Occupational Perspective on Homelessness

This is the author's accepted manuscript. The final published version of this work (the version of record) is published by [Taylor and Francis] in [Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2017] available at: [DOI: 10.1080/11038128.2017.1304572]. This work is made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher." Exploring the Lived Experience of Homelessness from an Occupational Perspective

Abstract: *Study aim*: This study explored the lived experience of a group of homeless men in relation to how they engaged in their day-to-day occupations when sleeping rough and living in a homeless hostel. *Methods*: Data were gathered from five men residing in a homeless hostel in the UK. Data collection included semi-structured interviews and photographic diaries. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Results*: Participants described their experiences of occupational engagement whilst sleeping on the streets which included engaging in survival occupations, the significance of apparently ordinary occupations and moving beyond survival occupations. The homeless hostel provided opportunities for occupational engagement that the men perceived in an idiosyncratic manner. The men described benefits of engaging in novel occupations and re-engaging in known occupations. Occupational deprivation was a common theme that occurred both whilst rough sleeping and living in the hostel. *Conclusion:* This study has highlighted the diversity of the lived experience of engaging in occupations whilst homeless; including the benefits of engagement and the impact of occupational injustices. It has furthered understandings of the concept of 'survival occupations' and the importance of community resources to facilitate occupational engagement whilst homeless.

Key words: daily occupations, homeless men, survival occupations, occupational justice, occupational deprivation, interpretative phenomenological analysis

Introduction

Occupational Perspective on Homelessness

Homelessness is a significant problem in European countries and the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANSTA) suggest that it has increased in fifteen member states in the last five years (1). In the UK, there is an upward trend in homelessness (2, 3) with the Government articulating homelessness as a key priority (4). Measuring numbers of homeless people is problematic as different agencies use different definitions to classify homelessness. For example, the UK Government collects statistics on 'statutorily homeless households' where a local council is deemed to owe a homeless duty to provide help to those legally classified as homeless (5). Although there are approximately 57,350 statutorily homeless households in the UK (6) there are many more hidden homeless who do not appear in statistics as they do not meet the definition of statutorily homeless (7).

The hidden homeless population includes people who live in inadequate housing, in bed and breakfast accommodation, in squats, who are 'sofa surfing', rough sleeping or living in hostels. (8) The hostel system in the UK provides temporary shelter for homeless people who do not meet the legal definition and are not eligible for local authority help. Crisis, a leading homeless charity, estimates that there are a further 41,500 hostel beds in England (9). Men make up 74% of the homeless population and Crisis report that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. They estimate that at least 35% of London's rough sleepers are migrants (9).

Homelessness is correlated with physical and mental ill health issues and premature mortality rates higher than the average population (10). However, literature shows that homeless people are not a homogenous group and diversity should be recognised (11). Many homeless people experience multiple vulnerabilities, often including histories of abuse, substance misuse and mental health problems (12). This can lead to marginalisation (13) and disempowerment (11). Therefore, it is argued that the voices of homeless people should be heard, and that they should be enabled to contribute to policy and decision making (11, 14, 15).

Occupational Perspective on Homelessness

Working with homeless people has been a developing area of practice for occupational therapists (16, 17, 18, 19). There is a small but growing occupational therapy literature base relating to homelessness including discussion around appropriate occupational therapy interventions with homeless people (17, 20, 21, 22, 23). Other literature focuses on the experience of occupational therapists working with this population (16, 19). There is limited occupational therapy or occupational science literature focusing on the lived experiences of homeless people in relation to their engagement with meaningful occupations (24, 25). Two recent studies have attempted to redress this balance by exploring what it is like to engage in occupations as a homeless person (24, 25). Illman et al, (24) reviewed 60 interviews with homeless individuals collected from a pre-existing randomised trial held in Canada (26). They used an 'occupational lens' to elucidate information about engagement in daily occupations. Four themes emerged from the analysis including; occupation as enjoyment, occupation as survival and/or risk, occupations as passing time, and occupations as self-management (24). Chard, Faulkner and Chugg (25) conducted face-to-face interviews with 8 homeless men from an inner city shelter in Canada about their lived experience of homelessness and found that passing time was also a main theme. A further theme, which relates indirectly to occupation, is that of loss. Participants reported loss of belongings, freedom, opportunities and trust. Additionally, the men discussed the street-life environment and engaging in anti-social occupations, substance misuse was a major occupation for some (25).

