Reviewer’s report

Title: Pathways into homelessness: recently homeless adults problems and service use before and after becoming homeless in Amsterdam

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Reviewer: Thomas P O’Toole

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Paper review
Pathways into homelessness: recently homeless adults problems and service use before and after becoming homeless in Amsterdam

General: Survey data of 120 recently (within 2 years) homeless adults in the Netherlands. Causes of homelessness and care patterns were stratified and analyzed.

Comments:
Overall it is a well planned and executed study that contributes to the growing literature on health service use among homeless persons. The author’s findings regarding both causes of homeless and initial service site utilization do inform prevention strategies which are critically important in reducing one’s duration of homelessness and the consequences that occur the longer one is without permanent housing. The findings also describe current service versus need disconnects upon initial homelessness that speak to the importance of comprehensive “first stop” support services and the better integration of medical care/substance abuse treatment and social services.

Specific suggestions:
(1) Additional information on subject selection, the survey instruments used, and how data were obtained and quantified would be helpful to better understanding the findings and any potential limitations to broader generalizations;

(2) The principle reasons noted for “lost housing” only focus on immediate and in some cases, structural, events and readers are left wondering how much, for example, were evictions or relationship problems related to substance use either by the respondent or their domestic partner, unemployment, gentrification of housing, rent increases, job losses, worsening health status/illness, etc. While Table 3 does address this to a limited extent, it should be further explored in the text as well. More sophisticate data analyses employing logistic regression modeling that better explore these relationships would be helpful; however, I suspect the small cell sizes may preclude some of this. If this is the case, it should be cited as a limitation of the study.

(3) Further discussion of demographic differences in both causes of homelessness and first site access would be beneficial, particularly given the role
of gender and age that has been previously noted in the literature.

(4) The role of financial debt and its effect on homeless persons is of emerging importance and its role in both health care-seeking and social service-seeking behavior needs to be further explored. A study of Baltimore (U.S.) homeless found that both debt and aggressive debt restitution practices had a much more pronounced impact on homeless persons compared with other urban poor populations. The paper would be strengthened by a further discussion of this dynamic and any additional data that can further describe it.

(5) Where someone goes for help and what type of help they are seeking do not always match to their needs, particularly when considering needs that go beyond immediate sustenance issues. A study of U.S. homeless found that first stop sites of care and reasons for seeking care correlated well with immediate care needs but not with underlying self-identified causes of personal homelessness (economic, health-related, substance use, etc.). If the data are available, the authors should present/discuss any self-reported reasons for seeking care and what respondents hoped to accomplish in that care event/episode. The authors may also want to consider their findings in the context of this international literature, particularly since it presents interesting comparisons of national “safety nets” and how they are organized.

(6) Finally, given the focus of the survey and descriptive quality of the data collected it would be extremely interesting and informative if the authors could comment on observed successful strategies for service use/existing homelessness. This may go beyond the scope of this paper and if so, the authors are encouraged to consider it in future manuscripts.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests