But then, as you get older, you start to realise, you get sick of it and you go to your residential placement. You're strung out on heroin. I wanted to get off it. ... we would sit down sometimes and laugh about things that we had done. It seems funny now talking about it and looking back at memories. It's not that good really. I don't want to go back to my scene. I want to say that was my childhood. I'm turning into an adult now.

A lifestyle of drug dependency, homelessness and offending behaviour had repercussions on interviewee's ability to relate to family and to conduct what were previously ordinary, day to day tasks. One man who became homeless after separating from his wife, described how even picking his children up from school became problematic:

I used to go down to collect the kids from school ... I'd collect them from school and drop them off at their nanny's and I'd be there for a while and then I used to go off and see if I could get a few pound, you know? Because I'd be sick, you know? You know, for drugs.

4.1 Introduction to Drug Use, and Drug Use while Homeless

Interviewees described an introduction to drug use at an early age, often leading to poly-drug use as they grew older:

I started using (drugs) when I was eleven ... by the time I was 13, I had started taking Es ... doing speed and coke when I was about 14. I was doing everything then at that stage really. I was heavy into the Es, I was taking Es every weekend and tablets then to hunt down my drink. That kept going until I was about 15 and then at 15, I started smoking heroin.

Drug use was described as a main causal factor for homelessness by some:

I was ruining the rest of the family (through drug use) ... I was the only one that started taking drugs out of four boys and one girl ... me mother and me father went to their wits end to get me help ... it was people I was hanging round with, you know?

One interviewee described how he started using heroin when he was homeless. He went on to note that it was while he was homeless that his perception of heroin users as 'scumbags' changed:

When I was 13 and I was smoking I used to be drinking and taking tablets. I used to look at people taking heroin and think they were druggies and scumbags. I thought that will never be me, it will never be me ... (then) I just had a different view on it and I became very curious about it ... so I experimented with it and I liked it, I can't say I didn't like the buzz, I did like the buzz. I found myself in a rut with people. I don't like myself for doing it. I regret doing it. It takes a hold of you.

Another common theme was that of using substances, either drugs or alcohol, to escape the reality of life as a homeless person:

I would have been (drinking), basically to escape the reality of this horrible feeling waking up every morning homeless ... it's not pretty.

(I started taking drugs) after I became homeless. Everybody else was doing it so

why shouldn't I, was the way I looked at it.

A key finding was that while interviewees were homeless, it was impossible to address their substance dependency. Lack of a stable home base was seen as fundamental to accessing appropriate treatment, or simply to stop using drugs. As one interviewee put it:

The biggest problem with me being on drugs (was) I had no home. How could I get clean when I live here, there and everywhere? My emotions are all over the place, you don't know who to trust. Whereas if I had somewhere safe to go home to at night and being able to talk about things. But I never had. I had it when I was younger but I drifted away from my family and when I went on drugs, they never touched drugs, they didn't understand that. I'm not blaming them, I took drugs because I enjoyed them. I'm not blaming anyone for me being on drugs, but maybe I could have been clean a lot longer if I had a house somewhere.

Whether drug or alcohol use commenced prior to becoming homeless, or while the individual was homeless, it is clear that substance dependency has emerged as a causal factor for becoming involved in offending behaviour. Criminal behaviour emerged as being survivalist in nature, or conducted in order to support a substance dependency. For younger interviewees, it emerged that substance use is associated with peer relationships and general informal support structures.

The data also show that while people are homeless, they find it very difficult to address their substance dependency. Their lifestyle is one of chaos, insecurity and extreme vulnerability. Without access to appropriate services to assist people in addressing their drug use and accessing adequate accommodation, involvement in offending behaviour is likely to continue.

5. Aspects of Life in Prison

All interviewees shared positive and negative aspects of being in prison. This section explores drug use in prison and being drug free, accessing education, accessing counselling, the importance of support of family and peers and preparation for release, with a focus on access to housing.

5.1 Drugs in Prison

Interviewees described their experiences of using illegal drugs in prison. Some spoke of the serious health risks caused by a lack of clean injecting equipment, which led to many people sharing one set of injecting equipment:

It's a merry go round, it's a breeding ground for drugs, you know? ... I'm 39 years of age, I seen young fellas coming here at 20 years of age and they never have used a drug in their life and, I only seen recently, in the last two weeks, fifteen of them using one works, between them ... 15 using one works and two spikes.

There could be five works between 35 people or 40 people ... each time there's a search, there could be a works down so that lessens it.

5.2 Addressing Drug Use while in Prison

Some interviewees had stopped using drugs while in prison. For them, prison emerged as a place removed from the pressures of homelessness and of peers, where they could tackle their drug use. Interviewees described how prison provided them with the ‘space’ to stop using drugs, something they could not address while living under the social and general pressures of life on the streets. Interviewees described the withdrawal process as difficult, with comments such as:

It was very hard. [I] couldn’t sleep, had cold sweats, rolling around, seeing things that weren’t there. I had terrible pains. Used to get pains in my legs ... headaches, each side of your head. It gets better, it gets easier.

However, for these interviewees, the pain of withdrawal was considered to be worth it: I did (find it hard to stop) for the first few weeks, but then it was alright. You’re better off without them. I used to get blackouts.

Interviewees in St Patrick’s Institution for Young Offenders described the incentives of the drug free wing, where interviewees were given special privileges:

You’re not taking drugs ... you have a telly and you have a play station.

I made a decision when I was down in the pad (padded cell) the second time, I’m staying away from drugs. I’m going to stay off drugs altogether. I’ve been on the drug free wing in here for over three and a half months ... It’s more positive and you get more privileges. You get two extra stations on the television, at night you get sandwiches rather than bread. You always get orange juice for breakfast. Sunday you get a fry. You get doughnuts as well ... you get extra visits. They might be only little things, but they’re big (in prison).

One interviewee described how being in a drug and alcohol free environment when in prison, gave him the opportunity to address other aspects of his life that he felt previously unable to do, including housing:

I would say that if I (still) lived out there I wouldn’t have made the effort. It’s because (of) the fact that I’m in here ... cut off from it that I’m making a lot of sense, because I’m not under the influence of alcohol or hash or tablets or anything like that. I’m in a drug free environment so it’s very easy to think logically.

In summary, while interviewees described some prisons as a place where drug use may be common, it also emerged as a place where dependent drug use could be addressed. Contact with peers who use drugs, as well as general pressures of being homeless both emerged as causative factors in interviewee’s drug use prior to imprisonment. For some, prison provided a separation from these factors that allowed people to address substance dependency.

5.3 Mental Health

While it also emerged that access to some mental health supports, such as counselling, would be beneficial to interviewees, these services were not always readily available or not accessible in a private and confidential way:

I would like to see a counsellor to deal with other issues. Just general stuff. I’ve

had loads of time to think. There was a psychiatrist in here but she is gone now. I go and see Welfare usually every week or so, they do counselling as well ... They have busy schedules.

Some interviewees also reported a perceived stigma to going to the Probation and Welfare Team:

Some blokes hate going in to them because ... if you stand at the gate and someone calls because they're caught with the Welfare³⁹ ... you start hearing people going, 'oh why?' So there's a bit of stigma going into the Welfare ... for all the hard men and that.

Another interviewee described how he chose to undergo 'cold turkey' from drug use, rather than seek support from the Probation and Welfare team and other services which he would have considered to be embarrassing for him:

I really didn't want the staff over there to know that I had been dabbling in that kind of scene, I found it very embarrassing, so I actually took it on board myself to go cold turkey.

5.4 Family and Friends

While contact with family and friends emerged as a highly important aspect of prison life for interviewees, some described difficulties they experienced in accessing visits from their family and friends. One interviewee explained how access to visits from friends was restricted by a regulation that all his visitors had to provide identification:

My Ma was mistaken for someone else that was barred. She had the same jacket on, so (they) said that no one was allowed to see me without ID. Most of my mates wouldn't have ID.

Another noted:

It's hard. She's trying to keep a job going, she goes to work from four till eight at night, you know? So I leave visits till Saturday so she won't be rushing early ... the last time I saw the young fella, he doesn't like coming up here, you know? Because he's fourteen and me and him was very close you know, like it breaks my heart to see him leave me, you know?

One interviewee explained his concern that visits from his children within the context of prison would be awkward and difficult. He also feared that such visits may create negative feeling towards authority figures:

We can't bring her in here (daughter), she thinks I'm in the army, 'cos you can bring her up here and she'll see all the Prison Officers. She's learned to respect the law. And she sees Prison Officers and me at the other side of the counter. And when I'm going to hold her and they say I couldn't, she wanted to know, 'what, what, why can't I hold her?' She's too wild, she's dead cute, so that's why I wouldn't go back to the house.

Some interviewees who did not have contact with family or friends spoke of a need to separate themselves from their peers prior to imprisonment. This was related to peers

³⁹ The Welfare is a colloquial term for the Probation and Welfare Service in prison.

engaging in behaviour, such as offending or drug use, from which the interviewee wanted to dissociate himself. Interviewees imprisoned for a sex offence described how their family had made the decision to dissociate from them:

I've no more contact with them (family), its gone by the board ... they are entitled to their opinions and I would probably feel the same way. I'm angry towards myself, but I don't want to put them through any trouble, trauma or grief.

5.5 Institutionalisation

The issue of institutionalisation emerged as an issue for both repeat offenders and long term prisoners. One interviewee noted:

I'm after doing that much jail and living in me cell like, and I love me cell, me cell and the whole lot ... people do say, Jesus, ..., you're institutionalised, what about getting out and having kids and all?

Another, aged 17 years, described the security he found in the structure of daily prison life, noting:

You get into a routine, sleeping and all that. Sleep and eat. More than what you do on the outside.

5.6 Accessing Education and Training

It emerged during interviews that while education and training programmes were made available, some of these prisoners felt that they would benefit from more proactive guidance in accessing these services. For example, young people with a negative experience of the formal education system outside of prison may be reluctant to access it. Also, it was suggested that people should be encouraged to consider the positive outcomes of accessing education and training, in terms of future employment:

People can have a very negative attitude in prison, because what has happened on the outside can affect them here in that sense. Why bother doing this? I have nowhere to go, I have no one outside to meet me, all that kind of thing will affect people ... a fella said to me, 'why bother?'. Just do your time and get out.

Interviewees described how in order to access education and training in prison, the individual had to be motivated to do so. The result of this was that less motivated prisoners would be excluded. Furthermore, it was raised that those who are less likely to have the motivation and confidence to access this are more likely to have fewer coping skills, lower levels of education, and generally be more vulnerable to returning to a chaotic lifestyle on release:

I got no push or support in that direction at the start, the bit I did I did it for myself. I wasn't doing it for anybody else. I wanted to do it for myself because my life was up in a heap and I didn't want to go out and commit any more offences.

Prison can help if people want to help themselves. But if they don't want to, they come up with all kinds of excuses not to do different treatment programmes, because they say it doesn't count.

One interviewee, who had no history of homelessness and possessed third level qualifications notes,

There is nothing really done for you ... I'd say if a person was very shy or retiring or something like that, then they would find it very hard, they would get left behind ... you have to be proactive ... you have to use the system, you have to put in the effort or whatever. If there isn't someone telling you to do that or if there isn't somebody telling you what you need to do, it is hard. ... It's easy for me ... I would have come from a fairly well educated background, so it was easy for me to get stuck into school and things like that, but some people, school would be the last thing on their minds, they spent half their lives trying to avoid it.

6. Accessing Accommodation and Appropriate Supports on Release

Accessing accommodation on release was an issue of concern for all interviewees. This section examines the role of family and friends in avoiding homelessness, the role of homeless services and perceived barriers to accessing housing experienced by interviewees.

6.1 Support from Family and Friends

Support from family and friends while in prison was cited as an important factor for interviewees, in terms of accessing accommodation on release. For example, one life sentence prisoner with no previous experience of homelessness, described how, although he had no accommodation arranged on release, he did not see homelessness as a real, long term concern for the future, due to the support from friends:

(I'm) not worried as such (about homelessness), as I say, I will always have somewhere to stay like ... there are ten or twelve different places if I was stuck, I would never be that badly off.

For other interviewees, a lack of a secure family base to return to was associated with a high risk of homelessness on release.

One interviewee stated that he intended not to return to his family home on release, due to a concern that his lifestyle may have a negative influence on his children:

Jesus, if I thought me staying away from the house was going to make sure that any of the kids didn't get any misinformation that was going to f..k them up in the future, then so be it. Do you know what I mean? ... and me ma and da love me more for that.

6.2 Accessing Housing

Interviewees who could not rely on informal support for interim accommodation spoke of the need for their accommodation needs to be addressed prior to the end of their sentence. Some expressed a fear over the possibility of being completely alone and homeless on the first night. As one interviewee described current circumstances:

It's like a merry go round in here. Like, regarding people going back out, sleeping on the streets, sleeping on cardboard boxes, you know? It's crazy.

Even those who did have the support of friends and family expressed concern, noting that staying with friends on a temporary basis was not an ideal situation:

Looking for rental accommodation, you can't really get it until you know when

you're going to be out, because there is not much point in saying to somebody, well I might be out in September but then again I mightn't get out until October'. I have places to stay with friends and whatever, but I would prefer to have my own place.

The type of accommodation interviewees felt most suitable to their needs varied. Some noted that they felt they could not cope in completely independent accommodation, but felt the need for some support. As one interviewee noted:

I know myself I won't be able to survive in a flat.

Some felt an accommodation base from where independent accommodation could be sought would be useful. Others simply wanted access to their own self contained accommodation. Comments included:

To have some sort of structure of accommodation when you're getting out, something temporary, something that is going to set you up that has prospects. To get help for when you eventually move into your own accommodation.

I just want to make sure that I have some place to stay when I get out ... at the moment, I don't know what will happen.

The Social Worker here wanted me to go to a place that has been opened now for female prisoners that have been released from prison. But I'm 23, I want to get my own place, even if it's only a bed-sit, until I find something better.

I'd like accommodation where there was other people in the same place as me, in the same predicament, they have nowhere else to go. And we're all working together to make this hostel work, for people that will be coming and then leaving to go to their own accommodation.

While interviewees were aware of the existence of Probation and Welfare Service supported hostel accommodation, some noted a reluctance to avail of this option, should it become available. One interviewee noted:

Most of those places you're on curfews and there are rules and conditions and you're still almost in an institution and then you're surrounded by people from institutions and most of them are ex-prisoners or whatever and I just want to make a clean break.

