



Nowhere To Go: Shelter Service Restrictions and their Health Effects on Individuals Deprived of Housing

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Conflicts of Interest

- None

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.



Objectives

Understand the impacts of service restrictions on the health and quality of life of individuals deprived of housing

Learn how to reduce the impacts of service restrictions, improve the health and quality of life of individuals deprived of housing, and incorporate potential strategies to accelerate progress on ending homelessness

Homelessness in Hamilton

- 20% of individuals experiencing homelessness are unsheltered
- Inadequate tracking
- Shelters over capacity
- Wait list for affordable housing
- Poor harm reduction infrastructure for shelters

CANADA

Hamilton shelter aiding women fleeing domestic violence is over capacity



By **Don Mitchell** • Global News

Posted September 21, 2022 5:49 pm · Updated September 21, 2022 5:59 pm

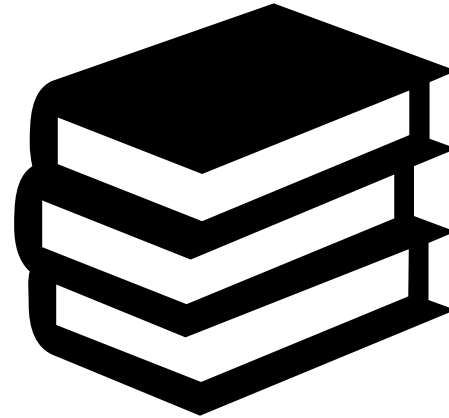


About the Project

- Nowhere to Go: Mixed methods study of the health of people who experience emergency homeless shelter service restrictions
- Service restriction: the practice of limiting or denying access to emergency shelter for a set period of time



Origins

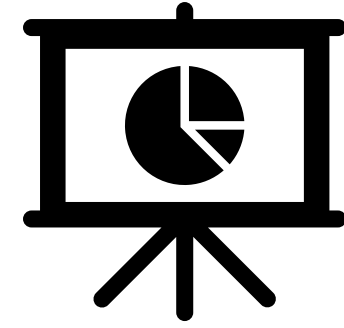


Project Progression

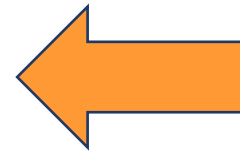
2020

- Create study design
- Obtain ethics approval
- Qualitative interviews and thematic analysis
- Retrospective chart review and analysis
- Knowledge translation

03/2023



**THIS
PRESENTATION
CONTAINS
PRELIMINARY
ANALYSIS DATA**



Demographics of participants

Total of 20 participants

- Age: 26-69 years old
- Sex: 15 male, 5 female
- Sexual orientation: Majority heterosexual (1x asexual, 1x bisexual, 1x lesbian)
- Race/Ethnicity: Majority Caucasian, 6 self-identified as having Indigenous identity, 1x Black and Indigenous.
- Reasons for restriction include:
 - Missing bed checks
 - Verbal disagreements with staff
 - Physical altercation
 - **Substance-related**
- Length of restriction: ranges from 24 hours to indefinitely
- Experiencing homelessness 11 months – 20 years
- Accessing shelters 4 months – 20 years

Service Restriction Experiences



Lack of Empathy



No Explanation of
Process/Logistics



Nowhere to Go

Lack of Empathy

- “I can definitely see how staff attitudes ... change as soon as they realize a person’s history”
- “It’s almost like they’re guards. They’re not there to help and ... be supportive”
- “I asked the guy for a bed and he muttered and ... laughed under his breath saying ‘No, there’s no beds’. I asked for a blanket because I was freezing and ... he muttered and laughed and said ‘No, we don’t give any’”
- “They don’t even give you a chance to explain”
- “I got kicked out ... for not being in my bed at 10 o’clock for a bed check but at someone else’s bed ... sitting on his bed or talking to him No questions asked, kicked me out and the guy that I was at the bed”
- However, many individuals expressed gratefulness for shelter staff, acknowledging burnout and difficult work conditions



No Explanation of Process/Logistics

- Confusion, inconsistency
 - How long?
 - Why?
 - Who can I talk to?
 - Where do I go?
 - How do I get my belongings?
- “No other options to go about even being homeless, just restricted and that’s it”
- “Different shelters have different ways of handling people. And the [Shelter] ... they don’t seem like they’re there to help”



Nowhere to Go

- “Then I found myself trying to find a stairwell to stay in, because it was freezing. It was during the winter. So I ended up running and sneaking into [Hotel] ... running to a stairwell before the security guards caught me and going to the stairwell that I know of that pumps out ... hot air. I woke up to cops giving me a ticket, a \$70 ticket ... That was painful”
- “I stayed on the street for a while ... all the shelters were full or they had COVID-related issues”
- “But clearly, like, tell me what to do? What can I do? I can't go here, here, here or here. It's minus 15 out and you guys won't let anyone sit inside your staircase door at the [Shelter] or whatever like that, right. And, yeah, light a fire and the firemen will come and put it out and tell you not to light another fire. So, I mean, there's very little help and offering options, you know.”

Health effects



- Freezing
- Hygiene-related
 - “Definitely had some ill effects from being outside all the time, when you’re not showering or being able to clean, you know, clean clothes that sort of thing, no options, eventually it affects you, it makes you sick.”
 - “shortly after that I got endocarditis, and I learned more about it, I just found out it was basically just, you know, intravenously using drugs and dirty environments and getting bacteria inside of you and it getting attached to some valve in your heart or something like that. And, basically, yeah, that's how it started.”
- Physical pain, i.e. foot pain from walking
- Loss of medications, clothes, ID
 - “I went 5 days without a high dose of methadone and pain killers”



Health effects

- Lack of sleep
- Mental health effects
- **Similar or decreased frequency of ER visits during service restriction**
 - **“Less, less. I used it less, because I was more like I don't want to be embarrassed and humiliated by these people, so I just, like, just avoided it and just moved on, you know, and tried to figure out my own way”**
 - **No record of service restrictions in charts**

Areas for improvement

- Better communication, transparency, and accountability
 - Contacting other shelters
 - Open discussion
 - Restructure process





Areas for improvement

- More access to housing, shelter, and other facilities
 - More shelters vs. more affordable housing
 - Access to hygiene facilities during the day

Areas for improvement

- Harm reduction approach



Next steps for the project



Expected to complete
in March 2023



Final report will be
published on the
HAMSMaRT website



Community town hall



Journal publication



Conclusion

- Service restrictions are a restriction on community health
- Need for further research
- More communication, accountability, transparency
- Changing shelter standards and practices
- Harm reduction approach



Questions?

Sources

- <https://www.homelesshub.ca/community-profile/Hamilton>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-doctors-track-data-homeless-deaths-1.6309344>
- <https://globalnews.ca/news/9144994/hamilton-shelter-women-domestic-violence-over-capacity/>

A close-up photograph of a person's hand resting on a computer mouse on a wooden desk. To the right of the hand is a large, three-dimensional '@' symbol made of light brown cardboard. The background is softly blurred, showing a computer monitor and other desk items. The overall lighting is warm and natural.

Contact Information

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