

Exploring the connection between women, health and homelessness



Groundswell

Out of homelessness

What I will cover today

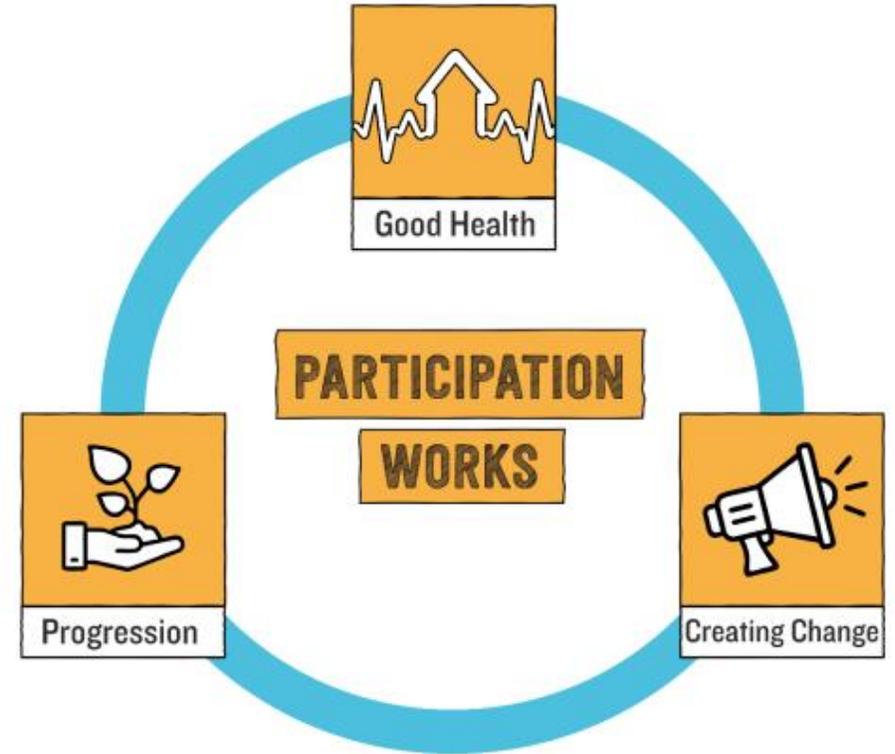
- About Groundswell
 - Why research was important
 - About the research process
 - Main findings of the research – play some of a podcast
- **Trigger warning – bereavement, abuse, mental health, suicide, poverty

About Groundswell?

Our work:

- HHPA – Homeless Health Peer Advocacy
- Insight and Action
- Progression – support staff and volunteer wellbeing

2/3 of staff experienced homelessness before



Why is the research important?

- Women's experiences and pathways into homelessness are often different to men's
- There is research focusing on women and homelessness but not huge amount which focuses exclusively on health – horrific health inequalities

The mean age at death of people experiencing homelessness was 44 years for men, 42 years for women between 2013 and 2017; in comparison, in the general population the mean age at death was 76 years for men and 81 years for women.**

** (N.B average age at death is not the same as life expectancy - these figures compare the average age a person who is currently homeless dies and that of men and women in the general population)

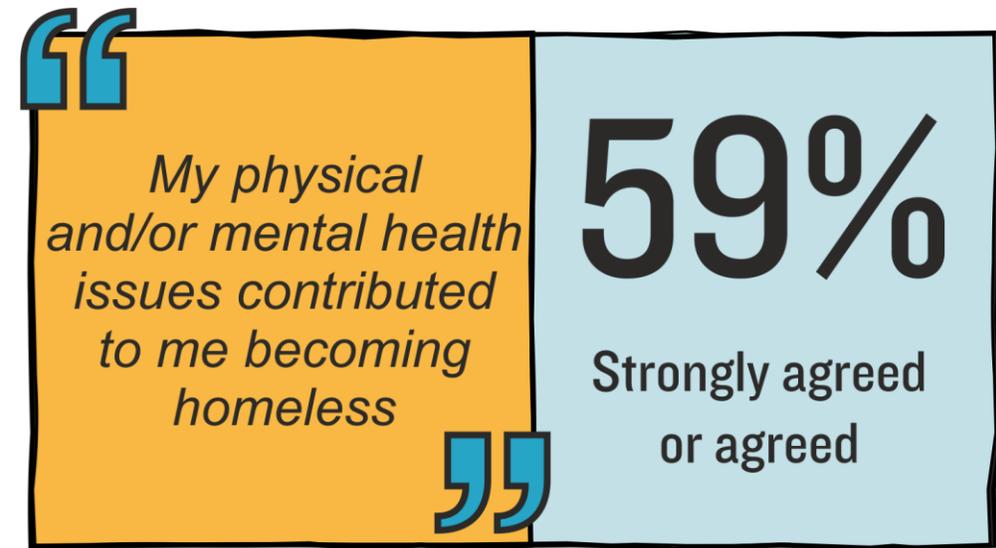
- Few research projects which are peer led on this subject

About the research process

- This peer research project involved women with experience of homelessness – they were involved in all parts of the research including designing, conducting, analysing and making a podcast
- Peer researchers' understanding, empathy and love was a key to the success of the research
- Findings are important but also process conducting the research
- Peer researchers felt it was empowering and therapeutic (and we hope that participants enjoyed the opportunity to talk to someone who had experienced similar issues)
- 77 survey-based interviews with audio recordings and 3 focus groups = 104
- Talked to women across various day centres, hostels and night shelters in London

Becoming homeless

- Often multiple interconnecting reasons for homelessness
- Most cited reasons – relationship breakdown (including family breakdown), **physical health (2nd)** and domestic violence



Physical and mental health issues

- New conditions arose and existing one's made worse by homelessness
- The conditions which showed the biggest increase upon homelessness were issues with joints, bones and muscles, blood conditions, heart conditions and problems with feet

"Well its probably because during the day I have been wandering around...when I used to go to sleep I used to raise my leg like this... raised because I wanted to lose the swelling. And that is sometimes a bit hard when you are trying to do it in a sleeping bag."

74%

were experiencing
physical health
issues



Groundswell

Out of homelessness

Podcast

- Illustrates the connection between women's health and homelessness

“ You are under stress constantly! It means you are very vulnerable...in terms of illnesses and everything. ”

Physical and mental health issues cont...

64%

were experiencing
mental health
issues compared
to 21% of the
general population



- Strong connection between mental and physical health
- Stress caused headaches, hair loss, stomach pain, eye irritation, rapid heartbeat, panic attacks, chest pain and periods to stop
- Mental health issues existed prior to homelessness, however many developed because of their housing situation
- Self-harm and attempted suicide common; 27% of those who needed an ambulance (in the past year) due to self-harm and/or attempted suicide

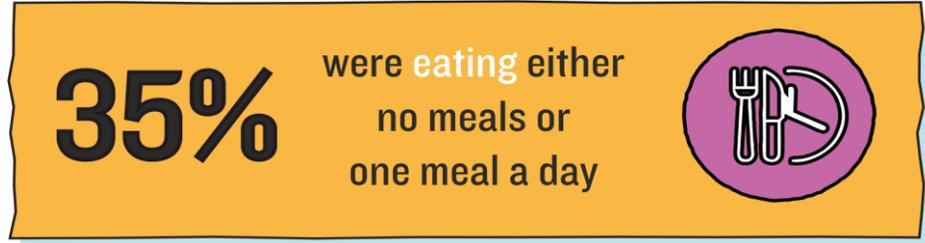
“It was serious.... I wanted to jump off the bridge or jump in front of a train. It was that serious. You get to a point where every door is slammed in front of you.”



Groundswell

Out of homelessness

Factors affecting mental and physical health...



Food – *erratic eating patterns – hard to keep routine*

Hygiene – *“Being unable to afford ... things like tampons, sanitary towels. And I have got a part time job in the morning, not being able to access a place where I can shower because most day centres are open in the morning.”*



Sleep – 46% rarely or never get enough sleep

Some women spoke of no matter how much sleep they got were still tired

Factors affecting health continued...

- **35% felt that domestic/sexual abuse was currently affecting their day to day life**

“That’s when the sexual abuse started. Cos you find yourself living in a house where you’re forced to do things that you don’t understand, or you don’t want to”.

Substance misuse:

- **24% felt an addiction was affecting their day to day life; homelessness was a trigger for addiction for some women**

“Gotta walk about...having to leave shelter at 7am is a big problem. Having nowhere to go in the day encourages me to drink & have nowhere to rest so I go on the buses/trains, even the library.”



Accessing healthcare



“Physical and mental health (of the participant) have deteriorated and it is near impossible to manage symptoms whilst juggling homelessness. Depression and anxiety causing lack of motivation and hopelessness as there is no stability.” (volunteer research)

Other basic needs a priority:

“I can't make appointment. [I need to] wash first and eat first. Survival comes first. Last thing we have as dignity is to keep clean.”

- CATCH 22 - women struggled to get mental health support either because of their addiction and/or housing situation

“I wanted to sign up for CBT but I can't access it as they think have bigger problems they think I need house first. And I can't refer myself as told need caseworker – don't have one as I am squatting.”

Thank you!



 020 7725 2851

 www.groundswell.org.uk

 @ItsGroundswell