Engaging in occupations for survival and/or risk was also found in a study by Heuchemer and Josephsson who identified that homeless people have to carry out a range of risky occupations in order to survive on the streets (27). These occupations include finding shelter, clothing or food, theft or having sex for money. They are undertaken for a variety of reasons, and are perceived as facilitating survival. Additional occupations may include drug or alcohol

abuse or self-harming. These occupations are often quoted as coping strategies (15, 25, 27, 28). Some studies have identified other more adaptive coping strategies, Cosgrove and Flynn (29) reported that homeless mothers used reading, writing, going to church and talking to others to help them cope with their situation. However, there is not a great deal of literature on this topic which may reflect limited use of alternative coping strategies, or potentially, a tendency in the literature to focus on subjects like violent behaviour or drug abuse (24).

Despite the need to survive some of the reviewed literature highlighted that homeless people also engage in day to day occupations like the domiciled population (25, 30), and find meaning (25) and enjoyment in these occupations (24). A diverse range of leisure occupations are described in the homeless literature including arts, watching television, reading, going on outings and being with friends (24, 30). There is recognition that money is needed to engage in many occupations, so low cost alternatives are often sought by the homeless person (24). However, Borchard (30) found that despite poverty, many people in his study bought electronic gadgets. This reflects the need not to make assumptions about homeless peoples' priorities for occupation. Therefore, with this in mind the current study set out to provide further insights into the experiences of homeless people and their engagement in daily occupations, specifically from the perspective of the United Kingdom. The researchers aimed to answer the question: 'What is the lived experience of homeless people residing in a homeless hostel in the UK in relation to engagement in everyday occupations?' The focus included the things that people needed, wanted or had to do day-to-day. The aim was to illuminate the experience of homelessness in greater depth than current conceptualisations in the broader literature, which focus primarily on the process and negative consequences of homelessness.

Material and Methods

Approach - A phenomenological approach was adopted as it is concerned with understanding the meanings of lived experience (31, 32). Phenomenology allows the researcher to explore lived experiences of phenomena that are not well understood (33), as is the case with homelessness from an occupational perspective. Innovative techniques are thought to be suitable for conducting research with vulnerable people, including using photography (34).

This study gained ethical approval from Plymouth University's Faculty of Health and Human Sciences Health Student Ethics Sub-Committee.

Participants – The researcher (first author) gained access to a population of people via a volunteer worker at a homeless hostel. The hostel is located in a deprived area of an inner city in the South West of England. The hostel accommodates approximately sixty people, the majority of whom are white British males who have slept rough immediately prior to gaining a bed in the hostel. The hostel aims to support people to move into more secure housing and the maximum stay is two years. Participants were recruited through the volunteer who used posters to advertise the study to responders. Inclusion criteria: Participants were required to have the ability to speak sufficient English to be able to describe their experiences (32) and the capability to use a disposable camera. Exclusion criteria included; those with active psychoses or acute mental health problems and people under the influence of non-prescription drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the interview.

Method – An initial information meeting was held at the hostel where potential participants were invited to take part and were given information on the nature of the project (n=8). A second meeting was held where participants signed a consent sheet if they wished to participate (n=6) and participants were given a disposable camera to take photographs of their daily occupations over a two-week period. They were also given some guidance on how to

use the camera. One man had to withdraw from the study before the data collection began, leaving five white British males participating, aged from eighteen to sixty-one years old.

