

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Stopping the downward spiral: Can volunteers improve the health of homeless Australians?

Homelessness has a devastating impact on physical and mental health – and it's on the rise. Dr Renu Narchal, along with Dr Ahmed Moustafa and Dr Valentine Mukuria, has been granted funding from the Catholic Community Services organisation to investigate the role of volunteers in improving the quality of life of homeless people. This research aims to help health and welfare organisations create better support programs for the homeless.

'Research has shown that homelessness greatly damages the health of individuals,' Dr Narchal says. 'Loneliness, trust issues, anxiety and depression, as well as a range of physical ailments severely decrease homeless people's quality of life. To combat this suffering, we will explore if specially trained volunteers can make a difference in the quality of life in this community.' It is hoped that this research will benefit the homeless, their families, community organisations, and the wider Australian population by helping those most in need.

To gather the needed information, Dr Narchal and her team will spend months working with the Catholic Community Services support program for the homeless. There will be two phases of data collection: phase 1 will comprise collected data prior to volunteer support, and phase 2 will collect data after the participants have experienced six months of regular contact with trained volunteers. Participants will convene for recorded interview sessions to enable an understanding of their experience of homelessness. Three focus group recordings will be transcribed and have thematic analysis conducted. Pre-test and post-test questionnaires will measure the effects of volunteer support on loneliness, anxiety, and other measures of quality of life. It is expected that the support of volunteers will improve this quality of life.



The data will be used to evaluate current homeless support services, volunteer training resources in NSW, and find ways to reduce homelessness and improve the quality of life for all Australians. By identifying the paths leading to homelessness, this study could also be used to divert those most at risk into better care.

Project Title: On the brim: Experience of homelessness

Funding has been set at: \$20,900

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