One interviewee expressed a fear that he may be put into residential care, stating that he would prefer to remain homeless:

I think they might put me in a home, but I'm not going into one ... I would hate it ... you feel really stupid staying in someone else's house and don't know what to do. Someone you don't even know ... I would rather sleep in the streets.

Interviewees also cited a lack of knowledge and frustration over how to access housing, either from a local authority or from the private rented sector, as well as accessing homeless services. In relation to this, a need emerged for the provision of clear and accessible information on all housing and accommodation options available to them:

(There is a need for) more about accommodation. I want to have a place to go to when I come out. I'm not picky and choosy, I don't mean it that way. I want to know what to do for myself ... I don't want to be asking other people to do it.

When asked to suggest means to assist prisoners at risk of homelessness in accessing accommodation on release, interviewees made a number of suggestions. These included allowing prisoners temporary release prior to release date, with the specific purpose of trying to access housing:

The last two months of your sentence if you could get out maybe for the weekend, even a day and then the weekend, so you slowly start to get used to the outside again, rather than just get out all of a sudden.

Another interviewee felt that a location service for private rented accommodation from prison would be useful for him:

I think that there could be some kind of service here for you, that they locate houses for you before you go out.

However, regardless of the means of providing interviewees with appropriate accommodation on release, a consistent finding to emerge from interviews was the crucial role a stable and secure accommodation base plays in the individual's successful re-integration in the community. As one interviewee said,

Once a person has a roof over their heads and a decent place to stay, everything else will fall in after that. That's the main thing. People ask me what I'm going to do when I get out of here. First thing is going to get accommodation, then go to get a job and then go for counselling. Once a person has a roof over their head ... then everything else is very easy to fall into place. But housing is a must, support and housing and being able to relax and put the feet up and watch television and whatever you want to do. Then they can start to do the other stuff.

6.3 Other Support Needs

Besides access to appropriate accommodation, a key concern to be raised among interviewees was the need to avoid anti-social peers that comprised their social structure in their life before prison. These peers were directly associated with drug use and offending behaviour. They considered that this was a crucial factor in whether or not they became involved in offending behaviour in the future. In order to avoid this, maintaining contact with their old peers was considered undesirable. As one interviewee put it:

I will probably have to stay away from them (friends) ... There is no way if you hang around with people that are using drugs and getting into trouble that you're going to stay out of trouble and stay away from drugs. It's not possible. It's going to be much harder on myself to stay away.'

The same interviewee later described his determination to avoid this lifestyle on release. Again, here he relates offending behaviour and homelessness to substance dependency:

I want to make a go of it this time. I said it before, I didn't really mean it before, but I know I mean it now. I don't want to look back when I'm 50 and be sitting on the other side of the road with a bottle of vodka. I have a chance. One thing I have to do is stay away from all drugs. Stay away from everything and I will be alright. It will be worth it. I know in time I will appreciate it.

Some interviewees described how the nature of their offence led to concerns over returning to the community they were from. One interviewee imprisoned for a drug

related offence shared fears over not being allowed to return to his home by the local community:

Well the only worries I have about release is the charge I'm in under ... that they will come along and say, 'you're barred from coming in here' ... the community or barred by the Corporation.

It also emerged that although interviewees had varying degrees of access to relevant support while in prison, such as drug treatment programmes and counselling, there were only limited measures for them to access relevant support on release.

One interviewee who had been completely drug free while in prison described his frustration in trying to access a drug rehabilitation programme on release:

A fella who works in Trinity Court ... is going to help me get in a drug treatment centre on my release, but you have to be out three weeks, you have to be drug free in the community for three weeks ... it's a bit silly really, the Welfare Officer said she is going to try to get it changed because ... you are drug free here for 12 months and then thrown back out into the community and there is ... a 50% risk that you are going back on drugs again. Whereas if you went straight from here into the treatment centre...

Access to relevant support, whether in housing assistance, counselling or drug treatment, on release was considered crucial in avoiding re-offending. Moreover, interviewees drew a distinction between making such support available to them and having it forced upon them, which was considered to have counterproductive results:

Somewhere to stay, something to do during the day, support on drugs, counselling, a support network, the offer is there if you need it, but not for people to be wrecking your head all the time. Not having Probation and Welfare ringing me up all the time, telling me to do the same thing every day. You don't need that, that's too much pressure.

Show people the options that they have. Don't put pressure on them. Not to keep hassling you. Explain to people that if they want support that they will get it ... that they know that it's there.

Conclusion

Among this group of respondents, a clear relationship has emerged between homelessness, substance dependency and offending behaviour. Interviewees who had been homeless prior to imprisonment described chaotic lives, high levels of substance dependency and poor availability of support. Breakdown in the family home was not uncommon, and was related to subsequent introduction to homelessness.

While homeless, interviewees described a chaotic lifestyle, where access to appropriate care was fraught with difficulty. Instead, interviewees described a reliance on an informal support structure among other homeless people. Emergency hostel accommodation was generally considered, by those interviewed, to be a poorer option to sleeping rough. In relation to accessing housing via local authorities, in particular, interviewees spoke of perceived insurmountable barriers such as the length of waiting lists, perceived discrimination, and frustration and confusion over the operation of housing and homeless waiting lists.

Substance dependency was a feature of homelessness for all interviewees with a previous history of homelessness. It also emerged as a primary causal factor in offending behaviour. The main barrier to addressing substance dependency was described as the general chaotic and unstable lifestyle caused by drug use and homelessness. Finally, substance use as a feature of relationships with peers was also cited as a disincentive to address drug use.

Imprisonment emerged as an opportunity to access training and education courses. Overall, in prison, the life of a homeless person is generally more stable and secure than on the streets. While drug use occurs in prison, it emerged that the pressures to use substances that existed on the streets for these interviewees did not present to the same degree in prison. They described a setting where addressing their substance dependency was possible, if they so wished. For those with access to a drug free wing, this was described as an additional incentive to address substance dependency while in prison.

In relation to education and training, it emerged that some prisoners may not be proactively encouraged to access such services. Interviewees thought it was important to be encouraged due to their previous negative experience of the formal education system, and a lack of confidence or lack of motivation.

Interviewees described difficulty in accessing appropriate therapy while in prison. Also it was noted that, the stigma of attending the Probation and Welfare Service, as it could imply a 'weakness' in the individual, prevented some from accessing support.

Despite these barriers to accessing services, as well as a perceived shortfall in others, prison emerged as a place where an individual who was previously homeless may positively address negative aspects of his/her life. Furthermore, it presented an escape from the extreme chaos associated with life on the streets.

In light of this, the most significant shortcoming of interviewees' experiences in prison was the lack of any continuum of care on leaving prison. Interviewees described a 'merry go round' of being on the streets, imprisoned, followed immediately by a return to the streets, and so on. According to interviewees with a history of homelessness, no efforts were made to access accommodation for them beyond being referred to the Homeless Person's Unit on release. However, as noted above, such an option may not always address the perceived needs of this group. Perhaps most significantly, this resulted in interviewees not only returning, almost inevitably, to a life of homelessness, but also to the same social network they were in before imprisonment. Interviewees were adamant that in order to address their substance dependency and offending behaviour, they could not rely on the positive social support of people who lived such a lifestyle. On the contrary, they needed to be provided with the means and support to establish a life removed from this environment. If adequate support is not in place for people with a history of homelessness on leaving prison, it emerged that a return to offending behaviour and substance dependency was to be expected. In relation to those with no history of homelessness but who said they were at risk of homelessness on release, the need for the same continuum of care also emerged.

Adequate and secure accommodation emerged as a priority for these interviewees. Some felt they needed independent and self contained accommodation, while others

were aware of greater support needs that semi-independent accommodation would offer. Secondly, access to appropriate drugs and counselling services were considered as additional crucial aspects of a continuum of care on leaving prison.

In summary, it emerged that prison can present as an opportunity for prisoners with a history of homelessness and substance dependency to positively address these aspects of their life. However, it has also emerged that, due to a lack of a continuum of care (which facilitates and provides for the transition from custody to community living) and the difficulty of accessing services for prisoners, individuals are leaving prison to return directly to the same life and environment they had prior to imprisonment. As long as this lack of a continuum of care and support continues, the needs of this group will continue to be unmet; they will remain homeless, dependent on substances and at high risk of re-offending.

CHAPTER 9

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE PROBATION AND WELFARE SERVICE

Probation and Welfare Officers work with homeless people in the criminal justice system in the community and prison context. The following chapter presents the findings from a number of focus groups with both custody and community based Probation and Welfare staff. The first section outlines the 'types' of homeless offenders Probation and Welfare Officers encounter in their work. The purpose is to build upon the emerging themes from the prison survey and in-depth interviews in relation to the diversity of needs amongst homeless individuals progressing through the criminal justice system. The second section addresses Probation and Welfare Officers' perceptions of the progression routes of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system. In many respects the analysis develops earlier themes in the report that highlighted the adverse position of homeless people in the criminal justice system when compared to their non-homeless contemporaries. The third section focuses on the issues and difficulties encountered by Probation and Welfare Officers in the community. It examines the barriers to effective supervision at the level of the client, the probation service and inter-agency level. The fourth section is concerned with the role of the Probation and Welfare Service in the prisons. It identifies and discusses the barriers to effective reintegration (particularly in relation to housing) focusing on issues within the Probation Service, the Prison Service and outside agencies. The fifth section draws together the common findings and difficulties encountered in terms of addressing homelessness by both custody and community based Probation and Welfare Officers. The final section discusses the way forward from the perspective of Probation and Welfare staff.

I. Profile of Homeless Offenders

The complexity of the homeless problem and the issues associated with homelessness are highlighted by the variety of issues and categories of homeless offenders identified by Probation and Welfare Officers coming before the courts and in prison. These include:

Chaotic drug users: According to Probation and Welfare Officers this group of offenders frequently move in and out of the prison system. The vast majority of their criminality relates to property crimes carried out to support their addictions:

Drug users offend to get money for drugs - you can beg for the money for a few bottles of cider, for those on drugs they need to break into cars to get the type of money they need.

Alcoholism: From what Probation and Welfare Officers said, it appears that offenders are likely to have become homeless due to trouble in the home and within the family. Their family life has often broken down and it is not uncommon for them to have barring orders against them. They are also likely to be arrested for public order and vagrancy offences.

Offenders with a homeless lifestyle: Officers suggested that some long term homeless offenders had a strong peer group on the street. Probation and Welfare Officers explained that this group tend not to be interested in settled accommodation.

Older homeless people: These individuals are likely to have experienced long periods of

homelessness. They tend to have a higher proportion of problems particularly with alcohol and mental illness problems and some are already barred from hostels.

Long term Prisoners: Probation and Welfare Officers identified that most long term prisoners have difficulties resettling in the community stating that 'they need a place to get back on their feet but we need to assist them in the short or medium term'.

Young offenders: According to Probation and Welfare Officers the issue of homelessness is played down by young offenders, many of them cannot go home because there is a barring order against them, instead they may stay temporarily with friends although they do not perceive their situation as being homeless.

Female offenders: Probation and Welfare Officers identified two distinct categories of female homeless prisoner - older women with alcohol and drug problems who are repetitive petty offenders sentenced for such crimes as breach of the peace, loitering and shoplifting – and younger, female drug addicts.

Prisoners with Personality Disorders/Mental Health Problems: Probation and Welfare Officers based in the prisons and the community identified a group of homeless offenders with problematic and disturbed behaviour who have not been diagnosed with mental health problems. This group were described as having difficulty remaining within boundaries, and were often drug users with poor cognitive and coping skills:

Sometimes it is obvious someone is clearly disturbed and yet following a psychiatric assessment no psychiatric illness is diagnosed - an assessment based on short-term intervention is that psychosis is secondary to substance abuse. Addictions are seen as the main cause of the problem - however it was the opinion of many in the groups that drug use is often a form of self-medication for psychiatric problems. This group often become the most isolated.

Many use drugs as self-medication to mask the underlying mental health issues. It creates a cycle of drugs, crime and prison - a cycle that goes on for years.

Some Probation and Welfare Officers in the community and in prisons perceived psychiatric services as being reluctant to work with some offenders in this group because the problems were not considered as psychiatric:

Psychiatrists won't touch them because they say the difficulty is not psychiatric.

Sex offenders: Probation and Welfare Officers described how this group are often not homeless on committal but are at risk of homelessness due to rejection from the family or community. Their homelessness is often temporary because in contrast to many offenders they often have had a relatively stable upbringing and the necessary skills to access housing again.

2. Homelessness and the Criminal Justice System

A consistent theme throughout this research has been the extensive involvement of homeless people in the criminal justice system. Regardless of the offences committed the overall perception was that homeless people fared worse in the criminal justice system than their non-homeless contemporaries. Probation and Welfare Officers reflected an

earlier theme that some homeless offenders commit crime in order to get respite from the streets:

The reality is that many people are homeless before they ever come to prison. Individuals commit crimes to get into prison particularly around Christmas and the winter when the weather conditions are particularly harsh.

Probation and Welfare Officers said it was sometimes difficult to recommend a community-based sanction such as a Probation Bond for a homeless person if an individual's lifestyle was chaotic and the homeless experience traumatic for them. In this scenario, Probation and Welfare Officers thought that keeping probation appointments would not be a priority. However a distinction was made between the 'chaotic homeless' and the 'stable homeless' - the view was that if a person was able to manage their homelessness and had a routine they were often capable of keeping appointments.

Overall however, Officers thought that homeless offenders are doubly penalised, firstly for their offending and secondly because of their homelessness. It was felt that homeless people would get custodial sentences before community sanctions. Indeed, one officer made the point that if a request is made for a Community Service Order report, it is difficult to recommend it if a person is homeless, because of a lack of a stable address.

3. Homelessness and Supervision by the Probation and Welfare Service

Homeless clients are the same as our other clients except they live their lives in a public place.

3.1 Tracking Homeless Clients

The perception amongst many of the Probation and Welfare Officers was that homeless people were willing to engage in probation supervision but their ability to do so was often impaired by their homelessness. When the courts refer a homeless individual to the Probation and Welfare Service for a pre-sanction report, even tracking them to write the report proved difficult. For example, on average, Officers thought that of every ten cases where the client was of 'no fixed abode' only five would turn up for appointments despite being offered three of them, or alternatively they would turn up on the wrong day. Probation and Welfare Officers' experiences were that if someone had a really chaotic lifestyle on the streets, it was very unlikely that they would be able to track them, even to write a pre-sanction report.