Participant photography was chosen as it has been used successfully with homeless people in the UK (12) and Canada (25). The aim of using the photographs in this study was to support deeper reflection as other studies have suggested that the photographs act as a visual prompt, enabling participants to explore their more difficult experiences in depth (35). The contact at the hostel collected the cameras at the end of the two-week period. Two copies of the photographs were made. One set was given to the participant to keep on the day of their interview. Individual semi structured interviews were conducted in the hostel. Questions related to what occupations the participants currently undertook, and whether or not these were important, or if they hoped to stop doing some of their occupations. They were also asked about past occupations and those they hoped to do in the future. The photographs were used to prompt discussions and further elucidate findings about their experiences. One participant had not taken any photographs, but was still interviewed using the interview schedule. Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at the time of consent and at the beginning of the interviews.

Data Analysis – Combining a discussion of photographs with an interview resulted in multi-layered data (35), including the visual image and the interpreted meaning given to it by the participant (36). Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (32). Data analysis was inductive, facilitating the development of themes. The stages of analysis were reading and re-reading transcripts and initial noting which included focusing on descriptions given by participants and also making conceptual comments which were interpretative in nature (32) Emergent themes for each case were developed again reflecting the participants' original words and including the researcher's interpretations. These were then grouped into super-ordinate themes on a case by case basis

in-line with the idiographic nature of IPA (37). Finally, connections across cases were undertaken and master themes emerged from the superordinate themes. Analysis was detailed and cyclical, and themes were adapted and developed over time (38).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher undertook reflexive memoing (39). The process of the analysis was scrutinised by research colleagues and the first and second authors conferred on the analysis for the benefit of an audit trail. Following transcription, participants were given the opportunity to check the contents of the transcript for accuracy (32).

Reflexivity – As an occupational therapist and occupational therapy lecturer the first author was aware of her interest in understanding the occupational nature of human beings. Having practised in adult mental health the author had prior knowledge of how disadvantaged populations might experience difficulties with participation in everyday life; and felt that this may be further compounded for people experiencing homelessness. Despite this prior knowledge the author attempted to bracket this out which is important in the IPA process (32).

Results

According to FEANSTA the participants (whose names have been changed to protect their identity) met the category of *houseless* in that they had a 'place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter' (40). However, during the research interviews four out of five of the men discussed their experiences when they were *roofless* (40) or sleeping rough, as well as when *houseless*. Table 1 provides information on the characteristics of the participants including the length of time spent rough sleeping prior to moving into the hostel.

Table 2 includes the themes reported here that relate to the research question around the lived experience of homeless and occupational participation. The full list of themes from the study is presented for information in Appendix 1. The use of verbatim quotes has been used to allow the reader to evaluate the analysis and increase credibility of the research (32). A number of participants' photographs have been included to further illustrate themes.

Rough sleeping, survival occupations and beyond - This theme illustrates the struggles experienced by participants when sleeping rough. From an occupational perspective, there were powerful accounts of what participants did to survive, how they undertook activities of daily living, and moving beyond these survival occupations.

There were a number of occupations that participants engaged in that became survival occupations. These occupations involved managing the elements, trying to sleep and finding food. Without secure housing, participants were exposed to the demands of the environment in a way that the domiciled population was not. Neil described sleeping on a park bench and experienced difficulties in coping with the weather in winter. "*It was freezing cold and I just, what I did was, during the day I'd sit here, cos when the wind was changing sort of thing, cos I had to work my way, all the way around this box, cos this, cos this was my home you know*", (Neil). Neil took a photograph to illustrate the bench he called 'home' (Fig. 1) and described how difficult it was to sleep when the wind was changing direction and he had to move each time. The natural environment also had unexpected consequences for Sean. He described how he slept in a tent until it was damaged by a fox, forcing him to consider alternative accommodation. *"But he made two, gnawed two holes in my tent and my bag and of course after that moment, and it can rain, that's, that's when it became imp, almost impossible for me to carry on."* (Sean). Getting sleep became difficult without permanent shelter. Participants commented on how challenging it was to actually sleep, shedding some insight into why people might turn to substances to help them cope. Neil's example illustrates

this clearly. *"To be honest with you I didn't actually sleep for the five days and I didn't sleep, I don't know how people can sleep, you, you have to get yourself a bottle of vodka or…"* (Neil).

