

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY ON INFECTIOUS DISEASES AMONG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN BERLIN, GERMANY**

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### **Background:**

Poor access to measures of harm reduction and safer sex, imprisonment and origin from high prevalence countries can increase the risk for HIV and viral Hepatitis among people experiencing homelessness (PEH). Valid data as basis for targeted prevention and care in Germany is needed. Therefore, a multicentre cross-sectional sero-behavioural study (POINT-study) among PEH was piloted in Berlin in 2021. As research, apart from its goal to understanding and improving health, also has the potential to cause additional harm to stigmatised and marginalised populations such as PEH and drug users, ethical aspects are the focus of this presentation.

### **Methods:**

The interdisciplinary study team with actors from harm reduction and homeless services, epidemiological research and infectiology enabled awareness from different perspectives throughout the study. Central components of the study were point-of-care-screening, linkage-to-care, language mediation, incentives for respondents and a questionnaire that included questions on the living and working situation of respondents. Study participants were included in the evaluation. Research results were discussed with low threshold service providers to identify practical implications.

### **Results:**

The response was high with all together 216 participants. During evaluation we learned that participants appreciated the free-of-cost test offer, linkage-to-care, available language mediation, incentives and the pleasant and respectful atmosphere during data collection. The need for improvement of awareness about HIV and Hepatitis within homeless services, as well as a closer cooperation between homeless services, harm reduction services and infectiology was identified.

### **Conclusion:**

The study is a step towards better data and direct transfer of research results into practice which enables targeted prevention, access to diagnostic, treatment and care for PEH without reproducing stigma and social exclusion. With this presentation we aim to discuss ethical pitfalls with conference attendees in order to learn and implement learnings in an adapted study design as part of a national rollout.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

*The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.*