

AI Acknowledgement Supplement

Final year project

An investigation into attitudes towards the homeless in Irish society

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date

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**National College of Ireland****Project Submission Sheet**

Student Name: Amy Burke

Student ID: 20125101

Programme: Psychology

Year: three

Module: Final
Project
(BAHPSYCHNCI3)

Lecturer: Dr. Barry Coughlan

**Submission Due
Date:**

31st of July 2025

Project Title: An Investigation into Attitudes towards the Homeless in Irish Society

Word Count: 6,400

I hereby certify that the information contained in this (my submission) is information pertaining to research I conducted for this project. All information other than my own contribution will be fully referenced and listed in the relevant bibliography section at the rear of the project.

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Signature: Amy Burke

Date: 31st of July 2025

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Name: Amy Burke

Student Number X20125101

Degree for which thesis is submitted:

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank everyone who completed my survey and to those who helped to share it with their friends and family. I would also like to thank my supervisor Conor Thornberry for your guidance and reassurance when I became overwhelmed. I would also like to thank Jonathon Lambert and all the staff from the library thank you for your patience and support.

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Abstract

This current study sought to gain insight into the Irish public's attitudes towards the homeless. In addition, this present study aimed to determine if there was a difference between different demographics. Moreover, this research sought to apply the contact hypothesis to examine whether personal contact with the homeless population can impact the population's attitudes. The Attitudes towards the homeless inventory (ATHI) was administered to ($n=142$) through social media consisting of 11 questions on a Likert scale. This survey asked various questions regarding homelessness. Findings revealed that the younger group had less favourable attitudes towards the homeless compared to the older group. Females had more positive attitudes towards the homeless population. This study also found participants who have experienced homelessness scored significantly higher than participants who have not experienced homelessness. Findings also indicate that participants who knew someone who was homeless scored significantly higher than those who do not. There was a difference in socioeconomic status with higher than middle income scoring significantly lower than lower income and lower middle income. There was no difference in different levels of education. Findings add to prior research in the Irish context. Results challenge previous literature that younger individuals would have more favourable attitudes. Findings also indicate that personal contact is important in shaping attitudes towards groups. However, further research should focus on how vicarious contact can influence broader social networks. This research has implications for stakeholders, awareness campaigns, homeless services, and housing.

Keywords: ATHI, homelessness, Irish context, the contact hypothesis

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Introduction

Background

Homelessness is a complex social and public health issue. According to Whiting (2024), as of 2023 Ireland has the 5th largest population of homeless individuals. In addition, according to Deloitte (2024) Dublin is one of the most expensive cities to rent in Europe. Moreover, a report revealed a 5.7% significant increase in rents in 2024 (Daft.*ie*, 2024). Shortfalls in housing supply has been noted as an issue contributing to the housing crisis (Ashe., 2024). The Irish government has attempted to control rental increases. However, research suggests that rent controls can negatively impact housing supply. For instance, Kren et al. (2024) found that rent controls are associated with market exit and an increase in sale listing and a decrease in rental listings. There are also significant concerns regarding the potential shortfall in meeting projected housing supply targets (Bergin & Egan, 2024). This has resulted in an increase of people becoming homeless in the last decade.

Homeless charities across Ireland have released reports on the increase in homelessness. For example, a report by Focus Ireland (2021) compared figures from 2014 and 2020. This revealed there was 2,300 individuals in emergency accommodation in 2014. However, according to this report there was a notable increase with figures rising to 6,000 homeless individuals in 2020. This upward trend has continued with the Central Statistics Office (2024) reporting that on census night 03 April 2022 there was 10,321 individuals in emergency homeless accommodation, thirty of whom were rough sleepers. According to the census report conducted by the Irish Government in collaboration with the Central Statistics Office (2024), Males represented (60%) and females represented (40%). Moreover, Dublin had 70% of the homeless population. In addition, Focus Ireland (2023) and Simon Communities of Ireland (2023) reported a record number of almost 4,000 children

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experiencing homelessness. These consistent increases in the homeless population underscores the severity of the situation.

The Irish Housing Act 1988 defines homelessness as “there is no accommodation that, in the opinion of local authority, you and any other person who normally lives with you or who might reasonably be expected to live with you, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation accommodation, or you are living in a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and you are living there because you have no suitable accommodation or you are, in the opinion of the local authority, unable to provide accommodation from your own resources” (Citizen’s Information Board, 2014). Local authorities use this definition to assess individual’s needs. However, under Ireland’s current narrow measurement of homelessness, these numbers exclude the hidden homeless. The hidden homeless refers to people in short term accommodation, staying with friends or sleeping rough (Hearne & McSweeney, 2023). While official numbers have already been staggering, Hearne and McSweeney (2023) estimates that if the hidden homeless were included the number of would increase to 23,881 indicating the true scale of the situation could be a greater concern.

Impact of attitudes on homeless

There is much research on Societal attitudes, whether negative or positive, can impact members of marginalized groups. For instance, individual attitudes can impact individual actions (Ajzen & Cote, 2010; Ajzen et al., 2018; Bentler & Speckart, 1979). This in turn effects homeless individuals and families in relation to facing discrimination, isolation, and health disparities (European Commission, 2025; Richards and Kuhn, 2022). One key reason why people experiencing homelessness face health disparities is the stigma they experience when accessing health care (Canham et al., 2024; Omerov et al., 2019; Reilly et al., 2022). Thus, some individuals experiencing homelessness avoid services and in turn experience poorer health outcomes (Reilly et al., 2022). For example, Ivers et al. (2019) found mortality

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rates among the homeless ranges from 3-10 times higher than the general population. In addition to physical health, Homeless persons are at increased risk of mental health disorders compared to the general population (Barry et al., 2024; Padgett 2020; Ingram et al. 2023) Although research indicates a bi-directional relationship between mental health with Sandra Feodor Nilsson et al. (2023) suggesting it can be a cause and a consequence. Research on discrimination and stigma has revealed a negative effect on marginalized groups and their mental health (Emmer et al., 2024). on the other hand, positive attitudes are associated with sympathy towards the homeless. This can increase the general populations willingness to help and increase support for policy to help the homeless (Agans et al., 2011; Gross & Wronski, 2019). Furthermore, findings from European research suggests that in general people have positive attitudes towards the homeless. However, there are significant differences depending on the region (Petit et al., 2019), suggesting that attitudes are shaped by additional contextual factors.