Additionally, without adequate shelter and finances, finding and preparing food became a survival occupation. Neil explained how he went round to the back yard of a restaurant and vaulted a high gate to get some discarded food from the bin. Neil had to engage in risk taking behaviours to meet his basic need for food. He makes sense of this as a survival occupation and not a criminal act. *"I didn't feel like a criminal because I was, I was trying to survive, I wasn't generally going out to be a criminal, I was, it didn't feel like stealing I just wanted to survive, that's all it was you know"* (Neil). Alex, who was 17 when he slept rough, also engaged in risky occupations and had to live with the consequences. *"To be honest the part, being in that situation you get in rocky roads, and where I got in rocky roads, I used to go and steal, just to have funds and get somewhere in life, and look at me now, it's caught up with me and I've got burglary charges, I'm on bail so, not good."* (Alex).

In contrast, the experience of engaging in something that might be considered ordinary by the domiciled population appears to carry greater significance for participants who were rough sleeping. Needing to engage in survival occupations and the unrelenting nature of the experience of homelessness meant that the status of some occupations became elevated beyond what they might have been if the participants had adequate shelter. For Neil, this included having warm food in the winter, despite having had to steal it from a bin. In addition, Neil described his experience of attending a day centre for homeless people. *"It was brilliant, you can go inside there, you can sit down in a chair….you know, and they gave me clothes, they gave me a bar of soap, some shower gel, they gave me toothpaste, they gave me everything"* (Neil). It is significant that Neil describes being given tools to undertake self-care as being given 'everything'. Sean commented on the value of his local library. *"And that*

is a life line, the library, somewhere where you can sit down, read a book on your own, obviously, there's not a lot to do on the streets but obviously, going into to a library and sitting down is priceless" (Sean). Sean's use of the word 'priceless' in relation to the library suggested how significant this ordinary occupation was to him.

Two participants talked about engaging in occupations that might be considered as 'higher-order' occupations in relation to those that fulfilled human survival needs. In some way they had moved beyond survival occupations. Neil talks about 'bin diving', an occupation that he engaged in in the hope of finding something useful to him in the future. He took a photograph to illustrate (Fig. 2). *"So I was just finding things that, that, anything that, bicycle tires you know, I'd keep it, I might find a use for it later on you know. So it's almost like, I, I had loads of crap on me like. I'd just find anything and use it to err.".* (Neil). Basic needs were being met and Neil engaged in some purposeful occupation, cognisant of the potential benefit of planning ahead. Similarly, Sean experienced a sense of satisfaction in being able to independently manage some of his food occupations. Having met survival needs he was able to engage in higher-order occupations like reading, which suggests his ability to adapt to the environment. *"Some days I did go back to my tent, to read a book, make some food, or have a coffee, cos it was my erm, I actually had a, had a camp cooker, a gas cooker which was very handy, and the soup run gave me a saucepan and some cups and some spoons. So that was alright."* (Sean).

Once survival was established, participants had a lot of time in the day to occupy. Neil, Alex and Sean talked about lacking purpose in the day, *"Through the day there is nothing to do, you walk round see the same places every day. I used to walk up and down the town about 6 times a day, nothing to do."* (Alex). This lack of meaningful occupation was perceived as a difficult experience, *"I was wandering, just wandering the streets, it was hard work"* (Sean). For the participants in the study this lived experience of homelessness was unremitting. Neil

felt profound emotional relief at the end of his rough sleeping experience. He said, *", I, I cri, I cried to be honest, I cried and I was like thank you, you know I couldn't spend another night out,"* (Neil).

Engaging in occupations; the experience of hostel living - Themes that emerged in relation to engaging in occupations whilst living in the hostel related to participants' ability to engage in meaningful occupations and whether or not people had access to them. Participants talked about how they experienced occupations in terms of the impact on health and well-being, and the impact of the institutional environment on their participation. Some participants were able to broaden their repertoires as a result of being in the hostel. The hostel offered a number of occupations including cooking groups, allotment gardening, literacy and computing classes, fitness training and football competitions.