The difficulty of tracking homeless people continues throughout the supervision. Probation and Welfare Officers describe the process as time consuming and frustrating especially if clients 'go missing' for a period of time. Even if probation clients are living in hostels or B&Bs, Officers say that it is necessary to send out appointment letters up to two weeks in advance in the hope that the client might pick up the correspondence at their accommodation. Overall, the difficulty of tracking and maintaining contact with homeless clients was seen to have a huge impact on the ability of Officers to effectively supervise clients in the community.

3.2 The Role of the Probation and Welfare Officer vis-à-vis the Homeless Client

When supervising homeless clients the consensus amongst Officers was that meeting the immediate needs of the offender was paramount. Officers viewed the supervision arrangements as amounting to crisis intervention with little opportunity to engage in any work related to offending behaviour:

If a client is moving from hostel to hostel - we are way down their list of priorities
- if life is a bit more stable it is no problem. Homelessness flattens supervision.

In relation to supporting the homeless client, Probation and Welfare Officers described their role as an intermediary one between the client and the homeless service. In other words, Officers liaised with services on behalf of their client, and worked towards securing a place for them. At the same time, they also had to interpret the service for the client, explaining to them what they had to do to access a place and why they had to do it.

Overall, Probation and Welfare Officers viewed accommodation as a vital element in the equation for effective supervision and reducing re-offending and therefore perceived the process of accessing accommodation as an integral part of their supervisory role. Directly accessing services for clients was seen as necessary because there was a perception that it was often very difficult for clients to access services by themselves. Homeless services, in general requested that the Probation and Welfare Service provide support to the homeless person if they were to allocate them a place in their service:

It is very difficult for clients to be allowed to access services by themselves - in order to get a place for a client it is necessary to get involved and guarantee support - while this is essential in most cases it prohibits the client from being independent.

Even when Probation and Welfare Officers were involved in accessing accommodation for clients they encountered considerable difficulties when liaising with some agencies and services. One officer encapsulated the views expressed by many others in her description of the difficulties:

You get a lot of run around from services, sometimes it is who you know. When presenting with someone it is important to have as much recorded information about the person as possible. If agencies don't know you the door is often closed - the fear amongst agencies is if they don't know you that you'll dump the client and disappear.

Accessing accommodation was made particularly problematic especially given the profile of many of the Probation and Welfare clients:

Huge energy is involved in getting a place and keeping a place and very little return in terms of the client sustaining that placement - it is an uphill struggle all of the way.

Furthermore, if an accommodation place is secured for an offender the next challenge encountered by Probation and Welfare Officers was attempting to sustain the individual in the accommodation:

For drug addicted offenders private rented accommodation rarely lasts, these offenders may be on the housing list and use private rented as a temporary gap

however it rarely lasts because of drug addiction, it can sometimes last for a few days or up to a month but very often not much more.

Stabilising clients in accommodation was also seen as difficult due to the low quality accommodation available to clients and/or the treatment they receive at services:

The accommodation is often sub-standard and even unliveable. There is also a difficulty around the unwillingness of the client to access or stay in any of the accommodation that is available because of the treatment they will receive.

Finally, the time limited nature of the work between the Probation and Welfare Officer and the client was identified by Probation and Welfare Officers as an issue which adversely impacts on the extent to which cases are followed up. An officer described a case where, by the time she had managed to get the client a place in transitional accommodation the supervision period had expired therefore making the provision of follow-up support very difficult.

In conclusion, a number of difficulties emerge for Probation and Welfare Officers in their role of supervising homeless clients in the community. Firstly, there appears to be the initial and on-going problem of tracking homeless clients given their lack of stable accommodation. A suggestion was made that the Probation and Welfare Service could provide a day check-in premises or a point of reference for homeless offenders on supervision in the city centre. Officers thought such a drop-in facility would alleviate many of the issues in relation to tracking offenders, provide a more flexible approach to homeless people and potentially improve the likelihood of them engaging with the Probation and Welfare Service. Secondly, in terms of supervising clients Probation and Welfare Officers were of the view that, in many homeless cases supervision is taken up with crisis intervention work, with little or no time to focus on offending or offending related behaviour. Finally, accessing accommodation for clients and supporting them in sustaining their placement through inter-agency work is an on-going difficulty for Officers especially with the more chaotic cases and, in light of the fact that much available accommodation is sub-standard and not where clients wish to remain. These issues in relation to accommodation provision and inter-agency contact will be discussed later in the discussion.

3.3. The No-Fixed-Abode Roster

In general, Probation and Welfare Officers write pre-sanction and progress reports for courts on offenders resident within the Probation and Welfare Service team's designated geographical area. However, the responsibility for pre-sanction reports for no fixed abode cases is rotated on a monthly basis amongst the community-based Probation and Welfare Service teams throughout Dublin. This practice is known as the 'NFA Roster' and the role is rotated amongst teams approximately once every 11 months. When this roster was first introduced, Probation and Welfare teams were based in the city centre and the roster was viewed as a pragmatic measure to manage homeless cases. A number of probation teams have now moved to local offices and therefore commute to the city centre (or other parts of Dublin) to meet with homeless clients for the purpose of preparing pre-sanction reports and supervision. While the time involved in commuting was raised as an issue, the main difficulty with the roster system related to a lack of knowledge with regard to homeless and housing services in the team due to the time

lapses between each roster period:

During the roster month you develop knowledge of services and contacts available, by the time your turn comes around again that knowledge base has to be built upon again. Knowing people and contacts in the homeless services is essential otherwise personnel are reluctant to accept your client.

The NFA roster system was clearly assessed as 'not working'. The consensus view amongst Officers was that the roster was not a satisfactory way for managing homeless clients:

The roster depersonalises the client because the team dreads it. Furthermore, you can't even give the homeless client a contact person because you don't know who s/he will be referred to.

An identified need for a designated NFA team was one of the main themes arising from the focus group discussion. As highlighted in the following extracts Probation and Welfare Officers viewed the development of such a team as central to building expertise and developing inter-agency contacts and relationships:

If there was one designated team it would allow expertise and also relationships to develop between the Probation and Welfare Service and the services for homeless people including the Corporation.

Consistency of staff is so important in terms of accessing services and placements for our clients. Personal relationships and 'who you know' is an integral part of inter-agency practice. Knowing someone within the service and them knowing you through previous professional work greatly increases the chances of establishing a place to stay for the clients. Unless people in other agencies know you they are afraid that the client will be 'dumped' on them.

4. Homelessness and the Prison System

Probation and Welfare Officers working on custody based teams identified the need for pre-release planning and the establishment of post-release support as the key issues for assisting prisoners with housing and other reintegration issues. There was a general consensus, that to achieve this, what was required was communication between other services working in the prison and the establishment of links with community based organisations. Officers were of the view that the most successful referrals from prison to the community were those that had been planned over the period of imprisonment. However, as the following quotation explains there are barriers preventing effective planning for release which places the prisoner at risk of homelessness and re-offending on release:

The ideal solution is that an agreement exists, that a plan of action can be put in place if someone is presenting as homeless. The current lack of such provision means a prisoner often moves from a stabilised to a destabilised position.

Probation and Welfare Officers within the prisons identified a number of barriers to preparing prisoners for release and reintegration into the community. These factors include;

- The issue of prisoners not recognising housing as a problem until release
- The issue of prisoners in general not being recognised as homeless until they are

released

- The practice of unsupervised temporary release
- The absence of an adequate bridging service between custody and the community
- Limited Probation and Welfare staff resources vis-à-vis the number of prisoners in each establishment
- A lack of accommodation and support services for offenders in the community.

4.1. Prisoners not Identifying Accommodation as an Issue Until Release

In almost all of the prison teams, Probation and Welfare Officers said a certain proportion of prisoners do not recognise their risk of homelessness while in prison. They claimed that it is often only on release that the reality of the situation hits the prisoner. It appears that sex offenders are particularly at risk in this sense;

Many sex offenders would have a distorted view of their family relationship and a distorted view of their family being there for them on release - even those who may have had no contact or visits with family and friends for up to five to six years - often times the family don't want the person to return home.

4.2. Recognition of Prisoners as Homeless Individuals

There is an issue around prisoners not seeing themselves as homeless until they are released. There is a bigger issue around prisoners not being recognised as homeless until they are released.

According to some custody based Probation and Welfare staff the implication of prisoners not being recognised as homeless until they are released is that planning for release is thwarted. In other words, the reality for many prisoners is that they leave prison with no where to go and only on release are they entitled to apply for money entitlements and accommodation. Furthermore, they are often hindered by the opening hours of the office they must visit to access emergency accommodation. The situation for country-based prisoners in Dublin is exacerbated by the time involved in travelling home:

The reality for country-based prisoners is that even if they get an early train they may not make it down the country to meet with a Community Welfare Officer within working hours.

Probation and Welfare Officers in some of the Dublin prisons described how, in recent times, a Community Welfare Officer visits the prison on a weekly basis. Community Welfare Officers organise a source of emergency accommodation and emergency benefits that can be received by the prisoner within a day of release. This service was viewed by Probation and Welfare Officers as useful and necessary 'to alleviate much of the hardship on leaving prison'. However, it was also acknowledged that in many cases, due to the limitations of time and resources, the service was available to the most acute cases only.

Probation and Welfare Officers in other prisons where there was not a visiting Community Welfare Officer raised the issue about equality of access. It was acknowledged that linking with Community Welfare Officers in areas outside Dublin would be problematic due to the logistics of commuting to prisons in Dublin. There was

a sense however, that more flexibility was required in the system, to allow the necessary paperwork to be completed for prisoners, to access supplementary welfare allowance immediately on release.

4.3. Practice of Unsupervised Temporary Release

The temporary release of prisoners depends on a number of issues, including the nature of the offence, the number of previous offences, the behaviour of the prisoner while in prison, and/or if the prison gets over populated some are given temporary release with no notice. Supervised temporary release by the Probation and Welfare Service is rare due to limited staff resources. Unsupervised temporary release is therefore often granted as a means of alleviating pressure on space within the prison especially in committal prisons such as Mountjoy and the Dóchas Centre.

Unsupervised temporary release was seen by Probation and Welfare Officers as making the issue of managing homelessness more difficult:

Temporary release can be granted approximately six months up to the end of sentence and while rare there have been cases on temporary release up to one year. With men, temporary release is likely to be only granted up to 6 weeks before the end of sentence. The implication of unsupervised temporary release is that sometimes prisoners go out to nothing because we don't know they have been released⁴⁰.

For individuals to access emergency accommodation they are required to present to James St. during office hours on Monday to Thursday and up to lunch time on Friday. The release of homeless prisoners on Friday evenings and at weekends therefore has particular implications for them.

4.4. Bridging/Liaison between Custody and the Community

While Probation and Welfare Officers were in agreement that 'people need to be released within boundaries in order to prevent re-offending, protect the public and promote safer communities' they acknowledged that 'there is simply not the resources or systems in place to provide follow-up support in the community'. The majority of prison based Probation and Welfare Service personnel that participated in the focus groups, identified the need for a link between custody and the community to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners:

A liaison person is needed to formulate links, to update cases and attend meetings and follow up - ideally it would be someone with a social work background who could work intensively on this issue and create better resettlement opportunities.

Prison based teams were mixed in their views about the provision of information on homelessness and housing for prisoners. There was a perception amongst some teams that the majority of prisoners knew the system and already had the necessary information to access emergency housing and benefits on release; other Officers clearly identified the need for such information for prisoners.

⁴⁰ According to Probation and Welfare Officers, it is not unusual for up to 10 women to be released as numbers rise within the prison.

5. Common Problems for PWS Clients in Terms of Accessing Accommodation.

A theme permeating the discussion with prison and community based Probation and Welfare Officers was the shortage of basic accommodation, suitable for prisoners on release and offenders in the community. While the housing situation was bleak for those leaving custody in general, it was particularly problematic for certain types of offenders such as sex offenders and arsonists. As one Probation and Welfare Officer described 'it is difficult to find accommodation for offenders generally and sex offenders come bottom of the pecking order'. Other groups who were singled out in particular were young prisoners and women prisoners, particularly those with children.

With regard to the availability of accommodation Probation and Welfare Officers were of the view that local authorities needed to take increased responsibility. Some Officers had engaged successfully with local authorities in terms of holding tenancies open for those who were in prison for short periods of time (the longest period a tenancy was held for six months). This practice was rare and was highly dependent on individual interaction between Probation and Welfare staff and staff in the Local Authorities.

5.1. Range of Accommodation Services

Reflecting upon the varying needs of homeless prisoners, Probation and Welfare Officers identified the need for a range of accommodation services for prisoners including those who were substance dependent:

A lot of accommodation stipulates that one must be drug free, hostels won't touch people with drugs, there is a need for hostels for this group.

There was a general consensus that the preferred choice of housing for most prisoners was independent living:

Most prisoners want independent living what is lacking is a link person to assist them to find private rented accommodation.

In many respects, although hostels were often viewed as the only option open to homeless prisoners, Probation and Welfare Officers were also of the view that there was a stigma attached to staying in hostels. They were not seen as the ideal choice for resettling prisoners in the community. Many teams recognised the unsatisfactory accommodation and services provided in much hostel accommodation however there was a perception in the groups that hostels were trying to change and some were adopting a multi-disciplinary care approach.

Officers recognised that many prisoners would not have the necessary coping skills to live independently immediately on release from prison:

In prison individuals have no decisions to make, everyday responsibilities are taken away from them and handed over to the prison for five years and then handed back to them overnight.

A period of adjustment is required when someone leaves prison, they need time and space and time to link to community agencies. It is also important for them to break out of the pattern of institutionalisation and the move takes place gradually. Prisoners have a hierarchy of needs and where they are going to live is the main concern.

The general view was that there was a need for a spectrum of supported accommodation from half-way housing up to independent living. According to Probation and Welfare Officers the difficulty with 'half-way' house accommodation is that it tends to be of a better standard to emergency accommodation and individuals are therefore reluctant to move on from such living arrangements.

In addition to a lack of range in the services for homeless offenders Probation and Welfare Officers in prisons and the community identified a need for more services to be set up in suburban areas to prevent homeless people drifting into the city centre.

5.2. Accessibility of Accommodation Services

Probation and Welfare Officers identified a need for more out-of-hours services for homeless clients. The opening hours of the Homeless Persons Unit were viewed as inadequate especially on Fridays when they are closed for the afternoon and all weekend:

Many family rows that start and often lead to someone being put out on the street often start late at night therefore services need to be more flexible.

5.3. Access to Private Rented Accommodation

The experience of Probation and Welfare Officers was that landlords were reluctant to take rent supplement and if they did it is generally because of the sub-standard nature of the accommodation.