Demographic differences

One contextual factor may be demographic difference. For instance, there is much research into gender differences in generosity. For instance, a meta- analysis by Bilén et al. (2021) found a small but significant difference in generosity, with females being significantly more likely to give more than males. However, the authors of this meta-analysis noted an issue with underpowered sample size in most studies. Nevertheless, similar findings were seen in research on levels of empathy between males and females (Gouveia et al., 2012; Chen et al. 2014; Kamas and Preston 2020; Greenberg et al., 2022; McDonald and Kanske 2023; Mestre et al., 2009). Research conducted by Toro et al. (2007) found females were more sympathetic to the homeless. However, this survey was conducted over the phone which may have created social desirability bias.

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Another demographic factor that has been researched, is socio-economic status. However, research into socio economic status and attitudes towards the homeless has been less consistent as a predictor of attitudes towards the homeless (Krajewska-Kuřak et al., 2016). Nonetheless, some research indicates that members of higher SES place more importance on identities related to their SES more than any other identities (Easterbrook et al., 2019). Additionally, higher SES has been associated with ‘welfare Eurosceptics.’ In other words, higher SES is linked to opposition to stronger EU welfare (Eick, 2024). The authors argue that one possible reason is ‘perceived’ financial burden of programs such as, minimum income scheme. Similarly, Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) found that higher socio-economic status opposed redistributive policies. Moreover, research has revealed individuals of lower SES exhibit increased prosocial behaviours (Robinson & Piff, 2017). For example, lower SES was associated with giving to charities at higher rates (Piff et al., 2010). Likewise, findings by Kraus et al. (2010) reveal that greater empathy was linked to individuals of lower SES.

Moreover, education has yielded conflicting results. although some research has indicated having an undergraduate degree or some level of college education may predict negative attitudes towards homelessness (Agans et al., 2011; Masson & Lester, 2003). Research has also found educational approaches can also be utilized to foster positive attitudes towards the homeless (Gardner & Emory, 2018; Wisehart et al., 2013). On the other hand, older research has found greater educational attainment and more liberal political orientations were more likely to link homelessness to structural causes (Lee, Jones, & Lewis, 1990). However, these results may be due to political orientation rather than educational attainment.

Research conducted on age has consistently found that younger individuals were associated with more positive attitudes towards the homeless Toro et al., (2007) and empathy

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levels (Ferguson et al., 2024). Some researchers argue that levels of empathy are not associated with age but rather age cohorts. For instance, research comparing generational cohorts found millennials (born 1982) put more importance on, fame, money, and image. In contrast, this study found baby boomers (born 1946–1961) put more emphasis on community involvement and empathy when they were the same age (Twenge, 2012). Additionally, when researchers examined longitudinal research findings suggest that empathy does not decline with age (Grühn et al., 2008). In addition, research has indicated that empathy can be context dependent (Wieck & Kunzmann, 2015). Nevertheless, research suggests that older adults display lower levels of cognitive empathy across self-report and empathy accuracy measures. However, this research has also noted that this is context depended (Beadle & de la Vega, 2019). Furthermore, a report conducted by (National youth council of Ireland, 2024) found that 76% of Irish 18- 22 years old see housing as a key issue of concern. Moreover, this was prevalent with young people who are privately renting. Tolerance has been investigated and found that young people have in general become more tolerant compared to their parents and grandparents (Janmaat & Keating, 2017).

The Contact hypothesis

A contextual factor that has been extensively researched is experience with disadvantaged groups. for example, the contact exposure hypothesis, first introduced by Allport (1954), suggests that quality interactions with outgroups can improve attitudes towards them by fostering understanding and highlighting shared traits. Over the decades, this theory has been enhanced and empirically supported (Pettigrew et al., 2011), with a meta-analysis revealing that intergroup contact can reliably reduce prejudice. Allport (1954) emphasized that specific conditions must be met, including equal status, common goals, and shared traits. Research conducted by Agans et al. (2011) found that individuals who have experienced homelessness were 70% more likely to sympathise with the homeless. However,

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this may be due to equal status and common goals or just shared lived experience, other research found that individuals who volunteered or had high levels of exposure with the homeless either changed or had supportive attitudes towards the homeless (Crowley, 2022; Hocking & Lawrence, 2000; Smith et al., 2023)

Research has investigated various forms of contact and its effects on prejudice. For instance, direct (face-to-face) has had positive results with different racial and religious groups (Berger et al., 2016; Bond et al., 2023). However, results from a meta-analysis conducted by Hsieh et al. (2021) found that direct contact-based interventions are more effective with primary or secondary school students. Nevertheless, other forms of contact have been shown to be effective. For example, Indirect contact which includes extended, vicarious, and parasocial contact. Mazziotta et al., 2011; Wright et al (1997) found that observing (vicarious contact) in-group and outgroup friendships with minorities reduced negative attitudes. This is significant, as research conducted by Bracegirdle et al. (2021) revealed that knowing someone in an outgroup can influence individuals' attitudes but also shape attitudes of others through communicated social norms, potentially triggering a ripple effect that reduces prejudice within broader social networks. Additionally, imagined contact (Crisp et al., 2010) and the introduction of TV characters (parasocial contact) (Schiappa et al., 2006) has been associated with a reduction in intergroup anxiety.

