The Effects of Social Identification, Norms and Attitudes on Use of Outreach Services by Homeless People

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ABSTRACT

The theory of planned behaviour, social identity theory and attitudes toward institutional authority were used to predict the uptake of outreach services over a 3-week period in a prospective study of 126 homeless people in a major UK city. Consistent with previous research, subjective norm was an important predictor, but so were identification with support services and attitudes to authority. The effect of intention on behaviour was moderated by subjective norm, such that intention affected behaviour more when subjective norm was weak. Subjective norm was affected by identification with support services, which in turn, was predicted by identification with homeless people and attitude to authority. It is concluded that the role of social identity and social norms is of central importance in understanding uptake of outreach services among homeless people. Copyright © 2003 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: homelessness; social identity; social norms; outreach services

INTRODUCTION

In Orwell’s (1934) classic work, Down and out in Paris and London, homelessness was portrayed as a part of a cycle that resulted in people sinking into various forms of social obscurity and exclusion. However, Orwell also noted that ‘down and outs’ developed a distinctive identity that had meaning within a particular social framework. This article reports a study using the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1988), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Emler and Reichers’s (1987) work on attitudes to institutional authority, to examine how aspects of identity and the normative social framework are related to the uptake of outreach services by homeless people.

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PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON HOMELESSNESS

Within the UK, research on homelessness is predominantly conducted within the discipline of housing studies (Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; Klinker & Fitzpatrick, 2000; Klinker, Fitzpatrick, Mitchell, Dean, & Burns, 2000). There are also significant inputs from sociology (Hutson & Clapham, 1999), and to a lesser extent from health (Klee & Reid, 1998), criminology (Carlen, 1996) and socio-legal studies (Cowan, 1999). The emphasis is strongly on policy formulation, and hence the issues have been framed largely in terms of policy and welfare debate (Christian, this issue). Also, the research methods traditionally employed tend to characterize homeless people as depersonalized, and often do not systematically explore issues associated with complex human behaviours, cultural and social relationships. However, if we look beyond this longstanding position, issues surrounding homelessness do have an essentially psychological component underlying many of the research questions. Understanding social identity, the impact of normative influences, and examining individuals’ perceptions, motivations, choices and actions are central to understanding homelessness. Therefore, in this article we explore identity—and more specifically attitudes and social identity variables—amongst the homeless.

Social identity and homelessness

Classic sociological research on homelessness (Anderson, 1923, 1931; Barh & Caplow, 1973; Bogue, 1963) has attempted to document the lives of vagrant workers in the US. For example, Bogue (1963) focused on patterns of social behaviour, such as attitudes towards voluntary agencies (e.g. the Salvation Army), types of services used (i.e. food, sheltered accommodation), and formation of social relationships, as well as the extent to which people felt alienated or exerted personal efficacy over decisions (see Barh & Caplow, 1973). In general, these ethnographic perspectives highlight important underlying epistemological views, namely they begin to draw out the role of the State in response to its citizens.

Contemporary research has also explored identity construction and homelessness. Snow and Anderson (1987) examined mechanisms homeless people used to construct their personal identities. Briefly, data were collected from field observations of 71 homeless individuals, supplemented by, ‘taped, in-depth, life-history interviews’ with six of them (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Identity was defined as person’s attempts to, ‘attribute or impute to others in an attempt to place or situate themselves as social objects’ (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Snow and Anderson (1987) reported that homeless people employ a number of strategies to define their identities, including categorical distancing (role and institutional), role specific embracement and fictive story-telling. According to Snow and Anderson (1987), homeless people engage in patterns of verbal conversation that demonstrate (a) a desire not to be associated with other homeless people or institutions that serve them (i.e. distancing), (b) confirm one’s attachment ‘with an identity or specific role, a set of relationships, or a particular ideology’ (i.e. embracement), or (c) enhance personal experiences (i.e. fictitious story-telling). The frequency and use of strategies tends to vary with the duration of one’s ‘street career’, with more recent homeless people engaging in distancing, embracement, and story-telling. In contrast, the researchers noted that people ‘on the streets’ for more than 4 years tend to use distancing to distinguish between themselves and those suffering from illness, or they use embracement to explain their scavenging behaviours (e.g. through bins).
Identity has also been considered from a social psychological perspective. Farrington and Robinson (1999) offered a conceptualized social identity of homelessness, based it on Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory (SIT). In so doing, they defined ‘social identity’, ‘as the aspect of a person’s self-concept based on their group memberships; it is a person’s definition of “self” in terms of some social group membership with the associated value connotations and emotional significance’ (Turner, 1991, p. 8). Further, they proposed that the construction and maintenance of identities could take different forms at different stages, and that these might have varying consequences for homeless people.

To further explore this approach, Farrington and Robinson conducted an unstructured interview study of 21 homeless people from a single sheltered accommodation service near Bristol, UK. On the basis of their qualitative analysis (they conducted analyses from notes recorded after having conversations with participants), Farrington and Robinson concluded that the role of social identification, first as a homeless person, and secondly with particular groups, diminished the longer a person had been homeless. Because the interviews were only loosely guided by the theoretical postulates of SIT, and did not provide a quantitative test of the relationship between identity variables and behaviour, it is difficult to generalize the findings.

Finally, Osborne (2002) explored more direct measures of SIT amongst 97 homeless people in Austin, TX. Using self-report data and no objective measure of behaviour, Osborne found that homeless people who identified highly with a ‘homelessness identity’ were less likely to use services, but reported higher self-esteem scores (Rosenberg, 1979). Osborne (2002) suggested that this, as well as his prior research (Osborne, Karlin, Baumann, Osborne, & Nelms, 1993) support the notion that homeless people do not use services, because it allows them to protect their personal identity, that is identity as an individual.

While the findings are interesting, it is possible that Osborne (2002) overlooked several other plausible explanations. First, it can be argued that homeless people who use services identify highly with the actual programme or service provider, rather than identifying with being ‘homeless’. Conceivably, ‘homeless’ and ‘service user’ could be two separate dimensions. Also, Osborne’s (2002), as mentioned earlier, did not gather an objective measure of behaviour. Instead, homeless people were asked to self-report the number of times they used ‘non-food related services’ (i.e. shelter facilities)—which is, in fact, a measure of prior behaviour. Furthermore, the study did not employ a representative sample, nor did it incorporate concerns over sampling raised in the wider body of homelessness research (Jahiel, 1992; Susser, Conover, & Struening, 1989; Toro et al., 1999). It is well documented that recruiting participants from services alone introduces bias. However, in this case it perhaps introduces a potential confound because we know that single homeless men are more likely to make use of food handout programmes, and less likely to make use of sheltered accommodation facilities in the US (Burt & Cohen, 1989). Given that Osborne’s sample is predominately male, the finding maybe an artefact of the recruitment procedure and not actually indicative of an identity process.

These methodological issues, together with the relatively little analysis of how these relationship—through identity processes—might impact on the use of services, limit the generalizability of the findings. Also, both of these problems require tackling to more fully explore the direct relationship between social identity variables and uptake behaviour.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH—SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND HOMELESSNESS

The literature reviewed earlier has highlighted some important processes that might link homelessness and identity, but as yet there is relatively little systematic quantitative exploration of the link between the two. This study, therefore, constitutes a start on that path. Three theoretical perspectives informed our research—the theory of planned behaviour (TPB: Ajzen, 1988, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986), the social identity approach (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), and Emler and Reicher’s (Elmer & Reicher, 1987, 1995; Reicher & Emler, 1985) work on attitudes to institutional authority.

Theory of reasoned action/planned behaviour

The TPB, the forerunner to the theory of reasoned action (TRA: Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), is a well-established theoretical model that has been used to predict a range of social behaviours. A number of narrative and quantitative reviews have established the predictive utility of the model (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Conner & Armitage, 1998; Conner & Sparks, 1996; Godin & Kok, 1996; Sutton, 1998). Briefly, the TRA posits behavioural intentions as the proximal determinants of behaviour: hence the more one intends to engage in a particular behaviour, the more likely should be its occurrence. Underlying intentions are attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes are the sum total of a person’s beliefs that performing a given behaviour will result in specific outcomes, weighted by the values attached to those outcomes. For example, if a homeless person believes that participating in an outreach programme once a week is more likely to cause one to receive ‘better’ accommodation (i.e. flat), and if the individual believes that this is a positive outcome, then the individual is more likely to hold a positive global attitude and to intend to make the required effort to obtain the behavioural outcome.

In addition to an individual’s behavioural intention and attitude towards performing a specific behaviour, the TRA also highlights the importance of social pressure through subjective norms (i.e. perceived social pressure from individual referents × motivation to comply). Hence, if a homeless person experiences social pressure from significant others regarding their participation, and that individual is susceptible to that social pressure (i.e. I want to please others important to me by taking part in an outreach programme), it is likely that the individual’s intention to participate will be influenced by this pressure.

Ajzen (1988, 1991) also suggests that not all decisions can be considered as being under the direct volitional control of the individual. Therefore, the TPB incorporates each of the TRA’s components, but also extends the model by proposing that intentions and the performance of a behaviour can be directly influenced by the perceived behavioural control component. Thus, individuals both perform and intend to perform behaviours that they regard as being relatively easy, or within their personal control.

The applicability of the model to the study of homelessness. As far as we are aware, the TRA/TPB has been applied to homelessness on four prior occasions. Wright (1998) examined this as a framework for predicting homeless persons’ intentions to enter into tenancy agreements (i.e. uptake long and short-term accommodation). Wright (1998) linked the behavioural intention construct of the TRA/TPB to participants’ ‘intentions’ to secure long-term accommodation. However, Wright (1998) did not assess the homeless’ attitudes and subjective norms, both components conceptualized to be...
proximal determinants of behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which restricts the generalizability of his findings.

Closer to the domain of the current work, Christian and Armitage (2002) examined the utility of the TPB model amongst Welsh homeless people \((n = 103)\). The researchers explored the predictive utility of the TPB in relation to housing outreaches, or programmes assisting homeless people to find accommodation—both short-term and long-term. Participants were given TPB-based measures, and their behaviour was assessed 1 month after administration. The results supported the model. Surprisingly, however, the normative belief component was a strong predictor of behaviour, unmediated by intentions.

Christian, Armitage and Abrams (in press) explored the influence of friendship groups and social identity on intentions and behaviour over extended periods of time. Homeless people’s use of housing support services (i.e. support for homeless people in short-term accommodation) was measured 1 year after a TPB/social categorization theory (SCT) based interview schedule was administered. Congruent with previous research (see Armitage & Conner, 2001), TPB variables were influential predictors of both intention and behaviour. However, consistent with other research on TPB and SIT/SCT (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999), the addition of self-categorization variables, such as friendship group norms and identification as a housing support service user significantly increased the rate of prediction for both intention and behaviour, respectively.

Finally, Christian and Abrams (in press) investigated the theoretically interesting question of whether the TPB model is sensitive to social contextual variation. Two comparative investigations were conducted with 203 homeless people to examine the impact of sociodemographic variables, prior behaviour, and the TPB variables, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intention, on uptake of outreach services. Study 1 was conducted in London, while Study 2 involved a comparable sample in New York. In London intentions and behaviour were most affected by perceived control and subjective norms. In New York they were most affected by perceived control and attitude. These differences were attributable to different institutional structures and opportunities for service uptake in the two cities, and the sensitivity of the TPB to social context.

The present study develops and extends work previously reported by Wright (1998) and Christian and colleagues (Christian & Abrams, in press; Christian & Armitage, 2002; Christian et al., in press) in several ways. First, Wright’s (1998) study only employed measures of behavioural intention, and was not prospective. Therefore, while consistent with the TPB framework, it did not provide a test of the relative effects of each model component, as it neglected to explore the influence of attitudes, perceived control, and subjective norms. Also, the work by Christian and colleagues (Christian & Abrams, in press; Christian & Armitage, 2002; Christian et al., in press) is somewhat limited in that it has not explored the full TPB model, but has reported on direct measures only. Moreover, the work by Christian and Armitage (2002) and Christian et al. (in press) has emphasized the importance of normative and identity constructs concerning homeless people’s decisions to take part in housing related services. In contrast, however, Christian and Abrams (in press), in a two-sample study of outreach programme participation, reported that intention and perceived control were the most powerful predictors of behaviour. Given the initial evidence illustrating the utility of TPB within this diverse social context, we wanted to assess these variables, but also wanted to further investigate the influences likely to impact on normative construction and subsequent social pressure.

In the present research, therefore, we considered the potential impact of two levels of identity—general self-categorization as homeless (the first stage of identification in
Farrington and Robinson’s study—personal level) and identification with support services (general level). Both levels could potentially affect uptake of outreach services. First, it is possible that the more a person sees him or herself as belonging to the category of ‘homeless person’, the more they will regard services directed at that category as being self-relevant. Second, the more that they see themselves as being ‘on the same side’ as support workers, the more likely they are to make use of the services. Moreover, though these identifications may affect intention, it is also likely that they affect behaviour directly because identity-based causes of behaviour may not depend on rational decision-making process that underpin behaviour as conceptualized in the TPB. Instead, we think social identifications may act more like implicit subjective norms in that they provide a normative framework for action (see Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Turner, 1991).

ATTITUDES TO INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

The present study introduces a further innovation by assessing the role of attitudes to institutional authority. Homeless people are likely to have experienced rejection (e.g. eviction, court orders, arrest) from government and other formal authorities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Randell & Brown, 1996). Homelessness research suggests that homeless people often characterize their engagement with institutional systems negatively (Colson, 1990; Randell & Brown, 1996; Snow & Anderson, 1987). It seems plausible that this is an important aspect of their reputation management in the context of a well-defined identity. Emler and Reicher (1987) demonstrated that delinquents are characterized not so much by lower levels of moral reasoning than non-delinquents, but by a more negative ideological orientation to formal authority. They reject the formal institutions of authority, such as the law, police and rule makers, often because those institutions have let them down, or constrain them in ways that inhibit their identity. Similarly, we reasoned that in the present research, those homeless people who see themselves as ‘homeless’, and who identify with informal support services are likely to have a more clearly articulated antagonistic relationship with the institutional system and authority such as the police, and are more likely to make use of the outreach services that allow them to survive without dependency on the institutional systems.

OVERVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

After pilot research, we conducted structured interviews about use of outreach services with 126 homeless people in Birmingham, the UK’s third largest city. The interview measured variables from the TPB, social identity, and attitudes to authority, as well as demographic variables. Participants’ uptake of outreach services was observed over a 3 week period. The TPB proposes that behaviour should be predicted first by intention, and that perceived control may also have a direct effect. In turn, intention should be predicted by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. On the basis of previous research and social identity theory we expected that stronger subjective norms and group identification would also result in higher uptake of outreach services. We also expected that more negative attitudes to institutional authority would be associated with greater use of the outreach services.
Given the role of social support and normative beliefs observed in earlier research, it seemed likely that the impact of personal intentions and social identity on behaviour may depend on whether there are strong pressures from immediate significant others in a person’s social network. In particular, we expect that intentions and social identity might have a direct effect on behaviour, but we reasoned that these variables might be more powerful predictors of behaviour when subjective norms are relatively weak, rather than when they are strong. In other words, because outreach use is a highly norm relevant behaviour (cf. Christian & Armitage, 2002), we thought that the presence of intentions and identity might be less pronounced when social pressure was great, but certainly more influential when it was not such an overriding factor (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

Finally, we should consider the possible impact of other variables. For example, past behaviour is typically the strongest predictor of future behaviour explaining variance over and above TPB variables. In the present study we check on this possibility by including measures of behaviour that are both retrospective and prospective. A further issue is whether these psychological variables and behaviour are all determined by more powerful common causes such as demographic factors. Our previous research (Christian & Armitage, 2002; Christian et al., in press) suggests that demographics should not account for a substantial proportion of the variance in uptake of outreach services. However, because these variables are seen as central to much research on homelessness (Anderson, 1994; Burrows, 1997), particularly in the UK, we again investigated whether gender, age or marital status had any effects.

**METHOD**

*Participants*

The participants were 126 (men = 102, women = 24) homeless people from the West Midlands, UK. All participants were seeking housing and support assistance through respite or non-respite routes. Our definition of homelessness has been drawn from both the Housing Act of 1977 and the Rough Sleepers Initiative (1987). These sources define homelessness as housing instability ranging from ‘rough sleepers’ (i.e. persons sleeping out-doors, in squats, or in other unconventional housing not intended for human habitation) to statutory homeless people (i.e. people without permanent housing, for reasons of finance, threat of violence; see Anderson, 1994).

The sample of participants can be characterized as: male (80%); single people (84%); who had previously taken part in outreach programmes (84%); and reporting no educational achievement (93%). These findings are similar to trends reported within the single homelessness literature (Anderson, 1994; Burrows, 1997; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000).

*Recruiting procedures*

In consultation with housing associations, service providers, and members of the local government, a sample of housing and service organizations were approached. The principal consideration when approaching organizations was the location and size of the population or sub-population served—we pursued a mixture of large and small facilities. All of the organizations that were approached serve both men and women. Using these selection procedures, the participants reflected socio-demographic characteristics of the general homeless population (Anderson, 1994; Burrows, 1997).
Consistent with the homelessness literature (see, Jahiel, 1992; Susser et al., 1989; Toro et al., 1999), we sampled people from service facilities (i.e. drop-in centres, Big Issue—a magazine produced by homeless people—offices) and from locations ‘on the streets’ in order to ensure a more representative sample. From facilities, participants were approached while seated at lunch tables (i.e. in groups). In contrast, from locations ‘on the streets’ homeless people were generally on own, under blankets, and sleeping or selling the Big Issue (i.e. homeless magazine). We approached them, querying whether it would be a convenient time to take part in a study, or whether we should return later. The investigator(s) asked the homeless individuals if they would consider giving their views about service programmes for homeless people. In total, we approached over 190 people, 126 completed the Time 1 interview, and 86 completed both Time 1 and 2 measures.

It is perhaps worth noting the resource-intensive nature of studying homeless people. Relatively few studies have adopted the systematic sampling technique (Susser et al., 1989; Toro et al., 1999), and the majority of studies have relied on smaller samples. Also, to overcome problems tracking homeless people over time, we used records and reports from staff to monitor behaviour (Sosin, Piliavin, & Westerfelt, 1990; Toro et al., 1999).

**Measures**

*Pilot study.* Nine potential homeless participants were randomly approached from locations on ‘the streets’. Participants were told that the investigator was conducting a study on homelessness, but that she needed to verify that the content of her questionnaire was appropriate for the study. Participants were asked if they would review the items, and comment on each item’s suitability for the study (if they preferred the investigator to read the items aloud). For their participation, which lasted on average 15 minutes, participants were paid 2.

All items were deemed appropriate and understandable. The items assessing attitudes toward formal authority were singled out as ‘unpleasant’, but participants suggested these items should be retained because ‘it is good for other people to know how life can really be’. Participants also suggested that the questionnaire as a whole was too long. On this basis, to optimize the attention and involvement of participants, the final structured interview questionnaire measured all of the constructs of interest to us, but avoided repetition or redundancy of items. On the basis of the pilot work and where it seemed sensible, we used single items to measure some constructs.

*Questionnaire measure.* The structured interview was designed to measure variables indicated by the TPB, social identity theory, and Reicher and Emler’s (1985) work on attitudes toward formal authority. Apart from the measure of behaviour, all items were coded using a five-point response scale: 1 strongly disagree, to 5 strongly agree.

*Behavioural intention.* Behavioural intention was measured using three items: ‘Do you intend to use an outreach reach programme this month’, ‘Are you likely to use an outreach programme this month’, ‘Chances are that you will use an outreach programme this month’. The mean of the three items was taken as a measure of intention with a high score indicating positive intention to use the outreach programme ($\alpha = 0.87$).

*Attitude.* Participants were presented with the statement: ‘Using an outreach programme this month would be... important/unimportant; enjoyable/unenjoyable;
pleasant/unpleasant; not upsetting/upsetting’ (scored 1 strongly disagree through to 5 strongly agree). The mean of the four items was taken as a measure of attitude with a high score indicating a positive attitude towards the use of the outreach programme ($\alpha = 0.76$).

**Subjective norm.** Normative beliefs were assessed using the item, ‘most people who are important to me think that I should use an outreach programme this month’, and motivation to comply was measured using the item, ‘I want to do what pleases most people who are important to me’ (providing a potential range of scores from 1 = weak norm, to 5 = strong norm).

**Perceived behavioural control.** Three items tapped perceived behavioural control: ‘It is easy for you to use an outreach programme this month’, ‘Whether or not I use an outreach programme this month is entirely up to me’, and ‘I can easily use an outreach programme this month’ (scored 1 strongly disagree through to 5 strongly agree). The mean of the three items was taken as a measure of perceived behavioural control with a high score indicating a greater degree of perceived control towards the use of the outreach programme ($\alpha = 0.90$).

**Prior behaviour.** Prior behaviour was measured using the item ‘How often do you take part in outreach programmes?’ Responses could range from never (0) more than three times each week (5).

**Homeless social/group identity (HSI).** We measured the extent to which individuals identified themselves as linked to homeless people, as a group, with the item, ‘To what extent do you feel that you identify with the group “homeless people”?’ (1 = not at all, 5 = very much).

**Identification with support agencies.** To assess perceived linkage to care workers and social service workers, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt ‘close’ to each target group, felt that they shared each target group’s goals, and shared each target group’s values. Participants indicated their responses on a five-point scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree through to 5 strongly agree. Responses on these six items loaded on a common factor (accounting for 60% of the variance), and formed a reliable single scale ($\alpha = 0.92$), and so we averaged the responses to form a measure of support agency identification.

**Attitudes toward formal authority.** Attitudes toward formal authority were measured using Reicher and Emler’s (1985) scale. This scale assesses alienation from the institutional system, perceptions that the authorities are biased, and that rules can be broken. Typical items are, ‘It is alright to do something against the law, or that you know is wrong, like stealing, if you can get away with it’, ‘The police pick on me and give me a bad time’, ‘It can be ok to do something which is against the rules if it is to help a friend’, ‘A lot of laws are not to help ordinary people, but purely to restrict their freedom’. All items were answered using a scale from 1 strongly disagree through to 5 strongly agree. The scale was scored such that a high score represents less trust and respect for institutional authority. The overall scale was reliable ($\alpha = 0.83$).

**Behaviour measure.** Staff in a central Birmingham outreach programme monitored participants’ attendance over the course of three and a half (i.e. 25 days) consecutive weeks. Participants’ attendance was scored of 0 if they did not participate through to 5 if they participated more than 4 days a week. Attendance at the programme was defined as...
participation only if it involved meaningful interaction or exchange or information or resources. Owing to problems retrieving some records, the behaviour measure was not available for some participants \((n = 20)\). However, comparison of scores on the remaining variables revealed no significant differences between these participants for whom behavioural data were and were not available. In addition to the earlier items, we recorded participants’ age, gender, marital/relationship status (single versus has a regular partner), and educational attainment.

**Procedure**

A team of three researchers administered the structured interview on a one-to-one basis in order to minimize the effects of illiteracy and other factors likely to hinder rates of participation (Akilu, 1992; Christian & Armitage, 2002; Milburn, Watt, & Anderson, 1986). Participants were told that all their responses were confidential, and that their participation would not affect their future use of services. The researchers conducted the interviews by reading the items aloud, whilst homeless respondents selected their responses. All researchers received training in the administration of the measure. Interviews took between 40 minutes and 1 hour to complete. In exchange for their assistance, participants received a small amount of money (or gift worth £1) that had been agreed by the facility prior to data collection. Finally, it is worth noting that 190 people were approached, and asked to take part in the study. Sixty-six per cent of those approached agreed to participate. However, we were able to obtain behaviour measures for 86 people, thus leaving us with an overall participation rate of 45% (Time 1 through to Time 2).

**RESULTS**

Initial analysis screened for multivariate outliers and revealed six cases that were excluded from further analyses, leaving 120 cases in all. Ninety-seven were male, 102 were single, and the mean age was 32 (SD = 11.9). The means and standard deviations for all variables, as well as the correlation matrix, are presented in Table 1.

**Prediction of intention**

The TPB holds that intentions are predictable from attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control. We used hierarchical regression to analyse the effects of these TPB variables, and then the remaining variables, on intention (see Table 2). In the first block (TPB variables), there were significant effects for subjective norm and perceived control. The effect of attitude was non-significant. The overall regression equation was highly significant, \(R^2 = 0.32, F(3, 108) = 17.14, p < 0.001\).

We expected that intention might also be affected by social identity as homeless. However, the addition of this variable to the regression equation was non-significant. Also, the inclusion of identification with support agencies did account for a further significant proportion of the variance. Finally, the addition of attitude to institutional authority did not account for any additional variance.

Prior behaviour was significantly correlated with intention \((r = 0.25, p < 0.01)\), but this effect was reduced to non-significance \((\beta = 0.14, t = 1.51)\) after the TPB and identity variables were in the regression equation. Gender, age and marital status did not account for any additional variance.
Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Behaviour</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Intention</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. SN</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.54***</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. PBC</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Attitude</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Homeless identity</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.46***</td>
<td>0.41***</td>
<td>−0.36***</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Identification with</td>
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<td>1.20</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
<td>−0.36**</td>
<td>−0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>−0.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>support services</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Attitude to authority</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>−0.18*</td>
<td>−0.27**</td>
<td>−0.23*</td>
<td>−0.20*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Prior behaviour</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Age</td>
<td>32.22</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Marital status</td>
<td>84% single</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Gender</td>
<td>80% male</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: To compute correlations, for gender male was coded as 1, female as 2; for marital status, single was coded as 1, in a steady relationship was coded as 2; n is 86 for correlations with behaviour and 120 for correlations involving other variables. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.
The TPB model holds that behaviour should be predicted by intention. For the 86 cases for which behavioural data were available the correlation between intention and behaviour was non-significant ($r = 0.06$). We then used hierarchical multiple regression to analyse the effects of the remaining TPB variables, and subsequently the identity and attitude to authority variables on behaviour (see Table 3). With intention already in the regression equation, there were significant effects for subjective norm and attitude. The effect of perceived control was non-significant. Overall, the regression equation was highly significant, $R^2 = 0.29$, $F(4, 81) = 8.22$, $p < 0.001$.

