Introduction

Homelessness and offending behaviour are shown to be intrinsically linked. For example, 75% of homeless services in England support clients with links to the Criminal Justice System (Homeless Link, 2011); 1/3 of offenders lose their home while in custody (Nacro, 2006). There is little research into the underlying reasons regarding why homelessness and offending are linked. This research examines possible psychological links between homelessness and offending, specifically examining The Big 5 Personality Factors (Costa and McCrea, 1985), Psychological Entitlement (Campbell et al, 2004) and Social Problem Solving (D’Zurilla et al, 2001).

Method

115 volunteer prisoners at a category B local prison in England. Remand and sentenced prisoners; all offence types and sentence lengths. Completion of initial homelessness questionnaire. Completion of Hexaco-60, Social Problem Solving Inventory and Psychological Entitlement Scale.

Results

Is there a link between psychological characteristics and homelessness?

T Tests showed offenders who were homeless had lower overall social problem solving ability (t(107)=-2.89,p=0.005); lower rational problem solving (t(107)=3.06, p=0.003); and higher impulsive problem solving (t(107)=2.60, p=0.011). There were no significant differences on other characteristics.

Are psychological characteristics differentially linked to offence type?

Offenders with Burglary, Theft and Arson convictions are more likely to be homeless, than those without these offences in their offending history.

Offender perceptions of homelessness

Most commonly cited reasons for homelessness: offending, relationship breakdown, family/friends asked to leave. Most commonly cited factors that could have prevented homelessness: not offending, better decision making, thinking about the consequences of offending, better perspective taking.

Summary

Social problem solving ability was lower in homeless offenders than those who were not homeless. Social problem solving ability was lower in people with Burglary, Theft and Arson convictions than those without these convictions. Offenders with Burglary, Theft, and Arson convictions are more likely to find themselves homeless than those without these convictions.

Implications

Improving social problem solving in offenders could decrease their chances of becoming homeless. Social problem solving could be embedded into “Good Tenants” courses. These could be offered as preventative measures by local authority and social housing providers to people on community sentences.

Evaluation

Shortfalls

Violent offence is not included
Male only participants
Demand characteristics
Reading ability and comprehension
Not produced in alternative languages
No comparison made with non-offenders

Strengths

Lots of opportunity for future research
Offers a new way of examining the link between offending and homelessness
Offers a preventative intervention
Includes under-researched acquisitive offenders

References


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