The current study

Ireland is currently facing a growing housing crisis, with rising rents (Daft.ie, 2024), concerns over housing shortages (Ashe., 2024; Bergin & Egan, 2024; Kren et al. 2024). As a result, homelessness has consistently been increasing (Central Statistics Office 2024; Focus Ireland, 2021; Focus Ireland 2023; Hearne and McSweeney (2023; Simon Communities of Ireland 2023). These trends underscore urgent need for policy reform and increased public investment in housing, homeless services, and awareness campaigns. Furthermore, it is vital

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that public attitudes are supportive as this can influence policy and services for homeless individuals (Gross & Wronski, 2019). In addition to attitudes influencing policy, as mentioned above, negative attitudes can impact homeless individuals mental/physical health, how they receive healthcare, and how the public interacts with the homeless. Understanding the factors that contribute to these attitudes is therefore essential.

While previous research has investigated various factors in relation to shaping attitudes and behaviours, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and education levels. On the other hand, there is a lack of research in the Irish context. Given the ongoing housing crisis, it is of most importance to research the Irish populations attitudes, as evidenced based solutions depend on the full understanding of social dynamics. For instance, research suggests that attitudes vary across regions (Petit et al., 2019). Moreover, research conducted on the contact hypothesis has focused on levels of exposure and how volunteering with the homeless influences attitudes towards the homeless. This has left a gap in the literature concerning how personal relationships, more specifically having a friend or family who experienced homelessness may shape these attitudes. According to Allport (1954) some ideal conditions of the contact hypothesis such as equal status, common goals, and shared traits are important when reducing prejudice. Therefore, exploring friendships and close relationships with the homeless may significantly impact how this effects attitudes towards the homeless both for individuals and broader social networks. Previous research has shown cross group friendships to be powerful in other contexts (Davies et al., 2011). Exploring this through the contact hypothesis will help in informing public education and advocacy campaigns. Additionally, contact with disadvantaged groups has been associated with motivation to improve inequality (Di Bernardo et al., 2019). Although some research indicates the public have supportive attitudes, for example, comparisons of two surveys decades apart have shown that the public attitudes are increasingly more compassionate to homeless individuals,

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(Tsai et al., 2017). The researchers involved in this study argue that because of the economic hardship experienced by many in 2008. This in turn, increased compassion and altered how the public views homelessness. conversely, a survey conducted in Ireland, by the Centre for Homelessness Impact (2022) found a slight decrease in sympathy from previous surveys. Notably, recent research suggests that individuals experiencing homelessness still face safety fears (Crisis (2020; Teale et al., 2024)

Thesis aims and Hypothesis

Giving this, the current study's overarching aim is to investigate demographic factors (e.g. age socioeconomic status, gender, education level) in Irish society. While filling in a gap in the literature by applying the contact hypothesis to explore how personal relationships can influence attitudes. To achieve this, the researcher has hypothesized

(1) There will be a correlation between age and ATHI scores. Additionally, there will be a significant difference in attitudes toward the homeless between younger participants and older participants, with younger participants scoring higher. Age will be operationalized as the participants' self-reported age in years and split into two groups based on the mean age. According to Johnson et al. (2022) described attitudes as mental assessments that can predict and influence behaviour. Additionally, these mental evaluations can be influenced by factors such as biology and cultural influences. attitudes towards the homeless will be operationalized by measuring the scores on the Attitudes Towards the Homeless inventory with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes.

Hypothesis (2) There will be a significant difference in attitudes towards the homeless between genders, with females scoring higher than males. Gender will be operationalized as the participants' self-reporting male, female, or other

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Hypothesis (3) There will be a difference in individuals who know someone personally who has been homeless, with individuals who knew someone who was homeless scoring higher. Additionally, individuals who have experienced homeless will score higher. This will be operationalized by participants answering yes or no to two questions about their experience of homelessness and knowing someone who is/was homeless.

Hypothesis (4) There will be a difference in attitudes toward the homeless between different socio-economic status levels, with higher socio-economic status scoring lower. This will be operationalized by the participants' self-reporting whether they are of: Lower income, Lower-middle income, Middle income, Higher than middle income, prefer not to say.

Hypothesis (5) There will be a difference in attitudes toward the homeless between different levels of education, this will be operationalized by participants self-reporting whether they have completed; Less than leaving certification, Leaving certification/level 5/6 certification. Undergraduate degree Postgraduate degree or higher. Prefer not to say.

Methodology

Participants:

The sample of this current study yielded ($n=142$). This sample consisted of 60 Men, women represented 81 of the participants, and one participant indicated they would prefer not to say. Participants age ranged from 18 to 78 years old with. The mean age was 36.86 ($SD=12.39$). All participants in this sample were required to be at least 18 and living in Ireland. Participants were recruited using snowball convenience sampling. The survey was dispersed with a short introduction to the study with the researcher's friends and family via WhatsApp groups and social media. Participants were also asked to share the survey link amongst anyone who met the inclusion criteria to take part in this study (see appendix A).

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Design & data analysis

This present study utilized IBM Spss version 28 to analysis data. A quantitative cross-sectional design was used in this current study. Independent (predictor) variables included, age, gender, experience of being homeless, whether they knew someone who has experienced homelessness, education levels, and socio- economic status. The dependent or criterion variable was the attitudes towards homeless Inventory (ATHI) Scores. To determine whether there was a corelation between age and Attitudes towards homelessness a spearman's correlation was conducted as age was not normally distributed. Additionally, estimated sample size was obtained by using G*power analysis. Consequently, it was estimated that 84 participants were needed. Following this, age was divided into two groups young versus old based on the mean age. To establish if there was a difference between the two age groups, Mann Whitney U was performed. This required a sample size of 53 participants for each group. Next, to determine whether there was a difference between males and females an independent T-test was conducted. According to G*power analysis a sample size of 51 in each group was required. Furthermore, an independent t-test was performed to establish whether individuals who have been homeless and have not, have differences in attitudes scores. Additionally, to explore attitude scores in individuals who know someone who is/was homeless and individuals who do not know someone who is/was homeless an independent T-tests was conducted. To investigate differences in socio economic groups a one way between groups Anova was performed. The sample size from G*power analysis was estimated at 200 participants. In addition, another one-way between groups Anova was conducted for education groups and an estimated 180 participants was needed.

