

**‘Precarious morality’:
Ethical practices in regard to people
with impaired decision-making
capacity experiencing chronic
homelessness**

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Overview

Background

Pilot Study description

Results

'Precariousness'

Decision-making and ethics

Background

- Roundtable leading to research collaboration

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Background

People with impaired decision making capacity who experience chronic homelessness

People with IDMC – cognitive impairment such as:

- Mental illness
- Intellectual disability
- ABI
- Drug and alcohol related issues
- Dementia
- Trauma / torture

Study description

As the first phase of a proposed larger research project, this pilot project has the following aims:

1. To **engage stakeholders** across the sector to identify gaps in knowledge and practice, to develop a shared understanding of issues faced by this target group.
2. To review and reflect on the **nature of the social exclusion** embedded in policy and legislative frameworks, for the target group.
3. To **identify barriers and enablers** in the current service systems, that impede connections to effective supports for the target group.

Study description

4. To contribute to the **development of service delivery** that promotes understanding, planning, coordination and is flexible and sustainable to the target group.
5. To **promote collaborative partnerships** between relevant service sectors and reduce the level of complexity and confusion associated with multiple service involvement.
 - The intended outcome is to **inform some appropriate service responses** to the target group.

Results

30 responses, 4 agencies

Approximately half from agency preventing homelessness; half from agency supporting people who are homelessness

Results

Literature review – complex problem requiring complex responses

Common profile: People often with more than one form of cognitive impairment

Nearly all (i.e. >90%) have:

- difficulties with relationships;
- live in poverty / unemployed /

Results

Some common features across respondents:

- practitioners feel ill equipped to fully understand implications of IDM, particularly when there are multiple presentations such as MI, ID coupled maybe with substance issues or indigenous or cultural aspects.
- Protocols and protections for people such as guardianship legislation are not fully understood

Results

Interesting correlations:

Between levels of education and adequacy to do job

Yes and *Yes but / No but...*

Between levels of education and adequacy to do job, and whether refer to Office of the Adult Guardian

Emerging issues:

- Degree of reflective practice
- Moral illiteracy or moral inadequacy?

Decision-making and ethics

New Conceptual Framework - *Precariousness*

Precarious Living

Precarious Ontology

Precarious Morality

Decision-making and ethics

Conceptual Framework

Precarious Living:

refers to the links between homelessness, housing insecurity and identifying the challenges in establishing a 'home'

Decision-making and ethics

Conceptual Framework

Precarious ontology:

- Considers problematic constructions of humanity, personhood and citizenship which threaten 'ontological security' of this group
- Impact on Human Rights

Decision-making and ethics

Conceptual Framework

Precarious morality:

... explores how inadequate ethical frameworks of practitioners may contribute to lessened moral protection and experiences of ongoing moral exclusion.

Precarious morality:

Whether workers have considered involving or have involved, the Office of the Adult Guardian to help with decision making for any clients?

- **Not all respondents answered this section**
- **41.94% of respondents have involved the OAG**
- **19.35% had not**
- **Some respondents were discerning:**
 - ***“Others I would not involve the Adult Guardian as they feel that their independence would be taken away, so workers help monitor their decision-making ability.”***

Ethical Concerns: Moral illiteracy or moral inadequacy?

- Autonomy (or lack thereof) - defining moral principle, but is weakly or restrictively conceptualized or understood
- *Independence- focussed*
- other moral principles such as justice, beneficence and care are given lesser currency

Moral illiteracy

- Issues between autonomy / self-determination, impaired decision making capacity and 'approved' proxy /substitute decision makers
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Ethical Concerns: Moral illiteracy or moral inadequacy?

Moral inadequacy

- **Could it be that alternative, relationship based ethical frameworks are more suitable for practice?**
 - **Where does the concept of *interdependence fit*?**
 - **No systems protections for this.**
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Ethical Concerns ... further research?

Moral uncertainty creates

- **profound ethical dilemmas** not only for the people themselves trying to navigate complex structural and systemic terrains, but also that practitioners risk feeling ethically inadequate to offer the most appropriate and / or effective practice responses
- issues for future **workforce planning** - requires extensive analysis and the development of an adequate ethical decision making framework for this group

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