5.4. Limited Services/Support for Offenders

Probation and Welfare Officers identified that accommodation was of little use to offenders without the provision of support services to assist offenders sustain their placement in the community – a common theme was the limited places available for drug treatment on release from prison:

It is important that the solution to homelessness is seen as providing support and on-going support rather than bricks and mortar - it is about recognising that some people cannot survive alone without support.

5.5. Offenders' Social Skills & the Homeless System

Probation and Welfare Officers described the importance of offenders 'presenting well' to homeless services in order to access a placement. According to Probation and Welfare Officers the process of accessing any type of accommodation involves detailed paperwork, lengthy periods of waiting around and perseverance on the part of the client. The main difficulty for prisoners and other offenders is that they often lack the necessary social and coping skills to successfully negotiate the system:

The poor social skills of many of our clients mean people don't know how to sell themselves.

Coping skills and perseverance are often lacking. Many have never been rewarded before for perseverance so why would they start now. They have 'learned failure'.

Our clients often have little in the way of skills to present themselves. The

frustration of sitting around and waiting day in day out is also difficult - it can often end in a brawl.

5.6. Expectations on Offenders' from the Homeless System

There was a general consensus amongst Probation and Welfare Officers that high expectations were placed on homeless clients in negotiating the homeless system. While acknowledging that it was necessary to assess individuals, there was a perception that homeless clients had to 'jump through hoops' to prove that they were 'worthy' of the service provided:

There is a sense of unworthiness in the way homeless people are treated almost as if they have to prove they are worthy of accommodation.

With transitional housing there appears to be an issue that individuals coming through the system need to show/prove they have changed. It may often be the case that they have to access basic hostel accommodation and move through the system essentially to 'prove' they are committed to change.

It is about striking a balance between staff safety in the homeless services versus what our clients are capable of doing.

5.7 Family and Community Resistance

Probation and Welfare Officers particularly those in the prison context encountered cases where families were resistant to prisoners returning to the family home on release thus rendering them at risk of homelessness:

Sometimes the family will take the opportunity of someone being inside to tell the person they're not coming home - often time they've got used to a quieter home life as a result of that individual being out of the home, for others it's the fear of the local community.

Community resistance was also an issue identified by Probation and Welfare Officers in prisons and the community:

Sometimes the impact of the anti-social legislation only becomes an issue after the prisoner's release, it is often only when the prisoner returns to his/her community does the issue of community acceptance arise.

6. Addressing the Problem and Identifying Solutions

A number of issues were raised by Probation and Welfare Officers as potential solutions to the problems that exist for homeless offenders in the criminal justice system.

6.1. Information Provision

A need was identified for more information provision at all levels in the system. Within the prison context the majority of teams were of the view that prisoners required basic information about accessing homeless services, social welfare and other benefits on release. Many prison-based teams thought there was a need for greater communication and sharing of information between other services in the prison. In the community

context, representatives from the various probation teams expressed the need for more mutual sharing of information on homeless services within and between teams. Some Officers suggested the creation of a central computerised database with up-to-date knowledge about new services as a means of informing all staff within the service about the services available.

6.2. Defining the Role of the Probation and Welfare Service

At an overall level Probation and Welfare Officers thought that the role of the Probation and Welfare Service needed to be defined, and explained to external organisations dealing with homeless clients. Officers were of the view that the perception of the Service needed to change to facilitate better working relationships with other agencies:

The Probation and Welfare Service needs to be sold to other agencies. The perception of us needs to change from a service that is not just trouble but a service that gives support.

6.3. Formalising Links with Agencies

Officers described contact between the Probation and Welfare Service and some other agencies as very ad hoc and personality driven (with the exception of services like Priorswood House) rather than formalised at any level, as one officer described:

When a Probation and Welfare Officer leaves a team they invariably bring those contacts with them, in a struggle for scarce resources that is what is required.

There is a need to formalise the contacts between the Probation and Welfare Service, the housing sector and other services. Central to addressing the issue of homelessness is recognising the different responsibilities of different agencies.

Earlier in the chapter Probation and Welfare Officers identified the need for a designated team to work with homeless clients. As well as the other benefits outlined Probation and Welfare Officers viewed the creation as such a team as instrumental to improving interagency contact:

Homelessness by its nature is ad hoc, but if you set up a homeless team you have a better chance of formalising contacts with agencies and having a consistent approach to practice.

Formalised links were seen as important by Probation and Welfare Officers, at a team level as well as at an organisational level. Firstly, it overcame the difficulty of losing the knowledge base when one staff member left the team and secondly at a pragmatic level Officers thought that such contacts would improve their ability to secure accommodation and other services for clients:

Having a link with the Corporation so that the person might eventually get a place to stay.

Formal links with agencies so that we know we can ring them up especially the Corporation - as it stands we are dependent on individual links.

6.4. Multi-Agency Partnerships

A theme which was reflected upon by many Probation and Welfare Officers was the need for the Service to work in partnership with other agencies – this was felt to be important in order to ‘avoid the perception of dumping offenders’. The contribution of the Probation and Welfare Service was seen to be in the form of providing a service to the offender and also sharing information about dealing with difficult behaviour amongst this client group with other agencies. Overall, a multi-agency response to the issues and difficulties faced by homeless offenders was seen as the way forward.

Conclusion

This chapter identified the issues arising for Probation and Welfare Officers supervising offenders in the community and working with prisoners in custody.

A number of difficulties were identified by Probation and Welfare Officers in terms of supervising offenders in the community. These included the difficulty of tracking them, the process of accessing accommodation on their behalf and the constant need for crisis intervention as opposed to offence focus work. At an overall level, Officers identified the need for a designated team to work with homeless cases to replace the current system of the NFA roster. There was a consensus that such a team would enable expertise on homelessness and homeless services to be developed within the Probation and Welfare Service. It was the view of community-based Officers that a specialist team would be an important part of developing strong inter-agency links especially between the Probation and Welfare Service, local authorities and homeless services.

Probation and Welfare Officers in the prisons identified the need for improved pre-release preparation and post-release support as key issues for assisting prisoners with housing and other reintegration needs. However, they identified a number of barriers to facilitating reintegration including the issue of prisoners not being acknowledged as homeless until they are released; the practice of unsupervised temporary release; the absence of a bridging service between custody and the community; limited Probation and Welfare staff resources vis-à-vis the number of prisoners in each establishment and a general lack of accommodation and support services for prisoners in the community.

Both custody and community based Officers identified a number of common problems in relation to effectively working with homeless offenders. The availability and accessibility of accommodation were dominant themes as well as the limited support services to assist offenders under supervision in the community or on release from prison.

Temporary homeless accommodation was seen neither to facilitate rehabilitation or reintegration; however there was a general recognition that there were few other housing options available to their client group. Contact with local authorities and homeless services were seen as a necessary part of the Probation and Welfare Officer’s role. A clear need was identified to formalise contacts between these organisations and the Probation and Welfare Service in order for Officers to be better placed to secure accommodation for clients. Finally, Officers viewed a multi-agency response to the homeless issue as the way forward in terms of working with, and addressing the needs of, some of their most marginalised clients.



CHAPTER 10

THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOUSING PROVIDERS AND HOMELESS SERVICES

For this stage of the research, a consultation process was undertaken with Homeless Officers/Co-ordinators and other relevant service providers within the homeless section of each local authority, the Director of Homelessness in the Eastern Regional Health Authority and the Homeless Agency. The aim of this section is to explore barriers to accessing appropriate accommodation for ex-prisoners and other offenders, and to identify means of addressing these barriers. It also looks at the role of homeless services in diverting homeless people from offending. The first section presents an overview of the operation of the Scheme of Letting Priorities and the Homeless Waiting List in each local authority. The second section examines provision of accommodation for homeless people under this scheme and section three outlines the role of Homeless Fora, with particular attention on the homeless ex-prisoner. The final section explores the issues and barriers regarding homeless ex-prisoners and accommodation provision. This section incorporates the views of relevant local authority service providers, as well as the Homeless Agency and the Eastern Regional Health Authority.

Table 1 Role of Relevant Services

| Agency | Role |
|--|--|
| Local Authorities in the Dublin region | There are four local authorities in the Dublin region: Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. They have the responsibility for providing housing for homeless people within respective jurisdictions. |
| Eastern Regional Health Authority | The Eastern Regional Health Authority is responsible for planning, arranging, overseeing and co-ordinating health and personal social services, including homeless services, in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. |
| Homeless Agency | The Homeless Agency was established in 1999 to co-ordinate develop and improve delivery of services and accommodation for the homeless in Dublin City and Counties. This subsumed the role of the Homeless Initiative which was established in 1996 in order to develop a framework within which homeless services could be planned, developed and co-ordinated. |
| Homeless Persons Unit | The Homeless Persons Unit provides advice, information and a referral point in relation to welfare entitlements, accommodation and income maintenance to homeless people. |

I. Scheme of Letting Priorities and Operation of the Homeless Waiting List

Each local authority in the Dublin area has a homeless officer or co-ordinator. Other relevant staff members include those whose remit is to review applications with a history of anti-social behaviour, as well as staff who deal directly with homeless applicants. The application and interviewing process within each local authority varies slightly. Each involves a process of verification of the individual's homeless status. This usually means

an application by the individual to the homeless person's unit. Other criteria include details of the individual's income, and verification that they are from the authority's area of jurisdiction. A summary of the means of processing homeless applications is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Outline of Procedures for Processing Homeless Clients

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Dublin City Council</p> | <p>The homeless person's section of DCC is located in the City Council buildings in the city centre. A number of people are employed to work directly with individuals who present as homeless. On presenting, the individual completes an application form. If they are not staying in emergency accommodation, the person is directed to the homeless person's unit. Only when the individual has provided a verified address of a homeless service are they accepted as homeless.</p> |
| <p>South Dublin County Council</p> | <p>There is one homeless officer and staff employed to work directly with homeless applicants. The individual presents to the local authority building. Validated homeless address must be provided. Applicants are often referred to the homeless person's unit.</p> |
| <p>Fingal County Council</p> | <p>There is one Homeless Co-ordinator and one person dealing directly with applicants. Applicants are often referred to the homeless person's unit. Both those with homeless accommodation addresses and those sleeping rough are accepted for inclusion on the list.</p> |
| <p>Dun Laoghaire Rathdown (DLRD) County Council</p> | <p>There is a Homeless Co-ordinator as well as staff employed to deal directly with homeless applicants. Since the opening of an emergency in Dun Laoghaire, it is alleged that all those who previously slept rough in the area use the hostel. It is therefore claimed that no homeless people sleeping rough are being excluded from the homeless list.</p> |

Homeless applicants in all local authorities are requested for permission to share information, if they have any history of anti-social behaviour. In Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, this is requested only if the individual has been previously evicted from local authority accommodation. Pre-tenancy checks are made for each applicant by the Allocations Support Unit.

1.1 Refusing Access to the Homeless List

There are some circumstances whereby an individual is refused access to a homeless list or is removed from it. It emerged that if anti-social behaviour is still a concern, applicants will not be registered as homeless. This also applies if the individual appears to be substance dependent. Both of these factors can also lead to the individual being removed from the list. In Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, the individual is told to return in one year's time.

The issue of substance dependency as a barrier to accessing housing was raised in the Threshold report, *Housing For All? Findings from Joint Research on the Local Housing Strategies and Homeless Action Plans (2002)*. This stated:

There is a clear recognition by most authorities that drug use and/or alcohol dependency can lead to homelessness and yet few local authorities make firm commitments to providing accommodation for these vulnerable groups (ibid, 2002:103).

Another factor that could lead to removal from the homeless list is the applicant's refusal to either the first or second offer of accommodation. This may occur if the accommodation is located in an area unknown to the client or removed from their family and friends. Also, if it emerges that the individual is no longer homeless, for example if they are in private rented accommodation, they are removed from the list. A final reason for removal from the list is if the income of the individual exceeds the income threshold.

2. Method of Prioritising Homeless Applicants

Policy suggests that homeless applicants to all local authorities are to be considered of highest priority for housing and are not subject to the points system of those on the housing list. They are provided housing based on housing stock available and length of time on the list. However, actual practice sometimes does not follow this procedure. For example, in Fingal County Council, homeless applicants are not dealt with until one year following initial application. If at this point, the individual is still homeless, their application is considered. The rationale behind this approach stems from the belief that homelessness for many applicants is temporary and that many applicants will access alternative accommodation within this period. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council operate the unique approach of allowing a homeless applicant to remain on the homeless list and the housing list simultaneously.

The average length of waiting time before an applicant is housed also varied. In Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, it was two years. In Fingal County Council the stated average waiting time was one year. It was noted that particular circumstances of applications can effect length of waiting time. Housing stock emerged as one significant factor. It was also noted that in particular circumstances, an application could access housing more quickly. Examples of such extenuating circumstances included incidents of domestic violence, if the applicant is elderly, or if the applicant has children.

None of the local authorities in the Dublin region provide information in a booklet form that explains in an easy to follow format as to how the Scheme of Letting Priorities operate and the housing options available to homeless applicants.

Table 3 Local Authority Tenancies Nominated To Homeless Persons In Past 12 Month Period

| Local Authority | Number of Tenancies nominated |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Dublin City Council | 100 (approximate) |
| South Dublin County Council | 8 |
| Fingal County Council | 1 |
| Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council | 11 |
| Total | 120 (approximate) |

The number of single homeless persons to be nominated to local authority tenancies in the past year varied.

3. Homeless Fora and Inter Agency Support

A homeless forum has been established in each local authority area. The described aim of these fora is to share information, to identify gaps in services and to make recommendations for improvement. One local authority referred to the need for further clarification around the role of their forum. Typical membership included representatives from the local authority, the health board, the Gardaí, and relevant voluntary and community service providers. The Probation and Welfare Service was represented on the forum of Fingal County Council. The Irish Prison Service was represented on the South Dublin County Council only. Other representatives on fora include health board representatives, social workers and relevant services in the voluntary and community sector.

4. Responding to the Accommodation Needs of Ex-Prisoners: Issues and Barriers

4.1 The Homeless Persons Unit (HPU)

The Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) provides a welfare and accommodation service to homeless people. A significant proportion of their clients are ex-prisoners. In 2002, out of 1,901 clients, 113 presented as ex-prisoners. Arising from a recommendation in the NESF report, *Reintegration of Prisoners (2002)* a new initiative was established, on a pilot basis, between the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) and the Probation and Welfare Service at Mountjoy and Arbour Hill prisons. The scheme involves a Community Welfare Officer from the HPU attending each prison regularly to link prisoners who have no home on release with homeless services. This link is established between one to five months prior to a prisoner's release and provides one example of a means of responding to the accommodation needs of prisoners at risk of homelessness on release.

It is the view of the HPU and the Probation and Welfare Service that this initiative has achieved high levels of success to date. In Mountjoy prison, the majority of prisoners who access the scheme are linked into homeless services and relevant welfare services for

release. It was felt that this service should be available to all prisoners who are in need of it. For prisoners who will access homeless accommodation on release, it was considered that this process allowed a smoother and easier transition into basic accommodation for the individual, from where s/he could begin to address their long term accommodation needs. Otherwise, it was felt, these individuals would present to the HPU after release, often having unnecessarily spent at least one night sleeping rough.

The HPU scheme has also led to access to independent accommodation for prisoners from Arbour Hill prison. Since January 2003, 12 prisoners in Arbour Hill were met prior to release. Of these, two returned to the family home, one gained access to local authority accommodation as a result of a case conference involving a range of relevant services, and eight accessed accommodation in the private rented sector. Only one became homeless on release. However, debate was raised by other service providers over the negative effects of defining someone as homeless, which occurs on referring someone to the HPU. Reference was made to the important role played by family and other informal supports in avoiding homelessness. It was stated that defining an individual at risk of homelessness as being homeless should be applied only in a last case scenario especially in light of the negative repercussions of labelling an individual as homeless has also been highlighted in the literature review.

4.2 Local Authorities

Local authorities noted that while housing stock was traditionally provided for family households, there has been a recent shift in housing provision, with an increase in the number of single household units being built. This has particular implications for prisoners especially in light of findings presented in earlier chapters suggesting that homeless prisoners were most likely to be single person households. However, a shortage of single unit stock still exists in some local authorities, which can result in single homeless applicants remaining on the homeless list for longer periods than family units. The Threshold review of housing strategies also noted specific concerns about the problem of unmet housing need for specific groups such as single people. In discussing the 1999 assessment of housing need, for example, it describes how single people were under-represented in assessment data as they did not register or link in with the local authority, due to length of time spent on the housing waiting list. Later, in relation to housing provision outlined in current housing strategies, it notes:

For those authorities that have specified household types to be accommodated, women and children figure highly. The level of provision for single people, male and female, in all accommodation types is generally unspecified. Single people are particularly vulnerable to remaining in the homeless cycle for longer given the method of prioritising housing need by most local authorities on the basis of household size and number of children (Threshold, 2002:103).

This paucity of housing provision for single people was also noted by other agencies involved in this consultation process. It was considered to be a main causative factor in the link between imprisonment and homelessness.

Accessing/Maintaining Local Authority Accommodation as a Prisoner/Ex-Prisoner

The overall consensus on the issue of a local authority tenant serving a short-term

sentence was that the tenancy should and would be maintained. It was noted that often other family members could live in the tenancy, and that it would therefore not come to the attention of the local authority.

When asked if there was any perceived need for designated liaison personnel to work with the Irish Prison Service and/or Probation and Welfare Service staff to carry out homeless assessments at least 6 weeks in advance of release, local authorities deemed it unnecessary due to the minimal extent of the issue presenting to them.

Responses varied to the recommendation within the NESF report, *Reintegration of Prisoners (2002)*, that local authorities should be obliged to treat prisoners in need of accommodation as high priority cases, including that of facilitating them getting on local authority waiting lists while they are still in prison. South Dublin County Council and Fingal County Council agreed to the principle. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown disagreed, stating that resources were not available and that the low number of ex-prisoners presenting as homeless meant that this was not necessary. Other agencies included in this consultation process referred to the importance of focusing on access to independent accommodation.

Offences which can lead to exclusion from local authority housing include intimidation, assault, sexual offence, arson, and stalking. Some local authorities also have a database of complaints, made by resident's committees, which can play a role in blocking an application. However, it was noted that resident committees do not have complete vetoing power over any application. In Dun Laoghaire Rathdown, applicants that are excluded for reasons of anti-social behaviour and/or associated offences are given one year to stabilise/improve behaviour, and will be placed on list then. It was also noted that the majority of ex-prisoners are not anti-social. For example, robbery is not considered an anti social offence. Moreover, it was argued that ex-prisoners do not emerge as a group with particular needs and have the same rights as other applicants.

Local authorities spoke of the difficulties of housing certain categories of ex-prisoners, particularly those with a history of sex offence. The fact that local authority accommodation had a strong family orientation was noted, and that extreme opposition to housing this group would be raised by resident committees. However, other services noted the fact that a specific release date is set for sex offenders, facilitates full preparation of relevant housing for prisoners on release. The need for provision of specialist accommodation by relevant local authorities was raised.

Incidence of Ex-Prisoners among Local Authority Homeless Applicants

When asked whether the specific housing needs of ex-prisoners are addressed, or whether this has emerged as an issue to be addressed, there was a general consensus within each local authority that ex-prisoners did not present as a significant sub group of all homeless applicants. For example, South Dublin County Council noted that, from a total of 58 current homeless applicants, none were ex-prisoners. As noted earlier, ex-prisoners can be excluded from local authority accommodation if their offence is considered to be anti social in nature. In Fingal County Council, evidence of moves to overcome the barriers to housing for ex-prisoners is reflected in the establishment of the BOND residential project, a supported housing project established to meet the support

and accommodation needs of young ex-offenders in the Blanchardstown area.

Policies of Voluntary Housing Organisations in Relation to Ex-Prisoners

The ability to monitor the operation of voluntary services admittance policies varied. Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council noted that this was not possible, but that most voluntary organisations in the area provide services for those with low to medium support needs. Fingal County Council stated that all of its applicants for voluntary housing services are on the local authority housing waiting list and that a local authority representative sits on each admissions meeting. It was agreed that such monitoring could take place, ensuring that voluntary bodies in the area do not discriminate against ex-offenders in the provision of accommodation in their admissions procedure

4.3 Diversionary Role of Homeless Services

As documented in earlier sections of this research, homeless people are more likely to be arrested for offences such as intoxication in a public place, or failure to appear for bail, on a Probation Bond and those appearing before the courts. Such offences are generally related to living in a public place, substance dependency and/or the general chaos and instability related to being homeless. In relation to such minor, 'public living' related offences, there was a general consensus among those consulted about the diversionary role of homeless services, in providing support for this most marginalised group of the homeless population. During this consultation process, it was noted that the fact that these people are being arrested and imprisoned points to a gap in homeless services. Homeless services, it was pointed out, need to acknowledge and meet their responsibility in diverting homeless people from offending behaviour.

4.4 Prevention of Homelessness among Ex-Prisoners: The Role of the Prison Service

Both the Homeless Agency and the ERHA referred to the importance of preventative measures in addressing the issue of imprisonment and homelessness. Both bodies considered that there was a need to clarify the responsibilities of the Irish Prison Service under the Homeless Preventative Strategy. Referring people directly from prison to the Homeless Person's Unit was perceived to be contrary to the Strategy.

Conclusion

While, the homeless application and interviewing process within each local authority varies slightly, each involves a process of verification of the individual's homeless status. This usually means an application by the individual to the homeless person's unit. None of the local authorities included in this consultation process provided a user friendly guide on the operation of the homeless list. The length of time on the waiting list varied from one to three years. The means of processing homeless applications also varied, with one local authority describing how a homeless applicant file is not considered until one year following initial application.

Local authority staff related a generally low level of ex-prisoners among their homeless applicants. However, a low output of local authority housing for single people was cited as a principal causative factor of homelessness among ex-prisoners. Moreover, the lack

of clear information for homeless people on their application process, as well as their rights and entitlements could relate to low presentation of this group to their local authority. The negative effect, both perceived and real, of a history of anti social behaviour on an individual's application could also act as a disincentive to apply for local authority housing.

The role of the Homeless Person's Unit through the new initiative whereby a range of accommodation is organised for prisoners at immediate risk of homelessness, emerged as a useful approach to linking prisoners to such accommodation on release. However, this approach should only be used for those who are at immediate risk of homelessness on release, such as those prisoners who were homeless prior to committal and/or are serving a short sentence. A greater focus needs to be placed on placing such prisoners in appropriate secure accommodation, with relevant support provided.

There is a need for specialist supported accommodation for homeless people attempting to address substance dependency, or for those who need to establish a life removed from previous peer support that are involved in substance dependency and offending behaviour. The fact that the Drug Treatment Court is not available to homeless people could be addressed by the provision of such accommodation. This issue could be addressed by widening the eligibility criteria to this court and/or addressing the issue of accommodation provision.

Finally, the role of relevant agencies in the prevention and elimination of homelessness among this group emerged as a subject of debate. The need for a clarification of the role and responsibility of each relevant group, from homeless services and local authorities, to the Irish Prison Service and the Probation and Welfare Service was a key theme from this stage of the research.

Overall, it was noted that the support needs of ex-prisoners at risk of homelessness can vary, from very high, in terms of mental health and/or substance dependency, to none at all. Associated stigma with specialist homeless accommodation was noted. In relation to this, it was considered important to provide a range of accommodation supports, with a focus on independent accommodation, and provision of support based on individual needs. As one interviewee stated, 'the ex-prisoner has the right to belong to a community.'

CHAPTER II

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Number of Homeless Offenders

This research found a high incidence of homelessness amongst individuals coming before the courts and in custody in the Dublin Metropolitan Area. Previous research has noted the difficulty in determining the extent of homelessness in the criminal justice system because of the often adverse implication for offenders such as an increased likelihood of remand in custody and/or a reduced likelihood of receiving temporary release if they disclose their homeless status (Baldry, 2001). As a result, official statistics generally grossly under-represent the number of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system. The self-report method therefore provides a much more accurate picture of both the nature and extent of homelessness amongst offenders. The analysis of court records for the Dublin Metropolitan area found that over a six week period 1.6% (n=159) of those before the courts were homeless staying in emergency (hostels), supported or transitional accommodation or were of no fixed abode. In the same time period it emerged that 9.3% (n=40) of all those cases referred to the Probation and Welfare Service for a pre-sanction report were homeless and of no fixed abode or were staying in other homeless accommodation. In contrast the results of the prison survey revealed that over half the prison sample (54%) had at least one previous experience of homelessness prior to imprisonment. Most alarming however is the finding that 25% of all prisoners in the sample were homeless on committal into prison. Furthermore, a separate analysis of the booster sample for women prisoners found that 33% of women were homeless on committal to prison. Overall women appear to be highly represented in the homeless statistics of individuals in the criminal justice system because analysis of Probation and Welfare records suggests that almost half of those homeless (43%) were women despite women making up only just over one-fifth of the total sample.

2. Profile of Homeless Offenders

The analysis of court record and prison survey data suggests that approximately half of all homeless offenders progressing through the criminal justice system are less than 30 years of age⁴¹. Probation and Welfare Service records also suggest that the majority of homeless people (73%) referred to them are under 30 years. There were a sizeable proportion of offenders over 40 years represented in the homeless group before the courts (27%), in prison (18%) or referred to the Probation and Welfare Service (18%).

Single prisoners accounted for 65% of those homeless on committal. The vast majority (88%) of homeless committals to the prison system were resident in Dublin prior to imprisonment. A comparison between those homeless on committal and those previously homeless found that 40% of those living in Dublin and homeless on committal were staying in the city centre compared to only 7% of those previously homeless. This reflects a general pattern of homelessness in Dublin whereby individuals gravitate towards the city centre where most of the homeless services are based.

⁴¹ Under 30 years olds accounted for 54% of those homeless on committal to prison and 50% of those homeless according to court records.

Prisoners homeless on committal were even more educationally disadvantaged than the general prison sample with almost half (43%) having left school between the ages of 7 and 13 years in comparison to 21% of the remainder of the sample. Only 12% of those homeless on committal were employed prior to imprisonment in comparison to 41% for the rest of the sample suggesting that this group of prisoners were particularly marginalised from the labour force.

Family rows and related problems appear to be strongly linked to homelessness. Two-thirds of all those who had ever been homeless said a family row was one of the reasons for first becoming homeless. Family rows are often symptomatic of family problems. Homeless prisoners were significantly less likely to have the support of their family prior to or during their time in prison. Furthermore, homeless prisoners were less likely to anticipate they would have family support on release and were more likely than the remainder of the sample to identify family relationships as a problematic issue for them on release. These findings are of concern especially in light of the strong literature on prisoner reintegration suggesting that informal social networks including family are often more successful at accessing employment and supporting re-entry than professional intervention (Haines, 1990).

The community appeared to be problematic for many homeless prisoners. The majority said they lived in a high-crime area prior to imprisonment. One-third of those homeless on committal and previously homeless said they were not accepted in their local areas prior to imprisonment and almost the same proportion (32%) of them had action taken against them by individuals and community groups in their area. The implication of these findings is very significant in terms of the potential difficulties in accessing housing for this group when they are clearly not wanted by the community.

Drug use was one of the issues most strongly related to homelessness. The vast majority (90%) of prisoners homeless on committal said they used drugs before coming into prison. The most common drugs used were cannabis (91%), heroin (82%) and cocaine (82%). 82% of these homeless drug users said drugs caused problems in their lives including family relationships and problems, crime and the inability to hold down accommodation or employment. Furthermore, 59% of all prisoners who had ever experienced homelessness said alcohol and drugs were one of the reasons for becoming homeless on the first occasion. Drug use was also common amongst prisoners homeless on committal in prison however the extent of drug use was significantly reduced in prison.

Over three-quarters of those homeless on committal, consumed alcohol prior to imprisonment and almost two-thirds (63%) of these drinkers said alcohol caused problems in their lives. Furthermore, the findings highlighting that 63% of drinkers homeless on committal to prison identified public places such as the streets and parks as the most common location for consuming alcohol has particular implications for them in terms of being at risk of prosecution for public order offences.

Just over one-third (35%) of those homeless on committal said they had been diagnosed with mental health issues and of them two-thirds had been hospitalised in a psychiatric

institution. Two-thirds of female prisoners⁴², homeless on committal stated that they had previously been diagnosed with a mental health problem.

3. Homeless Progression Routes

Youth homelessness emerged as a factor strongly related to homelessness in the prison sample. 64% of all prisoners who had experience of homelessness first became homeless before 19 years of age - of them approximately one-fifth had been homeless as a child. These findings are of particular concern given the research evidence that young people become quickly immersed in the street culture of youth homelessness and experience major difficulties in moving away from this cycle.

Not only had many prisoners first become homeless at a young age but those prisoners homeless on committal to prison were likely to have already spent significant periods of time homeless in their lives. The vast majority (88%) had been homeless for six months or more and 58% had spent three years or more homeless.

A significant proportion of homeless individuals coming before the courts, referred to the Probation and Welfare Service or in custody did not access homeless accommodation services. While 44% of homeless cases appearing before the courts were staying in hostels it is noteworthy that a further 42% were sleeping rough. Of the homeless cases referred to the Probation and Welfare Service over half were of no fixed abode (58%) while 35% were staying in B&B or hostel accommodation. Furthermore, almost one-third (32%) of those homeless on committal were sleeping rough prior to imprisonment with a combined total of 29% staying in B&B or hostel accommodation. The take-up of homeless day services providing food and washing facilities was higher with 63% of those homeless on committal saying they used these services.

A number of reasons exist as to why individuals sleep rough as opposed to accessing emergency accommodation however a recurring theme in this research was the reluctance of prisoners to use hostel accommodation. According to respondents, their reluctance related to the living conditions in hostels, the rules and regulations attached to them, the sense of institutionalisation and the use and availability of drugs in the hostels.

It is noteworthy that such high proportions of homeless offenders rely on their informal social networks of family and friends to provide them with temporary accommodation. Prisoners homeless on committal appeared to be particularly marginalised. They were more likely to have slept rough while homeless or used homeless hostels, B&Bs and squats than those previously homeless. Both groups had similar rates to indicate that they stayed temporarily with family and friends while homeless but it appeared that those homeless on committal had less informal support structures and/or were more entrenched in the homeless culture.

4. Progression Routes into the Criminal Justice

It is clear from the evidence presented in this report that this group of individuals place

⁴² This figure is based on the booster sample for female prisoners (n=50).

considerable pressure on the criminal justice system in terms of the number of times they are arrested and the length of time spent in prison.

With the exception of one case all prisoners homeless on committal had come to the attention of the Gardaí in the five years before coming into prison on the current occasion with 59% stating they had been arrested 20 times or more. Analysis of the court record data suggests that homeless people had a higher number of charges against them than those in the non-homeless group. The average person appearing in the courts had 1.5 charges against them in comparison to 4.5 for those in the homeless group. Furthermore a breakdown in the number of charges brought against homeless people found that over half (52%) had two to five charges against them in the six week period and over one-third (36%) had between six and ten.

Offences committed by homeless individuals are generally not of a serious nature. District court records⁴³ suggest that the most common charges brought against homeless people were intoxication in a public place (30%), threatening behaviour (24%), theft (21%), failure to appear (15%), refusal to follow a Garda directive (13%), alien failing to produce visa/registration certificate (8%), criminal damage (7%) and begging (6%). Probation and Welfare Service records indicate that larceny and public order were the most common offences amongst the homeless group.

Overall it appears that homeless people come into contact with the Criminal Justice System on a frequent basis, accumulating multiple offences and convictions for relatively minor offences in the majority of cases.

4.1 Nature and Extent of Involvement with the Criminal Justice System

Individuals entering the prison system homeless are likely to have had a significant history of involvement with the criminal justice system. Almost half (47%) of those homeless on committal to prison had been under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service in the five years before coming into prison on the current occasion. Of particular interest was the finding highlighting that only 7% of those homeless on committal had not been in prison in the five year period before imprisonment on the current occasion. In fact, two-thirds (64%) had been in prison more than twice in the five years prior to their current sentence.

Those homeless on committal were not only likely to have been in and out of prison but perhaps unsurprisingly they also spent significant periods of time in prison over their lives. The majority (78%) of those prisoners homeless on committal had spent more than two years in prison in their lives and over half (54%) had spent five years or more in prison.

Overall the experience of those homeless on committal with the criminal justice system has been in prison. This theme was reflected on by Probation and Welfare Officers in focus groups when the view was that it was sometimes difficult to recommend a community-based sanction for a homeless person given the often chaotic and problematic circumstances of their lives. Evidence to support this view was found in the

⁴³ It is important to note that more serious offences would not be dealt with in the District Court however information from Circuit Court records indicate only the Act and not the offence for which a person appears before the court. There were only 18 homeless people before the Circuit Courts in the six week period.

Probation and Welfare Service records. Although the numbers were small and therefore caution should be exercised, it is suggested that the homeless sample were more likely (than the non-homeless group) to be recommended as 'not suitable for probation supervision'. While 12% (n=33) of the non-homeless sample were recommended for a Community Service Order it was not proposed for any cases in the homeless sample. It is noted however, that this may be due to the courts not requesting Community Service reports for homeless individuals or because of the guidelines stipulating the need for stable accommodation.

5. Difficulties of Supervising Homeless Offenders in the Community

Managing risk and addressing offending behaviour is a challenging role in the supervision of offenders in the community. These challenges are intensified when an offender presents as homeless. Community-based Probation and Welfare Officers identified three key issues in relation to the community supervision of homeless offenders. The first relates to the problem of tracking homeless offenders, as the findings suggest homeless offenders are often likely not to report for either assessment or supervision - in the absence of a stable address it is difficult for their Probation and Welfare Officer to follow-up such occurrences. Secondly, Probation and Welfare Officers were of the view that in many cases supervision is taken up with crisis intervention work with little or no time to focus on offending or offending related behaviour. The third issue relates to the difficulty of accessing accommodation for their homeless clients and attempting to maintain clients in such placements.

6. Difficulties of Reintegrating Prisoners

Prison-based Probation and Welfare Service staff identified a number of barriers towards planning for release from custody. These included

- The difficulty for some prisoners, particularly sex offenders of recognising their risk of homelessness prior to release.
- The fact that prisoners are not recognised as a homeless group impacted on the extent to which plans could be made for release. In other words, with the exception of the Homeless Person's Unit Initiative in some prisons, prisoners could not arrange accommodation or claim benefit until they were released. The implication of this according to Probation and Welfare Officers is that often offenders are released to nothing.
- The practice of unsupervised temporary release particularly in the committal prisons whereby prisoners are released without prior warning, often times to alleviate pressure on space within the prison. The impact of this practice is that there is little or no opportunity for planning for release.
- The absence of an adequate bridging service between custody and the community
- Probation and Welfare Officer acknowledged that the limited staff resources they had vis-à-vis the population in each establishment impacted on the extent of their work.
- Limited accommodation options.

In many respects the views of prisoners with regard to their needs reflected those of Probation and Welfare Officers. A common theme that emerged in the accounts from prisoners was that resettling into the community is very difficult on release. The

following outlines the issues identified by prisoners;

- Basic information and advice on housing and money entitlements
- A point of contact in the prison to access information and assistance from the agencies involved
- Pre-release work to access and secure housing and support services before leaving prison
- The need for follow-up support services on release especially with regard to drug treatment
- Better housing provision and the need for better treatment in attempting to access housing within the existing system.

7. Housing Provision and Support

The common issue identified by all homeless prisoners was the need for accommodation, the need for a range of accommodation and the need for improved emergency accommodation provision. Probation and Welfare Officers also identified a number of accommodation needs including;

- The need for a diverse range of accommodation was identified. There was a consensus that independent living is the preferred choice for the majority of offenders however it was also acknowledged that some offenders did not have the necessary coping skills and would require supported or transitional accommodation.
- Probation and Welfare Officers identified the need for greater flexibility in the opening hours of emergency homeless services in particular the Homeless Person's Unit.
- The need to maintain Local Authority tenancies.
- The need to overcome offender difficulties in attempting to access private rented accommodation. This accommodation was viewed as problematic for offenders given that landlords were reluctant to accept rent supplement. The fact that almost two-thirds of prisoners tried and failed to secure private rented accommodation indicates the difficulties of accessing and maintaining accommodation in this housing sector.
- Probation and Welfare Officers identified the difficulty for homeless offenders of presenting well to homeless services given their lack of coping and social skills. While acknowledging the need to assess clients Probation and Welfare Officers were of the view that clients had to prove they were worthy of the service. Over one-third (37%) of prisoners homeless on committal were not registered as homeless before they came into prison. Over half (53%) said they were on a local authority list and almost two-thirds (63%) had tried to get private rented accommodation.
- There was a general consensus that accommodation was of little use to offenders without the support services to assist offenders sustain their placement in the community - in particular the lack of drug detoxification programmes were recognised.

In summary, the three key findings from this study suggest that:

- There are high numbers of homeless individuals in the criminal justice system especially in the prison system. The majority commit relatively minor offences but

they have a lengthy and extensive history of involvement with the criminal justice system.

- Those homeless on committal to prison are likely to have been homeless for long periods in their lives with many first homeless as children and young people. Furthermore, at all levels in the criminal justice system, from the courts to the Probation and Welfare Service and the prisons, there are high proportions of individuals of no fixed abode, suggesting that this group are marginalised from homeless services or services are not fully meeting their needs. All of these individuals share a common need for basic accommodation provision.
- Homeless prisoners have a chronic, long-term and complex range of support needs that are the cause of, or result from, their homeless experiences. Drugs and mental health problems are particularly prevalent amongst this group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Probation and Welfare Service

Given that 9.3% of referrals by the courts in Dublin to the Probation and Welfare Service were identified as homeless, and over half of these cases were of no fixed abode, consideration should be given to the introduction and development of a designated homeless team. The creation of such a team would allow for appropriate levels of support to match the homeless offender's needs. It would also promote the development of specialist knowledge and information as well as providing the basis for developing strong interagency relationships between the Probation and Welfare Service, Local Authorities, Homeless services and other support services.

In light of the findings suggesting that over half (58%) of homeless referrals to the Probation and Welfare Service were of no fixed abode it is recommended that **the Probation and Welfare Service explore new methods for engaging with and supervising homeless clients, with a view to more effectively meeting their needs reducing re-offending, and reducing the likelihood of breach proceedings against them for non-attendance.** One suggestion made was that a reporting day centre, based in an existing homeless service, be set up in the city centre to deal with homeless individuals referred and under the supervision of the Probation and Welfare Service.

Women represented only about one-fifth of referrals to the Probation and Welfare Service, however, over 40% of homeless cases referred to the Probation and Welfare Service were women. **It is recommended that in conjunction with other agencies, the Probation and Welfare Service continue to give particular attention to the needs of homeless women in any future service development, as a means of responding to their high representation in referrals to the Probation and Welfare Service.**

Analysis of detention school records found that 18 of 20 (90%) of all young people had re-offended within 6 to 18 months of leaving detention school and half were in custody either in St. Patrick's Institution or adult prison. **Particular attention needs to be directed at young people leaving detention schools by the Probation and Welfare Service to prevent them progressing to the prison system (especially when the input from the Service is strengthened by the new structures for monitored release from detention schools that will be put in place by implementation of the Children Act 2001). Any future initiatives by the Probation and Welfare Service ought to develop in a multi-disciplinary framework involving the Health Boards, Detention Schools, Homeless and Children's Services.**

A lack of formalised links between the Probation and Welfare Service, the Homeless Person's Unit and Homeless Services means that contact with agencies tends to be ad hoc and personality driven. Probation and Welfare Officers encountered particular difficulties in terms of accessing homeless services for their clients in the absence of such relationships. **To overcome these difficulties it is recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service build upon its existing contacts and formalise**

its relationships with homeless and housing services in particular through the Homeless Offender Strategy Team (HOST).

Drug use was clearly identified as a risk factor related to both homelessness and criminality. **The Probation and Welfare Service needs to continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with drug treatment services, maintain a focus on the needs of homeless offenders in the community and on release from prison, and work in a co-ordinated way towards meeting these needs.**

Homeless individuals falling through the gaps in the psychiatric services were identified as a group of particularly vulnerable offenders. **To overcome the difficulties encountered with this 'difficult to manage' group it is recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service formalise links with appropriate services (including the Homeless Psychiatric Outreach Team), in determining a 'best practice' approach to supervising these cases.**

Given that community exclusion is a potential risk factor to homelessness **it is recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service continue to work in partnership with Local Authorities to facilitate the resettlement of offenders into the community particularly where they had previously been excluded.**

Probation and Welfare Officers identified the need for greater communication and information sharing between probation teams based in the community in relation to accessing homeless services and the development of new services. The existence of the Homeless Agency's database of services in Dublin provides a useful resource for the Probation and Welfare Service. **It is suggested that the Probation and Welfare Service build upon this resource through the creation of a central database detailing up-to-date information about homeless services appropriate to their client group across the country.**

2. Probation and Welfare Service/Irish Prison Service

The importance of family support and maintaining family contact while in prison is vital in terms of preventing homelessness and reducing re-offending. A CSER report on the *Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children (2002)* recommended a number of proposals to promote family contact including family-friendly visiting areas, child and family visiting schemes and extended and more flexible visiting times. Other support strategies include facilitating and supporting prisoners to maintain family contact. **It is recommended that family contact and support is fostered and encouraged by initiatives developed by the Probation and Welfare Service and the Irish Prison Service.**

The need for information about basic issues such as housing provision, welfare entitlements and support services emerged as a dominant theme in this study. Furthermore, previous research (Haines, 1990) on services for released prisoners has highlighted that an important determinant of the quality of after-care provision is the extent of prisoners' knowledge about after-care services. (An approach used in some English prisons was to train prisoners as housing advice officers. It emerged in the course of this study that those prisoners with a previously (not current) history of homelessness were most reflective of the needs of homeless prisoners on release. Such an initiative

would provide training for the prisoners, create a more open approach to the issue of homelessness in the prison as well as providing a cost effective means of distributing vital information to prisoners across the system). **Overall, it is recommended that an up-to-date and user friendly information and advice service about housing, money entitlements and support services is set up in each prison with a liaison officer to co-ordinate the information and develop links with the relevant statutory, community and voluntary groups as a means of facilitating and supporting the prisoner's reintegration.**

Emergency accommodation provision has an important role to play in preventing an individual from sleeping on the street. Releasing prisoners to hostel accommodation however, may also place them into a concentration of the same social and criminogenic factors that led them to prison in the first place. **It is recommended that every effort be made in conjunction with local authorities and other housing services to plan for a full range of appropriate accommodation options for prisoners.**

The Probation and Welfare Service and the Irish Prisons Service have a responsibility to ensure that imprisonment does not contribute to homelessness. In particular, every effort should be made to support prisoners maintain their accommodation while in prison. The Probation and Welfare Service need to engage with Local Authorities in relation to maintaining tenancies while individuals are in prison, particularly those on short-term sentences.