Measures

Demographics

All participants were asked 6 questions to gather information on demographics in this study for statistical analysis. Participants were asked to report their age, gender, Socio-

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economic status, education level, whether they knew anyone who has been homeless, and whether they have been homeless themselves. (see appendix E)

Attitudes Towards Homeless Inventory (ATHI)

Participants attitude towards the homeless were evaluated by using the attitudes towards homeless inventory (ATHI) (Kingree & Daves, 1997) (see appendix F). this survey consists of 11 multi-dimensional was developed from previous research on homelessness, stigmatization, casual attribution, attitudes towards mental illness which inspired the four subscales in the inventory. which consisted of personal causation, affiliation, and solutions. Kingree and Daves (1997) ran four studies with college students to establish initial validation to the attitudes towards the homeless inventory. study 1 conducted a factor reliability analysis and resulted in reducing a 27 item to a 11-item measurement with four subscales. Additionally, this provided construct validity due to its association between subscales and demographics. Results from study 2 and 3 also provided validation for the factor structure and construct validity by predicting ways with personality and other attitudinal variables. in addition, study 3 also discovered significant differences on the ATHI centred on whether participants had faced homelessness themselves. Lastly, study 4 established predictive validity by displaying that ATHI could be utilized to determine changes in attitudes.

The attitude towards the homeless inventory consists of 11 questions that gives respondents 6 options to specify their level agreement or disagreement. These options include Strongly agree, Agree, Unsure but probably agree, Unsure but probably disagree, Disagree, and Strongly disagree. When scoring each of the four subscales higher scores signify more positive attitudes towards the homeless and lower scores indicate more stigmatizing attitudes. Statements 1,2,3,4,7,8 and 9 are reversed scored such as, (6=1) (5=2) (4=3) (3=4) (2=5) (1=6). This current study will be using total scores to assess attitudes. Questions 1, 7, and 8 will not be recoded along with the other specified items so that higher PC scores indicate that

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personal causes are not responsible for homelessness. This current study yielded a Cronbach alpha of .538.

Procedure

After considering potential ethical issues such as, potential emotional harm and ensuring anonymity. The researcher addressed the potential emotional harm by including support phone numbers if participants experience any distress. Moreover, this research did not include any identifiable information and Microsoft forms was set to not save email addresses etc. Following this, the researcher successfully obtained ethical approval from the National College of Ireland ethics committee and an ethical number was obtained (04112024x20125101) see appendix B.

Participants were first sent a brief introduction to the research and survey link via WhatsApp (see appendix A). when participants clicked on the survey link, they were then asked to read carefully a detailed information sheet before continuing to the survey (see appendix C). Furthermore, to proceed participants were asked to indicate their consent by selecting yes on the consent form (see appendix D). next, to gather demographical information, participants were asked a range of questions (see appendix E). following this, to establish attitudes towards the homeless scores, participants were required to choose their level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree (see appendix F). Participants were asked to read a debrief sheet before submitting their answers (see appendix G). finally, participants were asked to forward on the survey link.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Categorical variables

The current study yielded a sample size of 142 (n=42) participants. Men made up 42.3% of the sample and women made up 57.0% of the sample and .7% indicated they

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preferred not to say. Other demographics included Participants who have personally experienced homeless, Participants who knew someone who has been homeless, what education level participants have completed, and what socio-economic status best describes their situation (please refer to table one for more details.)

Table 1

Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency	Valid %
Gender		
Male	60	42.3%
Female	81	57.0%
Prefer not to say	1	.7%
Participants who have been homeless		
Yes	17	12%
No	125	88%
Participants who knew someone who is/has been homeless		
Yes	55	38.7%
No	87	61.3%
Education level		
Less than leaving certification	12	8.5%
Leaving certification/ level 5/6	50	35.2%
Undergraduate degree	37	26.1%
Postgraduate degree or higher	42	29.6%
Prefer not to say	1	.7%
Socioeconomic status		
Lower income	22	15.5%
Lower middle income	28	19.7%
Middle income	49	34.5%
Upper middle income	28	19.7%
Higher than middle income	10	7%
Prefer not to say	5	3.5%

Note. Valid percent reflects percentage of total responses

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Continuous variables

The current study includes two continuous variables, age and attitudes towards the homeless scores. Age information was gathered by asking respondents to self-report.

Whereas attitudes towards the homeless scores was gathered using the attitudes towards the homeless inventory measure. This current study found the mean age was 36.86 and the mean attitudes towards the homeless score was 44.84 (see table 2 for further details)

Table 2

Descriptive statistics – continuous variables

Variable	<i>M</i> [95% CI]	<i>SD</i>	Range
Age	36.86[34.8-38.9]	12.39	18-78
Attitudes towards the homeless scores	44.84[43.69-45.99]	6.9	21-60

Note. *M*- Mean; CI= Confidence intervals. *SD*= Standard deviation.

Inferential statistics

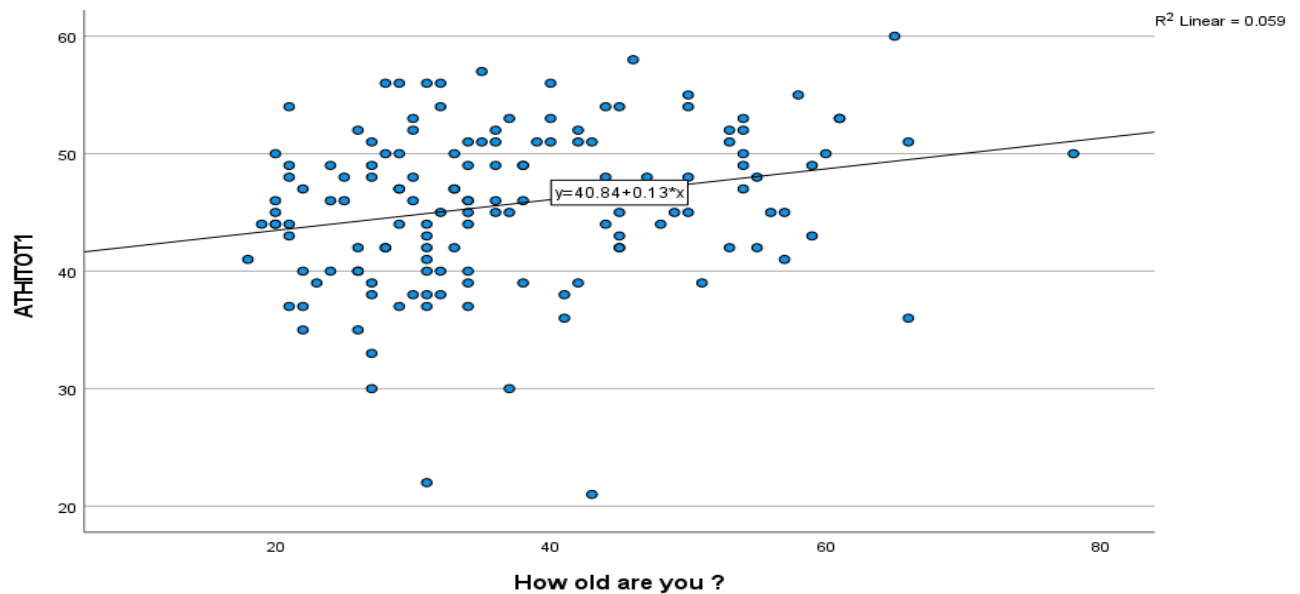
Relationship between age and attitudes towards the homeless

First, the connection between age and attitude scores was investigated. As a result of preliminary analysis, age was not normally distributed. Consequently, a Spearman's Rho Correlation Coefficient was utilized as an alternative. There was a weak positive relationship between variables ($r = .24$, $n = 142$, $p .004$). This means that the two variables (age & ATHI scores) shared 5.9% variance in common. (please refer to fig 1)

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Figure 1

Age and attitudes towards the homeless scores trend



Note. ATHITOT = attitudes towards the homeless inventory scores. Each dot represents one participant.

Differences in attitudes towards the homeless scores and age group's

Preliminary analysis indicated age was non-normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk, $p < .05$). As a result, an independent t-test was not appropriate, and it was necessary to run a non-parametric test, the Mann Whitney U-test. Age was split into two groups according to the overall mean age of 37, group 1 were under 37 and group 2 were above 37. Results indicate that there was a significant difference in scores between both groups. Group 1 ($Md = 62.26$, $n = 79$) scored significantly lower than, group 2 ($Md = 83.1$, $n = 63$), $u = 4918.500$, $z = -3.001$, $p = .003$, $r = -0.25$ which revealed a small effect.

Differences between attitudes towards the homeless in males and females

Levene's test for equality of variance was not statistically significant for attitudes towards the homeless in male and female groups ($p = .745$) as a result the data does not violate

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the assumptions of homogeneity. Test of normality was observed as normally distributed for gender and attitudes towards the homeless. An independent T-test was done to establish whether there was a difference in attitudes towards the homeless scores between men and women. There was a significant difference between scores, with men ($m = 43.33$, $SD = 7.33$) scoring significantly lower than women ($m = 45.81$, $SD = 6.36$), $t(139) = -2.14$, $p = .034$, two-tailed the magnitude of means (mean difference = -2.48 , 95% CI : -4.76 to $-.19$) was small (Cohen's $d = .36$).

Differences in participants who have been homeless and who have not

Levene's test for equality of variance was non-significant for attitudes towards the homeless in male and female groups ($p = .333$) as a result the data does not violate the assumptions of homogeneity. Test of normality were observed as normally distributed for gender and attitudes towards the homeless. An independent T-test was performed to establish whether there was a difference in attitudes towards the homeless scores between individuals who has been homeless and have not. Results reveal there was a significant difference in scores between groups. Participants who have not been homeless scoring significantly lower ($Md = 44.28$, $n = 125$, $SD = 6.95$) than participants who have been homeless ($Md = 48.94$, $n = 17$, $SD = 5.1$), $t(140) = -2.66$, $p = .009$, two-tailed. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -4.66 , 95% CI : -8.12 to -1.2) was medium (Cohen's $d = .68$).

Differences in participants who know someone who was/is homeless and who do not

Levene's test for equality of variance was non-significant for attitudes towards the homeless in groups who knew someone who has been homeless and have not ($p = .839$) as a result the data does not violate the assumptions of homogeneity. Test of normality were observed as normally distributed for both groups. An independent T-test was performed to establish whether there was a difference in attitudes towards the homeless scores between individuals who did not know someone who was homeless (group1) and who has known

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someone who is homeless (group 2). Group 1 scored significantly lower ($Md=43.23$, $n=87$, $SD=6.81$) than group 2 ($Md=47.38$, $n=55$, $SD=6.34$), $t(140) = -3.63$, $p = <.001$, two-tailed. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -4.15, 95% CI : -6.41 to -1.9) was medium (Cohen's $d = .62$).

Differences in attitudes towards the homeless between socio economic status

A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were a difference in attitudes scores between different socio-economic status. Socioeconomic status was divided into five groups (lower-income, lower middle income, middle income, upper middle income, and higher than middle income). There was a significant difference in attitude scores for the five socio-economic groups, $F(5, 13) = 2.42$, $p = .039$. The effect size indicated a small difference in attitude scores ($\eta^2 = .08$). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for higher than middle income ($M = 39.30$, $SD = 10.17$) was significantly lower $p = .042$ than lower income ($M = 46.91$, $SD = 6.98$). there was also a significant difference in attitude scores with lower middle income ($M = 46.79$, $SD = 5.37$) scoring significantly higher $p = .036$ than higher than middle income. There was no statistically significant difference in mean scores between higher than middle income and middle income ($p = .266$) there was also no difference in mean scores between higher than middle income and upper income ($p = .291$). (please see Fig2)

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Figure 2

Differences between all socio-economic status



Differences in mean scores in education

A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a difference in attitudes scores between four education groups (less than leaving certification, leaving certification level 5/6, undergraduate degree, post graduate degree or higher) one participant indicated prefer not to say and was removed. There was no statistically significant difference in attitude scores across all groups, $F(3, 137) = .404, p = .750$

Discussion

In this current study, the relationship between personal contact with homeless individuals and demographic factors was examined to identify which factors are associated with favourable/unfavourable attitudes. The current study aimed to add to the body of literature and clarify previous inconsistent findings. Additionally, the current study sought to explore how personal contact can impact attitudes towards the homeless in Irish society.

In support of the first hypothesis, results reveal there was a positive correlation between attitude scores and age. Additionally, upon further investigation, there was a small difference between participants who were under 37, having lower attitude scores than participants above 37. Thus, the researcher rejects the null hypothesis. However, this hypothesis was only partially supported. In other words, young adults have unfavourable

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attitudes compared to older adults, which is contrary to expectations as Toro et al., (2007) found younger individuals were more sympathetic towards the homeless. Additionally, this contradicts previous research that suggests that older adults have lower levels of cognitive empathy. This is a shocking finding as according to (National youth council of Ireland, 2024) most 18- 22-year-olds see housing as a key issue which is incongruent with having unfavourable attitudes towards the homeless. This may be explained by the context ((Beadle & de la Vega, 2019; Wieck & Kunzmann, 2015). For instance, when researchers examined generational differences, values have changed (Twenge, 2012). Exposure to celebrities through media correlates with a change of education aspirations (Alero Aderonke & Toyin Adinlewa, 2021) and the value young people put on the community (Twenge, 2012). In addition, older participants may have had more experience with homelessness. For example, in this current study age was positively correlated with having been homeless and having a friend or family member who has experienced homelessness.

There was support for hypothesis two, as expected, Females scored significantly higher on the ATHI than males. Thus, the researcher accepts the alternative hypothesis. In other words, findings suggest that female participants had more favourable attitudes towards the homeless. This is consistent with previous psychological research that indicates females are more empathetic (Bilén et al. 2021; Gouveia et al., 2012; chen et al. 2014; Kamas and Preston 2020; Greenberg et al., 2022; Mestre et al., 2009) and sympathetic to the homeless (Toro et al., 2007). Differences in levels of empathy between females and males may explain these results. This finding strengthens results from Bilén et al. (2021 who criticized research for underpowered sample size as this research reached the adequate number of participants.

Findings also found support for the third hypothesis, there was a medium difference between participants who knew someone who was homeless scoring significantly higher than participants who did not know a homeless person. As a result, the researchers will accept the

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alternative hypothesis. This is to say that having direct contact with a homeless person can affect attitude scores. Thus, having more favourable attitudes towards the homeless. This finding gives support for the contact hypothesis introduced by Allport (1954). The result is also consistent with previous research (Bracegirdle et al. 2021; Hocking & Lawrence, 2000; Smith et al., 2023). Furthermore, Crowley, (2022) found close to a medium difference between people who volunteered and those that haven't. One explanation of why this present study found a higher difference is because according to Alport (1954) the optimal conditions are common goals, shared traits, and viewing each other as equal which may be present in friendships and family connections (Davies et al., 2011; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Wright et al 19979. Additionally, this may help to explain results from. Agans et al. (2011) as results also found that individuals who experienced homelessness had higher scores in the ATHI scores.

The current study also found support for individuals with higher socio-economic status would have unfavourable attitudes towards the homeless. Therefore, the researcher will accept the alternative hypothesis. Findings found significant difference, with higher than middle income scoring significantly lower than lower income and lower middle income., stated differently, participants who had higher income had more unfavourable attitudes towards the homeless. This is consistent with previous research (Piff et al., 2010) and Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) who found that higher socio-economic status opposed redistributive policies This is also congruent with research that indicates that individuals with lower SES display more prosocial behaviours Robinson & Piff, 2017) and greater empathy (Kraus et al. 2010) one possible explanation to why individuals of higher SES had less favourable attitudes could be due to perceived financial burden (Eick, 2024).

Finally, hypothesis 5 was not supported. Therefore, the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis. There was no significant difference between different levels of education. The finding suggests that attitudes towards the homeless are relatively consistent regardless

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of educational attainment, indicating that education level is not a key factor in shaping attitudes towards the homeless. This finding does not align with previous research that indicated that educational attainment could predict negative attitudes towards the homeless (Agans et al., 2011 and Masson & Lester, 2003). It is possible that other variables such as political orientation may be more influential (Lee, Jones, & Lewis, 1990). The absence of significant differences found in education level may be attributed to the field of study participants undertook. It is possible that differences could emerge if the field of study is considered. For instance, researcher conducted by Maximiano-Barreto et al. (2020) found that factors such as field of study and years practiced in the field were associated with empathy levels.

Strengths and Limitations

To the researcher's knowledge there has not been a study investigating whether personal relationships can impact attitudes towards the homeless. Moreover, this survey was anonymous which may have minimised the risk of social desirability bias. Aside from age, this study yielded mostly normal distributed data. Furthermore, using G*power analysis this study reached the acceptable sample for hypothesis 1,2, and 3. However, this research is not without its limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of this research means causation can not be established. Additionally, for hypothesis 4 and 5 the sample size was underpowered and did not reach the acceptable sample size of 200 participants. Next, there are several limitations regarding questions asked in this current study. Participants were asked whether they had a friend or family member who has experienced homelessness. However, this research did not establish the strength of these personal relationships. regarding socioeconomic status, participants may have been uncertain how to categorise their socioeconomic. Consequently, it may be beneficial to give an option of yearly salaries.

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Finally, results from a Cronbach alpha analysis produced an unacceptable score for the attitudes towards the homeless inventory scale.

Suggestions for future research and implications

This study used a cross-sectional design which may be beneficial for preliminary investigation. However, to establish causation future research should utilize longitudinal design to establish whether attitudes towards the homeless change over the life course. Additionally, it would be advantageous to conduct experimental research to investigate how observing in-group and out-group relationships can affect individual attitudes and social circles. Development of a new attitudes towards the homeless scale due to the poor reliability score would be advantageous. In addition, future research should develop a contact scale to investigate the strength of the relationships between participants and homeless friends and family. Conducting a mixed method approach may also be valuable to gain insights into whether personal relationships must be close ones to make an impact. Moreover, according to the contact hypothesis positive parasocial or vicarious contact may reduce prejudice. Therefore, research should explore indirect contact and parasocial social media contact with the homeless. Most importantly, future research should investigate homeless individual's experience with the public to establish whether the experience of homeless individuals match peoples self-reported attitudes.

Awareness campaigns should encourage contact with homeless individuals. For instance, promoting stories and testimonies from the homeless or previously homeless individuals may reduce prejudice. For instance, Vegt et al., (2024) found that interactive storytelling environments can be crucial in reducing stigma in health-related contexts. Moreover, meta-analytic findings reveal that narratives constructed from a first-person point of view is superior in reducing stigma in mental health (Zhuang and Guidry 2022). One such program is This is my brave (TIMB) which uses personal stories to combat stigma towards

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individuals with mental health challenges this can be affectively adapted to foster supportive attitudes towards the homeless by giving individuals a platform to tell their stories in a humanizing and relatable way. TIMB has received empirical support with control trials supporting its use (Kosyluk et al. 2020). Much of the participants in this study were of college age. Therefore, it may be advantageous to implement programs like TIMB in higher level institutions. On a policy level the definition of homelessness should be updated as the definition being used is almost four decades old and does not consider the hidden homeless (Hearne & McSweeney, 2023). Additionally, it is vital the department of housing and the minister for housing ensures that the housing supply progresses under the housing for all goals (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024)

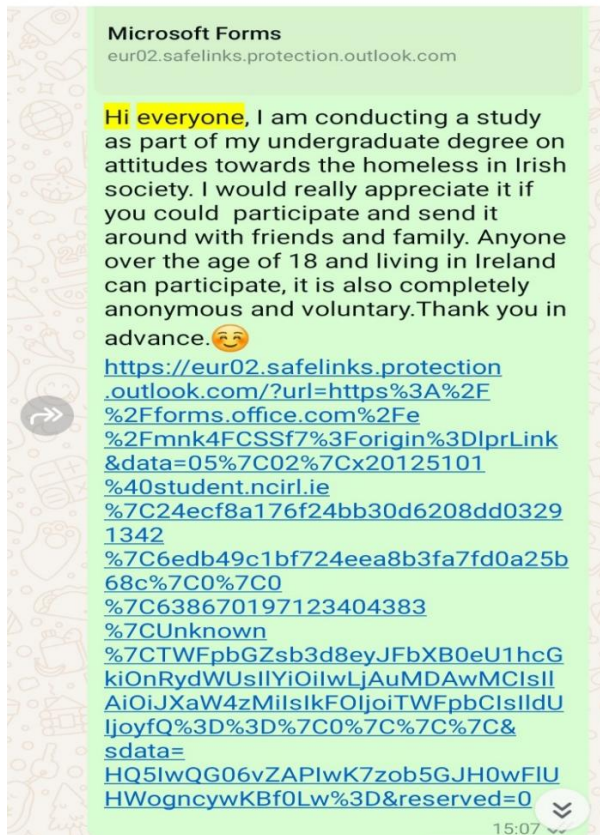
Conclusion

In summary, Homelessness remains a pressing social and public health issue, with homeless charities and governmental agencies reporting consistent year-on-year increases. The Irish public's attitudes can impact individuals experiencing homelessness. For instance, stigma can result in homeless individuals avoiding medical care. Thus, Homeless individuals may be at an increased risk of various mental and physical illness, as well as premature death. On the other hand, positive attitudes can increase willingness to help and policy support. Therefore, it is essential to explore attitudes towards the homeless. Although findings from this research found that in general participants had favourable attitudes, some differences were found. Notably, younger individuals had lower scores. This may point to a generational shift, or other factors could be at play. Further research should explore this. Finally, programs such as TIMB can be effectively implemented to give homeless individuals a voice and encourage contact amongst the public and the homeless.

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Appendix

Appendix A



Appendix B

Ethical approval from National college of Ireland



National College of Ireland
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Sráid na hÉireann, RSC
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email: info@ncirl.ie
Website: www.ncirl.ie

Date: 04/11/2024

Ref: Ethics Approval Number: 04112024x20125101

Proposal Title: An investigation into attitudes towards the homeless

Applicant: Amy Burke

Dear Amy,

Thank you for your application to the NCI Psychology Ethics Filter Committee, and for responding to clarification requests related to the application. I am pleased to inform you that the ethics committee has approved your application for your research project. Ethical approval will remain in place until the completion of your dissertation in part fulfilment of your BA Honours Degree in Psychology at NCI.