Perceptions of the availability of occupations were mixed, as were participants' feelings about whether their lives were balanced. Mark felt strongly that his life was on hold in the hostel. His experiences of the availability of occupation were generally negative, *"Erm, so yeah, apart from having the odd, the football, and the cooking. I'm just in my room, just on my own; you know festering in my own thoughts"* (Mark). Mark's description of his use of time suggested that he was not consistently able to meet his occupational needs. Alex also seemed to have some difficulty with occupying his time in a meaningful way, as he talked about using sleep as a means of filling time, *"It's just there's nothing to do, so I'd rather sleep and be well energetic when I do wake up than be knackered so yeah, it's easier to sleep"* (Alex). In contrast, Sean's perception was different and he felt that the range of occupational opportunities was satisfactory within the hostel. *"And I think there is a concert coming up as well, so within the building, there is plenty, plenty to do"* (Sean). For some participants, the opportunity to engage in valued occupations was limited by staff availability. Mark found cooking particularly beneficial but could not participate in this occupation as

frequently as he would have liked, *"Yeah, I like cooking, yeah. But obviously here, you know, this [cooking group] is on a Thursday"* (Mark). Bill also appeared to lack meaningful occupations but found positive ways to manage his time by using his MP3 player, *"So I do what I call 'time travelling', so I put my head phones in and I listen to the hits of the sixties and seventies, or read a book or something at the same time, and that it, works out so many hours of the day, you know what I mean?"* (Bill). Cost was also a limiting factor in engaging in meaningful occupation. All the participants talked about cost in relation to engagement.

Participants experienced pleasure at engaging in occupations whilst living in the hostel and the impact on well-being was evident in participants' accounts. Sean's comments on his experiences at a local climbing centre illustrate the beneficial effects of engagement, *"It was a great moment, that's sort of character building, confidence building, to be fair the last two years my confidence has gone down a lot, so you know, it's, it's helped with my confidence really"* (Sean). Mark was able to experience mastery as a result of engaging in a weekly cooking group run by a volunteer. The majority of his photographs were of cooked dishes, perhaps suggesting his pride in his ability in this occupation (Fig. 3). *"These are the cooking, right I can see myself like, I do think I'm quite a good cook you know, I'm not bad at cooking so, and I enjoy doing that"* (Mark). Routine in occupations was also perceived as having an impact on health and well-being. The significance of the hostel being able to facilitate a return to routine in terms of improving health and well-being was evident in Neil's account. *"I could get up, walk up and down and just get back to brushing my teeth, and get back to my routine, you know, brushing my teeth in the morning, folding my clothes up, I could wash my clothes, fold em up, put them away again, everything, my routine came back"* (Neil).

Not all occupational engagement within the hostel supported health. Substance misuse was an ongoing reality for a number of participants. This was no more so than in Mark's account of his lived experience. He took a photograph of some of his drug paraphernalia to illustrate this

as one of his daily occupations (Fig. 4) *"And then I took a picture of that (photo of syringe) obviously not to glorify anything but that is part of my day, you know, day to day life"* (Mark). There were other occupations tied in with his drugs habit, including regular visits to his drugs workers which provided some routine. Sean had experienced issues with alcohol in the past and this may explain some of his transient lifestyle, *"But my problem is the alcohol. That's held me back, you know. So we've all got something"* (Sean). Whilst the participants were insightful into their issues, they also experienced a lack of control over managing their habits. For Mark, engaging in drug use brought occasional relief from the realities of his life, *"I don't do drugs to enjoy them, you know sometimes it's so I'm not ill, the other times, it's just to try and just sleep and that"* (Mark).