While recognising that emergency accommodation is not ideal, it is often the only option available to prisoners. The role of the Homeless Person's Unit, through the prison based initiative whereby emergency accommodation is organised for prisoners at immediate risk of homelessness while still in prison has emerged as a useful model for this group. **It is recommended that this arrangement is continued and extended, where appropriate, to other prisons. For prisoners returning to areas outside of Dublin, the establishment of an arrangement between the Probation and Welfare Service and Community Welfare Officers for emergency payments to them on release would serve to alleviate much of the immediate hardship associated with community re-entry.**

The Probation and Welfare Service in prison **should initiate an information and awareness programme for prisoners, in order to challenge current perceptions of their role, and to ensure that all prisoners are fully aware of all services available to them from the Service.**

The use of custody-based drug maintenance programmes was viewed by prisoners as an important opportunity to address their drug use. **To ensure that the impact of drug maintenance programmes in prison continues on release, it is recommended that the Irish Prison Service and the Probation and Welfare Officers ensure referrals of offenders are made to drug treatment and maintenance programmes in the community prior to the release of the prisoner.**

An added difficulty for prisoners who are being considered for temporary release is their homeless status. **It is recommended that strategies are further developed by the Probation and Welfare Service and the Irish Prison Service to extend the**

range of accommodation and support that can be accessed by prisoners at risk of homelessness. Such strategies would include accessing accommodation and support for prisoners. The provision of temporary release to prisoners would serve to assist with the reintegration process and also to break down the culture of secrecy in relation to homelessness in the prison.

It has long been recommended that the Probation and Welfare Service, the Irish Prison Service and other services deliver co-ordinated plans of care to prisoners (Kennedy Report, 1970; NESF, 2002). **This research endorses these recommendations suggesting that the Probation and Welfare Service should work in partnership with the Irish Prison Service and other services in the prison to deliver Positive Sentence Management.**

3. Irish Prison Service

The issue of homelessness and housing for prisoners needs to be set in the context of a reintegration framework. For successful reintegration to occur the research evidence (Altschuler & Altschuler, 1999) suggests that planning needs to begin at an early stage in the sentence and continue through to release with follow-up support in the community. The concept of Positive Sentence Management encapsulates Altschuler & Altschuler's (1999) 'reintegrative confinement' approach whereby a comprehensive plan of action involving a multi-disciplinary approach addresses the wide range of prisoner's needs. **It is recommended that Positive Sentence Management be promoted as a framework to support the reintegration needs of prisoners.**

Drug free units are available in a number of prisons in Dublin including St. Patrick's Institution, Wheatfield and Cloverhill Prisons as well as the Training Unit which is a designated drug-free place of detention. The availability of drug free units in prison is a particularly important in terms of impacting on homelessness given the strong links between drug use and homelessness. **It is therefore recommended that drug free units be available across all closed regime prison establishments, to ensure that prisoners who enter the system drug-free or choose to address their addiction in prison are afforded such an opportunity.**

While acknowledging there has been a reduction in the practice of unplanned and unsupervised temporary release in recent years due to the expansion of the prison estate, it continues to be a difficulty in committal prisons. **It is recommended that unplanned temporary release be avoided as much as possible but where it occurs, that provision is made to link the prisoner with appropriate services in the community.**

4. Local Authority & Housing Associations

The UK Social Exclusion Unit Report (2002) *Prevent Re-offending Amongst Offenders* identifies housing as one of nine key factors in criminological research that is related to reducing re-offending – it points to the evidence suggesting that having stable accommodation reduces the risk of re-offending by one-fifth. Local Authorities and Housing Associations have an important role to play in supporting diversion and reintegration strategies through;

- **Providing clear, user friendly information to homeless individuals on the operation of their housing and homeless lists;**
- **Simplifying the process of registering on the housing and homeless lists;**
- **Identifying and providing a range of specialist housing including supported and transitional housing, half way houses and independent housing units for homeless offenders and ex-prisoners;**
- **Increasing the level of housing stock for single household applicants;**
- **Liasing with the private rented and voluntary sector to increase the housing options available;**
- **Working in partnership with the Probation and Welfare Service in the community and in prisons to identify and address the needs of offenders and support the process of planning for prisoner release. The case conference approach recently adopted should be used in responding to such prisoners, in relation to both support and accommodation needs;**
- **Implementing policies and practice guidelines about maintaining tenancies for short-term prisoners;**
- **Post-settlement support.**

5. Other Agencies

The majorities of those homeless on committal to prison were both homeless and involved in the criminal justice system as children and young people. Consultation with agencies delivering services to homeless young people suggest that they become quickly entrenched in the homeless sub-culture of the streets including criminality. **Homeless services, the health boards and other children's services need to continue to develop and implement strategies to move young homeless people off the streets.**

Young people leaving care are at particular risk of criminality and homelessness. The vast majority of children in the current detention school system (87%) had a previous experience of a care/custodial setting and over one-third (37%) of those homeless on committal to prison had been in residential care as children. **The provision of appropriate care options including foster placements and high-support independent living units are required in order to have a real chance of diverting these young people leaving the care system from criminality.**

Homeless services have an important role to play in the prevention of criminality by diverting individuals from the streets. The existence of diversionary services e.g. a wet hostel in Aungier St. Dublin and Dublin Simon Outreach Team is a positive attempt to divert individuals from the streets and potentially the criminal justice system. **It is recommended that homeless services are supported in continuing to develop, expand and target services to meet the needs of those of no fixed abode given the positive co-relation between criminality and length of time of the street.**

The evidence presented in this report suggests that the majority of homeless people coming into contact with the criminal justice system commit relatively minor offences including a large proportion of public order offences. It would appear that there is potential for the Gardaí to divert some homeless individuals away from the criminal

justice system. A diversionary role for the Gardaí however requires the corresponding provision of appropriate facilities for homeless street drinkers for example. At present, trainee Gardaí receive training on inter-facing with homeless individuals from Focus Ireland. **Given the high level of contact between the Gardaí and homeless individuals, it is recommended that the Gardaí continue to receive up-to-date information and training regarding the provision of homeless diversionary services in the city centre and beyond.**

It is strongly recommended that community-based sanctions be considered for appropriate homeless cases and a custodial sanction imposed only as a last resort.

It is strongly recommended that homeless prisoners be recognised as a sub-group of the homeless population and that this issue be examined by the Cross Departmental Committee on Homelessness. It is essential that such individuals are acknowledged as homeless and have access to appropriate services in planning for their release.

There is a clear onus on all social, housing and criminal justice services to work in partnership to address the multiplicity of needs emanating from those individuals who are the most marginalised. Diversion strategies are required at a number of levels to prevent individuals from entering the formal criminal justice system, to divert offenders from custody and to assist prisoners break the cycle of crime, homelessness and imprisonment. Successful diversion from the criminal justice system will only be achieved in the long term, however, if it is supported by the provision of appropriate housing and services to meet the needs of offenders. **In essence, a focus on diversion without the development of housing and support strategies will be counterproductive. Clearly, this approach points to the involvement of a wide range of agencies including the Probation and Welfare Service, the Prison Service, Local Authorities, the Homeless Agency, the Health Boards and a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations. It is within this context that the research recommends that the specific responsibility of each relevant agency and authority in relation to the accommodation needs of offenders and ex-prisoners is clarified, by the Cross Departmental Committee on Homelessness.**

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- Housing Act (1988)
- Larceny Act (1990)
- Misuse of Drugs Act (1984)
- Non Fatal Offences against The Person Act (1997)

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE - PRISONER'S SCHEDULE

Questionnaire Number: _____ Name of Prison: _____
 Status (remand/sentenced) _____ Gender: (m/f) _____
 Date: _____ Reason for non-participation: _____

Complete Part One (questions 1 to 21) with all respondents. Complete the remainder of the questionnaire only with those who have experienced homelessness.

PART ONE: TO BE COMPLETED WITH ALL INTERVIEWEES

I. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Q1. What age are you? _____

Q2. Nationality

- Irish national [] 1
- Irish national (Traveller) [] 2
- Non-national (European) [] 3
- Non-national (Non-european) [] 4
- Other (Specify) [] 5

Q3. What age were you when you left school? _____

Q4. Before coming into prison this time were you:

- Unemployed [] 1
- Employed full-time [] 2
- Employed part-time [] 3
- Training (apprentice/trainee) [] 4
- Full-time education [] 5
- Part-time education [] 6

Q5. Marital Status:

- Single [] 1
- Married/Cohabiting [] 2
- Separated/divorced/widowed [] 3

Q6. Children Yes [] 1 No [] 2
(if no move to Q8.)

Q6a. Number of Children _____

Q7. Were your child(ren) living with you before prison?
 Yes [] 1 No [] 2

2. INFORMAL SUPPORT STRUCTURE

Q8. Before coming to prison on this occasion did you receive good support from your:

- Family Yes [] 1 No [] 2
- Friends Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q9. While in prison on this occasion, have you had contact with:

- Your family?: Yes [] 1 No [] 2
 - Your friends?: Yes [] 1 No [] 2
- (if no to both go to Q10.)*

Q9a. What type of contact **Family** **Friends**

- Visits [] 1 [] 1
- Letters/cards [] 2 [] 2
- Phone calls [] 3 [] 3

Q10. On release, do you think you will have support from:

- Family?: Yes [] 1 No [] 2
- Friends?: Yes [] 1 No [] 2

3. HOUSING STATUS PRIOR TO IMPRISONMENT

Q11. Prior to imprisonment did you:
(Please tick ONE box only)

- Own your own home [] 1
 - Rent from the Council [] 2
 - Rent from a private landlord [] 3
 - Live with your parents [] 5
 - Stay temporarily with friends/family [] 6
 - Stay in a homeless hostel* [] 7
 - Stay in a B&B [] 8
 - Transitional/supported accommodation [] 9
 - Sleep rough [] 10
 - Other specify _____ [] 11
- *Specify if this is long-stay or short-stay

Q12. How would you rate these accommodation or living arrangements?

- Good [] 1 Bad [] 2 Average/OK [] 3

Q13. Will you be returning to this accommodation or living arrangement when you are released?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2 *(if yes move to Q14.)*

Q13a. If no, what is the reason?

- Lost housing due to imprisonment [] 1
- Not allowed to return by the family [] 2
- Not allowed to return by the community [] 3
- Would like to get better accommodation [] 4
- Other (specify) _____ [] 5

Q13b. Do you know where you will live on release?

- Yes [] No []

Q14. Did you have three or more address changes in the year before coming into prison this time?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2

4. LOCAL COMMUNITY – PRE & POST RELEASE

Q15. What area of Dublin or the country were you living in before coming to prison on this occasion?

Q16. Would you like to return to this area on release?

- Yes [] 1 *(If yes go to Q17.)*
 No [] 2 *(If no go to Q 18.)*

Q17. Do you think you will be able to return to this area on release?

- Yes [] 1 *(if yes go to Q19.)* No [] 2

Q17a. If not what are the reasons?

- No available accommodation [] 1
 - Not welcome by family [] 2
 - Other [] 3
- (move to Q19.)*

Q18. What area of Dublin or the country would you like to live in on release? _____

Q18a. Do you think you will be able to live there on release?

Yes 1 (if yes go to Q19) No 2

Q. 18b If not what are the reasons?

No available accommodation 1
Not welcome by family 2
Other (specify) 3

Q19. What things do you think will be a problem for you on release? (tick all that apply)

Relationships with your family (parents, siblings) 1
Relationship with your partner 2
Lack of employment 3
Educational difficulties 4
Alcohol 5
Drugs 6
Psychiatric disorders (including depression) 7
Accommodation/housing 8
Community (e.g. not wanted in the community) 9
Specify other _____ 10

5. HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is defined as a period of time when you may have stayed with friends or a family member because you had no where else to go, stayed in a hostel or B&B, on the streets or in another location such as a squat, a car or any other place you did not consider home.

Q20. How likely is that that you will become homeless on release?

Very likely 1 Possible 2 Not likely 3

If applicable, what would be important to help you avoid homelessness on release?

Q21. Have you ever been homeless?

Yes 1 No 2

If no thank the participant and end the interview.

6. EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Q22. Before coming into prison this time how long had you been homeless in your life?

Less than 1 month 1 1 to less than 2 years 6
1 to under 3 months 2 2 to less than 3 years 7
3 to under 6 months 3 3 to less than 4 years 8
6 to under 9 months 4 4 to less than 5 years 9
9 to under 12 months 5 More than 5 years 10

Q23. How many times (occasions) have you been homeless in your life?

Q24. Where did you stay on any occasion that you were homeless? (tick all that apply)

Emergency Homeless Hostel 1
Transitional Housing Unit 2
Long Term Supported Housing 3
In a Bed and Breakfast 4
With a friend or other family member 5
In a squat 6
In a car 7
Slept rough 8
Other (please expand) _____

Q24a. (Only to be answered if participant has slept rough).

Why did you sleep rough?

Don't like hostels 1
Hostels were all full 2
Barred from hostels 3
Didn't know about hostels 4
Other (please expand) _____

Q25. At what age did you first become homeless?

Under 13 years 1 30-39 4
13-19 years 2 40-49 5
20-29 years 3 50 years or over 6

Q26. What was the main reason for becoming homeless on the first occasion? (tick all that apply)

Family Rows/conflict (parents, siblings etc.) 1
Relationship problems (girlfriend, husband etc.) 2
Notice to quit (anti-social behaviour) 3
Notice to quit (non-payment of rent) 4
Court order (barring order) 5
No affordable or suitable accommodation 6
Alcohol/Drug use 7
Leaving Prison 8
Leaving Residential Care/Detention School 9
Leaving Psychiatric institution 10
Victim of domestic violence 11
Pressure from local residents 12
Other (specify) _____ 13

Q27. Have you ever used homeless day services?

Yes 1 No 2

Q27a. If yes, specify main services used:

Q28. Were you homeless before coming to prison this time?

Yes 1 No 2 (if no go to Q32.)

7. TRYING TO ACCESS HOUSING

Q29. Were you on a council housing list before coming into prison?

Yes 1 No 2 DK 3

Q29a. If no, why not?

Was not eligible 1
There was no point 2
Barred by local authority 2
Arrived in Dublin only recently 3
Allocated accommodation I didn't like/was unsafe 4
Other (please expand) _____

Q.30 Were you registered as homeless with your local authority before coming into prison?

Yes [] 1 (if yes go to Q31) No [] 2 DK [] 3

Q.30a If not, why not?

Was not eligible [] 1
Didn't know you could be [] 2
There was no point [] 3
Other (please expand) _____

Q.31 Did you try to get private rented accommodation?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q.31a If not, why not?

It is too expensive [] 1
Landlords won't accept SWA [] 2
Arrived in Dublin only recently [] 3
Other (please expand) _____

8. HOMELESSNESS AND THE COMMUNITY

Q32. Would you describe your neighbourhood as a high crime area?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q33. Before coming to prison on this occasion did you think you were accepted or welcome in the area in which you lived?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if yes go to Q34.)