Please note that:

- Students are responsible for ensuring that their research is carried out in accordance with the information provided in their application.
- Students must abide by PSI ethics guidelines in completing their research.
- All procedures and materials should be approved by the supervisor prior to recruitment.
- Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made.

Sincerely,

Robert Fox

Dr Robert Fox

Chairperson, Psychology Ethics Filter Committee

Ethics Committee members: Dr Robert Fox (representative on the NCI Research Ethics Subcommittee), Dr Michelle Kelly, Dr Amanda Kracen, Dr Conor Nolan, Dr Lynn Farrell, Dr Fearghal O'Brien, Dr David Mothersill, Dr Michele Kehoe, Dr Barry Coughlan, Dr Conor Thornberry, Dr Brendan Cullen, Cassandra Murphy, Eden Bryan.

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Appendix C

Information sheet

My name is Amy Burke, and I am an undergraduate student, in Psychology at National College of Ireland. I am undertaking a research study to investigate attitudes towards the homeless, specifically exploring age, gender, socio-economic status, prior experience with homelessness, and levels of education as part of my undergraduate degree under supervision of Dr Conor Thornberry.

What is involved in this study?

This research study involves participants answering a few demographic questions such as age, gender, socio economic status, levels of experience with homelessness, and education level. Please note that there will not be identifiable information asked in this study. Following this, Participants will be asked to answer the Attitudes Towards the Homeless Inventory (ATHI).

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. While your participation would be greatly appreciated, you are under no obligation to take part. The decision to participate is entirely yours. Should you choose to participate, you will be required to check the yes box on the consent form section. However, at any point while completing this survey you wish to withdraw, please exit the page. Additionally, you will not be asked to explain why you have withdrawn.

What are the potential risks and benefits in taking part in this research?

Although this study poses minimum risk, contact information for homeless support services and emotional support resources will be provided in a debrief sheet. Your participation will contribute to a better understanding on attitudes towards the homeless in Irish society and may inform further research and potential policy changes. This study has been reviewed and

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received ethical approval.

Will taking part be confidential and what will happen with my data?

This study is anonymous and will not include identifiable information. All recorded information will be kept confidential and securely stored for five years at National college of Ireland using encryption methods. Please note that due to the anonymous nature of this study, it will not be possible to identify or remove participants individual data after participation. Anonymised data will also be uploaded to a secondary data repository to facilitate validation and replication, in line with Open Science best practice and conventions.

Contact Information

If you have any further questions regarding this study or information regarding your data, feel free to contact the researcher at x20125101@student.ncirl.ie. If you have any concerns or feel that the research has not been carried out as described, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Conor Thornberry at conor.thornberry@ncirl.ie.

Thank you for your time. If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form below.

Appendix D

Consent form

Consent form

Please indicate your agreement by clicking either the 'Yes' or 'no' box

1. I verify that I am over 18 years of age, I have read the information sheet and voluntarily consent to take part in this study *

☐ Yes

☐ No

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Appendix E

Demographic form

How old are you?

What is your gender?

Man

Woman

Other

Prefer to self-describe _____

Have you been homeless at any point?

Yes

No

Do you have friends or family who have been homeless at any point

Yes

No

What is the highest level of education you have completed

Less than leaving certification?

Leaving certification/level 5/6 certification.

Undergraduate degree

Postgraduate degree or higher.

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Prefer not to say.

Which of the following best describes your socio-economic status

Lower income

Lower-middle income

Middle income

Higher than middle income

Prefer not to say

Appendix F

Attitudes towards the homeless inventory

The following items are designed to assess your attitudes about homelessness. Please read each item carefully and then indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with it by circling one of the six response options. Please respond honestly. There are no right or wrong answers, and your responses will be treated confidentially.

1.Homeless people had parents who took little interest in them as children.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

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2. Government housing policy has made the housing problem in the country worse

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

3. The low minimum wage in this country virtually guarantees a large homeless population.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

4. I would feel comfortable eating a meal with a homeless person.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

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Strongly disagree

5. Rehabilitation programs for homeless people are too expensive to operate.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

6. There is little that can be done for people in homeless shelters except to see that they are comfortable and fed.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

7. Most circumstances of homelessness in adults can be traced back to their emotional experiences in childhood.

Strongly agree

Agree

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Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

8. Most homeless persons are substance abusers.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

9. Recent government cutbacks in welfare have contributed substantially to the homeless problem in this country.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

10. I feel uneasy when I meet homeless people.

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Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

11. A homeless person cannot really be expected to adopt a normal lifestyle. Strongly agree.

Strongly agree

Agree

Unsure but probably agree

Unsure but probably

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Appendix G

Debrief sheet

Thank you for participating in the current study!

This study aimed to assess attitudes towards the homeless in the Irish population. Particularly, investigating whether there are differences in age, gender, socio economic status, education level, and experience with homelessness.

This is an area that is under researched in the Irish context. However, it is important to assess the public's attitudes on the homeless as any information found could contribute to charities

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and policy makers strategies to garner support from the public.

All data collected in this study will remain anonymous and confidential. Participants will not be individually analysed or singled out. Furthermore, all electronic data will be password protected in the Psychology Department at the National college of Ireland, data will only be accessible to the researchers and will be kept confidential and securely stored for five years at National college of Ireland with using encryption methods. Please note that due to the anonymous nature of this study, it will not be possible to identify or remove participants' individual data after participation.

I would like to express thanks for participating in this research, if you have any questions, please contact the researcher at X20125101@student.ncirl.ie. If you have any concerns or feel that the research has not been carried out as described, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Conor Thornberry.

If you know anyone who would be interested in this topic, please forward this link to friends and family.

If you feel you have been affected by any of the content in this study, you can call the Samaritans free helpline at 01 116 123. If you or someone you know may be facing homelessness, please contact, Focus Ireland: 018815900 or the Peter McVerry trust: 018230776.

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