The institutional environment, and the imposition of rules, impacted on occupational engagement. The hostel undertook room checks where residents were expected to vacate their rooms for two hours. These rules were viewed differently by residents. Sean talked about his experience of room checks and the psychological impact was significant. The environment was potentially not conducive for his recovery, *"Then after a few weeks it starts to get a little bit more annoying, frustrating, you know because the rules are you can't be in your room between 9 and 11 and it's one of those things that you, I feel, I find it hard to live with"* (Sean). Sean also had strong views about staff asking residents to complete tasks. His opinion suggested an infringement of his occupational rights, *"Most of the residents just shrug their shoulders and say why? Why do we have to jump through these hoops, why do we have to do these things just to satisfy you that we are doing something today? You know, I'm paying my rent, I'm homeless, all I need is a roof, I don't need you to be nagging me to get out and do other things"* (Sean). In stark contrast to Sean, Alex, the youngest participant, did not seem to feel hindered by the hostel rules and regulations. He was able to flaunt these to a degree, as he states, *"I always say to the staff, and the staff know this, from a Tuesday to a Friday is the*

best time to get me, you want me on a Tuesday to a Friday that's fine, the only reason

because Saturday I'm resting, Sunday you don't see me" (Alex).

Despite the difficulties of institutional living, the participants were able to engage in occupations that were new to them, allowing them to expand their occupational repertoires. A number of activities had been set up within the hostel including access to an allotment, cooking sessions, a computer room and workshop. Participants perceived that having access to these novel activities was beneficial. *"In fact I've been doing a lot of gardening with (name of volunteer) and that's something actually I've, started to get to like actually, you know, I must admit, I've, I've, I haven't got a lot time to do it as much as I want. I'd like more time to be able to do more gardening"* (Neil). *"Even though I was in the armed forces, I did a bit of abseiling in the army, but I've never been on a climbing wall in my life, ever. So it's a really great experience"* (Sean). However, not all ventures into new occupational territories could be conceived of as health promoting, as in Neil's example below, *"I did, I did take drugs when I first came here, just to party with them, and I can see that they enjoy them, and I can see how they [drugs] ruin it, you know"* (Neil).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experience of homelessness from an occupational perspective. The study gives important insights into the occupational lives of a group of homeless men, both whilst they were sleeping rough and later when living in a homeless hostel.

Consistent with the previous homeless studies by Illman and Heuchemer (24, 27) this study found that homeless people engaged in occupations to facilitate survival. The nature of these occupations seemed to take two distinct forms. Firstly, there were physiological survival

occupations, those that were employed to facilitate immediate survival and relate to the physiological needs described by Maslow (41) including finding food, shelter and getting sleep. Secondly, there were those that were used as coping survival occupations which were used to manage the very demanding situations the participants found themselves in, including risk taking occupations and using alcohol or substances. Although there is limited literature relating to survival occupations Nelson and Wilson (42) have discussed survival occupations in relation to the experience of survivors of concentration camps. Interestingly, holocaust survivors described occupations that fit into both these categories including physiological survival occupations (eg stealing food scraps) and coping survival occupations (signing Sabbath songs in secret). Additionally, Morville and Erlandsson (43) who undertook research with asylum seekers in a Danish Asylum Centre, found their participants used some occupations as a coping tool more than being a meaningful way to fill time. This fits with Nelson and Wilsons definition of survival occupations as those that are 'primarily self and other protective, not adding meaning to life but enabling life' (42, p183). Whether or not the survival occupations undertaken in this study were meaningful to the participants is debatable, as meaning can only really be ascribed by the individual experiencing the occupations (44). Perhaps these occupations were not meaningful in the sense that is typically used in occupational science in relation to occupations that are valued or positive. But as Nelson and Wilson suggest 'survival occupations have meaning precisely because they permit life itself to continue' (42, p186).

Occupational science has been criticised for its tendency to take a positivistic view of occupations (Kiepek, Phelan and Magalhaes (45), focussing on what is socially acceptable. There is growing discussion around what have been termed 'dark-side' occupations, those that are engaged in that may not be health giving, or could be antisocial or criminal; however, they may still carry purpose or meaning (46). It is important not to overlook these

occupations as they give a more comprehensive insight into the true nature of humans as occupational beings. As an example, Neil engages in an occupational form that he calls 'bin diving' which has also appeared in a Canadian study described as 'dumpster diving' (25). This might be considered as an antisocial or dark-side occupation but it is clear that Neil found a sense of purpose in this occupation, filling his time in a useful way beyond just wandering the streets.

Some of the 'dark-side' occupations that participants engaged in carried risks in relation to criminal charges or damage to health, for example, stealing, jumping security gates and using substances. In fact, the majority of the participants in this study mentioned using substances and described how they were used to enhance wellbeing. Neil began taking drugs when he joined the hostel. He stated he wanted to 'party with' the other residents; his motivation to participate in drug taking appears to be driven by his need for 'belonging', which is described as the need to connect with others (47). Mark used substances to make himself feel better, or in order to sleep. Substance misuse is a frequent topic in the homeless literature (28) and the use of substances to support well-being when homeless is common (15, 25, 27, 28).

Experience of occupational injustices had a significant impact on participants' time use, both when rough sleeping and living in the hostel. The ability to engage in occupations other than those necessary for survival when rough sleeping was limited. Sean's description of reading a book in a library as 'priceless' serves to illustrate this. Experiences of occupational deprivation for rough sleepers is confirmed elsewhere in the homeless literature (24, 25). The relentlessness nature of rough sleeping has been described as a '24 hour' experience (27), whilst participants in this study described a form of occupational alienation where they spent hours wandering the streets. Opportunities for restorative occupations were also clearly limited. Additionally, the hostel environment was experienced as occupationally depriving because of the impact of rules and regulations on preferred routines. For example, Mark was

not able to engage in his valued occupation of cooking at times when he wanted to because of factors beyond his control. Issues of control and the impact of rules on occupational engagement are not unique to this study (24, 25, 27, 29). It was interesting that Sean, the ex-military man appeared to find the rules most difficult to deal with. Perhaps his experience of this lifestyle and his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) meant that he no longer felt able to cope with a regimented approach. Alex appeared occupationally deprived in that he described a strategy of using sleep to fill his time, this use of sleep is a common feature of institutional settings, although these include prisons and forensic settings, where people are held on an involuntary basis (48, 49).

Interestingly, other participants appeared more able to make successful occupational adaptions to their environments and use their time in a more positive way. Bill, for example, described the use of his MP3 player for 'time travelling' which helped him pass hours in the day. Neil's powerful narrative is full of vivid emotional and physical details of his survival. His experience of rough sleeping was his first. His story is peppered with this attempts to adapt, including picking up cigarette ends and bin diving. Neil might be described as 'transitionally' homeless (50) where a person 'enters the shelter system for one stay and for a short period.' (p210). In comparison, Sean was 'episodically' homeless (50) in that he had frequent periods in hostel environments'. His narrative had a different quality to Neil's, his adaptation to his surroundings and the homeless lifestyle seemed less effortful, for example, his description of life in his tent, making coffee, reading a book, sounds like what might be typically expected of a domiciled person's routine. Also, compared to other participants' experiences of hostel living Sean feels that the current hostel residence offers 'plenty to do.'

There were incidences where participants' engagement in occupations did sit within the more familiar territory of occupational science, which espouses a philosophy where engaging in occupations can be beneficial for health and well-being (51). This was true for participants,

whose feelings of self-worth were boosted by engaging in occupations that had value for them, for example climbing. Enjoyment of occupations was also a theme found in other studies of homelessness (24,30) as was the benefit of engaging in new occupations (24). A study by Bradley et al, (52) asserted that homeless people had a wide range of hobbies undertaken both inside and outside of the shelter they lived in. Accomplishment is considered as a key component in occupational well-being (46) and a sense of mastery was felt by some participants whilst engaging in these valued or novel occupations. The opportunities provided by the hostel to return to some sense of normality and routine were valuable to participants. These 'basic' occupations seemed to be more impactful, once rediscovered, than they might otherwise have been.

In conclusion, the findings from this study illustrate the diversity of the lived experience in relation to occupational engagement amongst this group of homeless men. Rough sleeping brought about challenges for the participants in terms of everyday survival and experiences for some of occupational deprivation and alienation continued into the hostel. Despite this, the hostel offered some opportunities to engage or re-engage in personally meaningful occupations. The extent to which this was achieved varied according to personal perceptions, structural factors including hostel routines and staff availability, and associated costs.

Limitations

IPA as an approach has its critics (53, 54) as the double hermeneutic process leads the researcher to draw on their own epistemological background (38) and they may not be aware of all their preconceptions (32). The use of bracketing in this case could been seen as contradictory as researchers' prior experience should be part of the analysis (55). However,

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (32) argue that bracketing should be achievable by being systematic in one's approach to analysis.

Participants self-selected for this study and as such they were relatively motivated. Therefore, the views of residents who might have been less motivated to participate in the research and other aspects of hostel life were not canvassed. This is particularly relevant, as this study attempted to elicit the experiences of a marginalised population, it may be that those who did not volunteer may have been more disenfranchised and could have had important insights to contribute.

Participants were all males, which is more typical of the homeless population in the UK. However, numbers of homeless women are rising but there is a reported lack of research into women and homelessness (56), and understanding their specific occupational experiences should be a focus of future research.

Implications for Practice

This study adds to the evidence base in relation to homeless men and the experience of occupational engagement in the South West of England including occupational adaptation but also deprivation and alienation. It is clear that there is a role for Occupational Therapists to promote an occupational perspective in services that provide support to homeless people. This includes acknowledging the importance of ordinary occupations and developing opportunities for restorative and novel occupations to help mitigate reliance on dark-side occupations. An awareness of the difficulties experienced by people when sleeping rough should encourage occupational therapists to campaign for public places or spaces that provide a break from the intense experience of rough sleeping. Finally, despite residing in the same institution, the participants in this study described very individual occupational experiences

which reinforces the need for occupational therapists to work in a client-centred way with

homeless people.

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Table 1: Participant information at time of interview

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Age	Brief description of circumstances which led up to participant moving into the hostel	Experience of rough sleeping	Time in hostel
Alex	Male	18	He did not give the reasons for him losing his home, but explained that he had slept rough for 6 months prior to coming to the hostel.	6 months	6 weeks

Neil	Male	28	Neil experienced severe depression before he began rough sleeping. He had been 'sofa-surfing' for some time and this became untenable. A few years prior to this Neil's mother had died. Neil had a previously well paid job.	5 nights	6 months
Sean	Male	34	Sean explained that he had been living in hostels since September 2012. Prior to this he had been in the army. Sean stated he had only ever had one 6 month experience of holding onto a tenancy in his life.	Did not give a timescale	5 weeks
Mark	Male	35	Mark explained that he had a relationship breakdown, then lost his job, wrote off his car, and had a 'mental breakdown' prior to living on the streets.	6 weeks	11 months
Bill	Male	61	Bill ran his own business and started to have some physical health problems which were investigated and reported to be stress related. The market collapsed in the UK and he 'lost everything'.	No	3 months

Participants' names have been changed to protect their identity

Table 2: Master and super-ordiante themes in relation to engagement in occupation

Theme 1: Rough sleeping, survival occupations and beyond
Survival occupations
The significance of apparently ordinary occupations
Moving beyond survival occupations
Theme 2: Engaging in occupations; the experience of hostel living
The experience of availability of occupations
Experience of occupational performance for health and well-being
The meaning of rules and regulations in terms of occupational performance
Expanding occupational repertoires

Appendix 1 Complete list of themes from the study

Complete table of master and superordinate themes from the study
Theme 1: Rough Sleeping, survival occupations and beyond
Survival occupations   The significance of apparently ordinary occupations   Moving beyond survival occupations
Theme 2 : Engaging in Occupations; the Experience of Hostel Living
The experience of availability of occupations   Experience of occupational performance for health and well-being   The meaning of rules and regulations in terms of occupational performance   Expanding occupational repertoires
Theme 3: Occupations in Transition

Occupational aspirations
Barriers and enablers for change
Theme 4: Impact of Homelessness on Who I Am
What I know about me, specific occupational identity
Sustaining and changing occupational identities
Theme 5: The Meaning and Significance of Place, Space and Environment
Meaning of environment
Experiences of escape in relation to space and place
The meaning of having your own private space