Q33a. If no what do you think was the reason?

Because I was homeless [] 1
Because of my offending [] 2
Because of my friends/family [] 3
Because I was causing hassle [] 4
Other specify _____ [] 5

Q34. Have you ever experienced any action against you by individuals or community groups in the area?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q35.)

Q34a. What was the nature of the action taken against you (warning/beating/told to leave the area)?

Q34b. What was the reason for the action against you?

Q34c. How many times has this happened?

9. HOMELESSNESS AND VICTIMISATION

Q35. Have you ever been hassled or harassed by others when you were homeless?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q36.)

Q35a. If yes, who hassled or harassed you (the guards, members of the public, other homeless people etc.)?

Specify: _____

Q36. When you were homeless were any of the following crimes committed against you?

Theft [] 1 Sexual assault [] 3
Physical assault [] 2 Other _____ [] 4

Q37. If yes, who were you victimised by?

Someone (homeless) known to you [] 1
Someone (not homeless) known to you [] 2
Someone unknown to you [] 3

10. ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND HOMELESSNESS

I am now going to ask you some questions about alcohol and drugs - again everything you tell me is confidential.

Q38. Before coming to prison did you drink alcohol?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q39.)

Q38a. Where were you most likely to drink?

Streets/Parks/Public places [] 1
Bars/clubs [] 2
At home [] 3
Other (specify) [] 4

Q38b. Do you think your drinking causes problems in your life?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Specify: _____

Q39. Before coming to prison did you take drugs?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q40.)

Q39a. What types of drugs did you use?

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Speed [] 1 | Cannabis [] 8 |
| Cocaine [] 2 | Magic Mushrooms [] 9 |
| Crack [] 3 | Tranquilisers (valium, temazepan) [] 10 |
| Ecstasy [] 4 | Methadone or phisetone [] 11 |
| Heroin [] 5 | Amyl nitrate (poppers) [] 12 |
| LSD [] 6 | Anabolic steroids (steroids) [] 13 |
| Semeron [] 7 | Other [] 14 |

Q39b. Do you think your drug use causes problems in your life?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Specify: _____

Q40. Before coming to prison did you take solvents (e.g. glue, gas, aerosols, petrol etc.)?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q42.)

Q40a. What types of solvents did you use?

Q41. Do you think your use of solvents causes problems in your life?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Specify: _____

Q42. Do you use drugs in prison?

Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q43.)

Q42a. What types of drugs do you use?

- Speed [] 1 Cannabis [] 8
- Cocaine [] 2 Magic Mushrooms [] 9
- Crack [] 3 Tranquilisers (valium, temazepan) [] 10
- Ecstasy [] 4 Methadone or phisetone [] 11
- Heroin [] 5 Amyl nitrate (poppers) [] 12
- LSD [] 6 Anabolic steroids (steroids) [] 13
- Semeron [] 7 Other [] 14

Q43. Do you use solvents in prison?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q44.)

Q43a. If so, what types of solvents do you take in prison?

11. HOMELESSNESS AND HEALTH

Q44. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health problem (including depression)?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q45.)

Q44a. Have you ever been an inpatient in a psychiatric hospital?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q45. Do you suffer from any sickness, illness or disability? (recurring or ongoing illness only)

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q45a. If yes specify: _____

12. CRIME, IMPRISONMENT AND HOMELESSNESS

I am now going to ask you a few questions about offending and prison - again everything you say is confidential.

Q46. Have you ever spent time

- In Residential Care [] 1
- In Trinity House/Oberstown/St. Lawrences [] 2
- In St. Patricks [] 3
- On Probation [] 4

Q47. Specify the types of offences you MOSTLY get into trouble with the police for? (tick one only)

- Crime of violence (harassment, assault, brawling etc.) [] 1
- Nuisance crimes (begging, intoxication, vagrancy) [] 2
- Property crimes (forgery, theft, larceny, burglary) [] 3
- Drug crimes (possession/selling drugs) [] 4
- Weapon offences (use of a firearm, knife etc.) [] 5
- Other (specify e.g. murder, manslaughter etc.) [] 6

Q48. Do you think homelessness is one of the reasons you get into trouble with the police?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Q49. In the five years before coming to prison this time how many times do you think you were (put in number of times):

- Arrested by the police [] 1
- Given a probation order [] 2
- Sent to prison [] 3

Q49a. How long in total have you spent in prison over your life? _____

Q50. How long have you been in prison on this occasion?

Q51. When are you due for release?

- Don't Know [] 1 Not Applicable [] 2

Q52. Have you had contact with a Probation & Welfare Officer in the prison on this occasion?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2 (if no go to Q52b.)

Q52a. If yes, what was the nature of the contact?

Q52b. If no, is there any reason why you have not had contact with the Probation & Welfare service?

Q53. Have you received information and/or help with the following issues while in prison on this occasion? (tick all that apply)

- Education [] 1 Drugs [] 4
- Job skills [] 2 Offending behaviour [] 5
- Alcohol [] 3 Money entitlements [] 6
- Employment/training [] 7
- Housing/homeless services [] 8
- Information on community groups in your area [] 9
- Other _____ [] 10

Specify education/training undertaken:

Qualification received (subject and award e.g. Leaving Cert. Subject, FETAC certificate):

Q54. Are you willing to meet with one of the researchers again to talk in more detail about your experiences of homelessness?

- Yes [] 1 No [] 2

Any additional information/comments you would like to make

Thank the participant and end the interview.

APPENDIX B

PRISONER QUALIATIVE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name of Prison:

Status of Prisoner (remand/sentenced):

Age:

Gender:

Nationality:

Marital Status:

No. of Children:

Were you homeless before you came into prison? (If not homeless before prison on this occasion, where did you live? What has happened to your accommodation? What has happened to your belongings? (housing list, local authority etc.)

Tell me a bit about your experiences of homelessness (sleeping in hostels, sleeping rough, services used, where you stayed, what it was like, what you need from services, what are/were the gaps, your experiences of victimisation and offending)

What happened that you became homeless in the first place? (family row, barring order, lost your job, forced to move by people in the community etc.)

Since the time you first became homeless have you experienced times when you were not homeless? What types of things do you think helped you move out of homelessness (e.g. suitable accommodation, drug treatment, better relationship with family etc.)

What things do you think may have led you to return to homelessness or to move in and out of homelessness? (e.g. relationship breakdown, drugs, alcohol use, mental illness)

How has it been for you since you came into prison? Have you got help with any of the issues you have raised? (housing, alcohol, drugs, anger management etc.) Do you think the prison authorities and/or Probation and Welfare Service are aware that you are homeless? If not what things prevent you from telling them? If there were no repercussions for disclosing your homeless status do you think you would inform the authorities?

Do you mind me asking you how long you have left in your sentence? What worries or concerns do you have about your release (e.g. financial, housing, relationships with your family, friends and children, mental health etc.)?

What do you think will happen to you on release? Where do you think you will go? Do you have family or friends to support you on release? Is it possible for you to return to your community? Would you like to return to your community? What things would prevent you from returning to your community?

What things would be important to help you avoid homelessness on release? What type of accommodation would you like? What other support or assistance do you think will be beneficial for you?

How likely is it that you will get into trouble on release? What do you think will be the greatest obstacles to you staying out of trouble on release? What things would be important in helping you to stop offending (housing, job, family support, education, training, drugs, alcohol etc.) Do you think you will be in prison again in the future? Why do you think this is so?

APPENDIX C

Research Project On The Number, Profile And Progression Routes Of Homeless Persons
Before The Court And In Custody In Dublin

**Training Schedule – Research Fieldworkers
Tuesday, 3rd June 2003**

Facilitators: Liza Costello and Mairéad Seymour (Principal Researchers)
Centre for Social and Educational Research, Dublin Institute of Technology.

- 9.00 - 9.15 Introductions
- 9.15 - 9.30 Background to the Research, Aims and Objectives
- 9.30 - 9.45 Defining Homelessness - Challenging the Myths?
- 9.45 - 10.00 Overview of the Relationship between Crime and Homelessness
- 10.00 - 10.45 Setting the Context - Research in the Prison Environment
 Guest Speaker: Siobhan Brett, The Pathways Project
- 10.45 - 11.00 Coffee Break
- 11.00 - 11.15 Interviewing Young People
- 11.15 - 12.00 How to Deal with Problematic Issues/Situations:
- 11.15 - 11.30 Drug Use and Challenging Behaviour
- 11.30 - 11.45 Research Issues
- 11.45 - 12.00 Personal Questions and Safety
- 12.00 - 12.15 Support for the Research Fieldworkers
- 12.15 - 1.00 Introduction to Survey Questionnaire (including section by section
 examination), Informed Consent and the Consent Form
- 1.00 - 2.00 Lunch, Informal Discussion, Questions and Answers
- 2.00 - 2.30 Role Play (as both interviewer and interviewee)
- 2.30 - 3.15 Ethical Issues and Protocol for Interviewing Prisoners
 Guest Speaker: Mark Wilson, Senior Probation and Welfare Officer,
 Mountjoy Prison
- 3.15 - 3.45 Final Points and Closing.

APPENDIX D

Centre for Social and
Educational Research
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**Centre for Social and
Educational
Research**

Dear Participant

The Centre for Social and Educational Research is carrying out a study on the housing needs of prisoners. We are interested in getting an overall picture of prisoners' housing experiences and therefore we would like to meet with you even if you have never had difficulty finding housing or been homeless.

You are being asked to take part in this study because your name was randomly picked from a list of all prisoners. If you decide to take part one of the researchers from the Centre will ask you a number of questions about your experiences and they will record the answers on a questionnaire. Your name will not appear on any part of the questionnaire. The information that you give in the interview will be treated in the strictest confidence. It will not be passed to anyone else in the prison. The only time we have to disclose information is if you tell us you are thinking of harming yourself or harming someone else.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. No extra privileges will be given to you for taking part and similarly none of your privileges will be withheld if you decide not to take part. Furthermore, if you decide to take part and are uncomfortable about answering any of the questions you can stop the interview or not answer the question at any time.

I understand the information contained in this letter

Name:

Date:

I am willing/not willing to take part in this study

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX E

CUSTODY BASED PROBATION OFFICER FOCUS GUIDE

Name of Prison:

No. of Probation Staff (SPWO, PWOs):

Date:

PROFILE OF THE PRISONERS

Categories of homeless prisoners in the population (e.g. young homeless prisoners, non-nationals, prisoners with mental health problems, drug problems etc.)

Are there specific issues in relation to remand versus sentenced prisoners in terms of their needs vis-à-vis homelessness?

What are the main barriers for released prisoners in terms of accessing accommodation? (e.g. prisoners not homeless pre-prison but homeless on release and prisoners homeless on entry and exit from prison)

THE ROLE OF THE PROBATION AND WELFARE SERVICE

What is the nature of the work undertaken with homeless prisoners prior to release in terms of addressing their housing needs? (e.g. contact with the Homeless Persons Unit, voluntary agencies etc.)

What services have you directly accessed in the community in the last 12 months in terms of assisting prisoners with their accommodation needs? What services have you directly accessed in the community in the last 12 months in terms of supporting prisoners with their other needs e.g. alcohol, drugs, mental health etc.? Is contact formalised and/or ad hoc?

What are the particular difficulties experienced in terms of accessing accommodation for high-risk prisoners and/or prisoners with high support needs (e.g. alcohol/drugs, mental health issues, institutionalised, type of offender/type of offence, prisoners with children)

What gaps do you see in the services provided by statutory (Local Authorities) and voluntary services for homeless ex-prisoners?

THE ROLE OF THE PRISON SERVICE & CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

What types of issues within the prison regime contribute to the prisoner's risk of homelessness on release (e.g. releasing prisoners at the weekend)?

What types of issues within the criminal justice system in general do you see as placing prisoners at risk of homelessness?

REINTEGRATION AND FOLLOW UP

Are staff resources available to link the prisoner with services in his/her community in terms of reintegration? If not, what things would be useful?

What provision is available for after-care on release (life sentenced prisoners, sex offenders, other prisoners)?

Are there arrangements in place to ensure continuity of service provision to prisoners on release (e.g. drug treatment, mental health services, alcohol)?

Are there any other practical arrangements that would assist prisoners access accommodation on release (e.g. increased discharge grant, housing benefit organised etc.)?

Based on the profile of different prisoner groups (e.g. single male prisoners, female prisoners and/or prisoners with children)? What types of supported housing options should be available for ex-prisoners? (e.g. transitional housing, supported housing, What other support should be available?

Any other comments or issues that need to be addressed?

APPENDIX F

COMMUNITY BASED PROBATION AND WELFARE TEAMS FOCUS GUIDE

1. Profile of Homeless Clients

- Extent of homelessness within the Team's catchment area.
- Categories of homeless offenders and needs e.g. young homeless people, individuals with mental health problems, drug problems, older clients, ex-prisoners, non-nationals etc.
- Types of reasons or factors related to homelessness amongst the client group you are working with e.g. addiction, barring orders, relationship breakdown.
- Categories of offender/offences, where homelessness is more problematic in relation to offending behaviour.
- The main barriers/issues arising for clients in terms of accessing their own accommodation.

2. The Role of the Probation and Welfare Service and Inter-Agency Contact

- The role of the Probation and Welfare Officer in assisting a client access accommodation?
- Nature of the contact with both statutory and voluntary agencies vis-à-vis homelessness. What services have you directly accessed in the community in the last 12 months in terms of assisting clients with their accommodation needs? What services have you directly accessed in the community in the last 12 months in terms of supporting clients with their related needs e.g. alcohol, drugs, mental health etc.? Is contact formalised and/or ad hoc?
- What are the particular difficulties or barriers experienced in terms of accessing accommodation for high-risk clients and/or clients with high support needs (e.g. alcohol/drugs, mental health issues, institutionalised, type of offender/type of offence, prisoners with children)?
- What gaps do you see in the services provided by statutory (e.g. local authorities, health board) and voluntary services for homeless probation clients?

3. The Impact of Homelessness on the Outcome of Probation Supervision

- The impact of homelessness on the client's willingness/ability to engage with the Probation and Welfare Service
- Re-offending and the homeless client - impact on risk of continuing to re-offend.
- The impact of homeless clients vis-à-vis individual case management and the overall team (in term of staff resources and time) - the impact of rostering for homeless/NFA cases on teams.

-
- Are there any other additional support strategies required to assist you in supervising homeless probation clients?

Any other comments or issues that need to be addressed?