However, we also expected that behaviour should also be affected by social identity as homeless. The addition to the regression model of homeless social identity (in Block 2) was marginally significant, and accounted for a further 4% of the variance in behaviour. The further inclusion of identification with support agencies explained a further significant proportion of the variance. We then added attitude to institutional authority, which contributed an increment of 6% in the explained variance. Finally, we examined whether prior

### Table 2. Standardized coefficients from hierarchical regression analysis predicting behavioural intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step/predictor</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ ch.</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Subjective norms</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>16.47***</td>
<td>3,108</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social identity</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>15.04***</td>
<td>5,106</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with outreach workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Institutional authority</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>12.24***</td>
<td>6,105</td>
<td>−0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prior behaviour</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>10.44***</td>
<td>7,104</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Socio-demographics</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>7.25***</td>
<td>10,101</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.$

### Table 3. Standardized coefficients from hierarchical regression analysis predicting behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step/predictor</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ ch.</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Behavioural intentions</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1,82</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subjective norms</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>8.22***</td>
<td>3,79</td>
<td>0.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social identity</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>8.37**</td>
<td>2,77</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification with outreach workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Institutional authority</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>9.04***</td>
<td>7,104</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prior behaviour</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>4,72</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Socio-demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
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</table>

* $p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.$
behaviour, gender, marital status or age could account for any further variance, but none of these variables had any effect.

These findings can be summarized as follows: behaviour is reliably predicted by subjective norm, attitude, social identity, identification with support services, and attitudes to institutional authority. However, it is not affected by intention. Intention is reliably predicted by subjective norm, perceived control, and identification with support agencies. Interestingly, none of the demographic variables had any unique impact on behaviour or intention.

**Moderation effects**

As expected, subjective norms were a strong predictor of behaviour. After mean centring the variables, we proceeded to investigate our hypothesis that psychological variables could moderate the impact of socio-demographic variables on behaviour, particularly intention. Accordingly, we first conducted a series of regressions in which we predicted behaviour by first entering subjective norm and other TPB predictors, and then the interaction between them. We found a significant interaction effect between subjective norm and intention, $\beta = -0.25$, $t = 2.51$, $p = 0.014$, which accounted for 5% of the variance.

However, there were no significant interactions between subjective norm and attitude or with perceived behavioural control. Specifically, we thought that when subjective norms were strong, the impact of attitudes to authority and of identification might be weakened. To explore these possibilities we conducted regression analyses with subjective norm and either attitudes to authority or identification as predictor variables, and then the interaction terms. The interaction between subjective norm and attitudes to authority was significant, $\beta = -0.18$, $t = 2.02$, $p = 0.05$, and accounted for 3% of the variance. The interaction between subjective norm and identification with support services was also significant, $\beta = -0.25$, $t = 2.52$, $p = 0.014$.

Finally, we conducted an analysis predicting behaviour from intention, subjective norm, attitudes to authority and identification with support services (in Block 1), and then entered the three significant interaction terms involving subjective norm in a stepwise fashion. This revealed that only the subjective norm $\times$ intention interaction was significant, $\beta = -0.20$, $t = 2.23$, $p = 0.028$. This indicates that the previous interactions involving attitude to authority and identification are mediated through the subjective norm $\times$ intention interaction. In summary, when subjective norms are weaker, intention has a greater impact on behaviour.

To understand the pattern of the subjective norm $\times$ intention interaction, we conducted simple slope analysis was used to explore the nature of this significant relationship. In accordance with Aiken and West (1991), we examined regression lines at three levels of moderation, the mean level and one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean level (see Figure 1). In Figure 1, the relationship the intention-behaviour varies with the level of normative influence. Interestingly, the behaviour of high identifiers was not influenced by their intentions ($\beta = -0.20$, $p = 0.30$), whereas the behaviour of low identifiers was significantly impacted by their intentions ($\beta = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$). That is, when identification with people important to the participant was high, norms were a more powerful predictor of behaviour than intention.

The results of these analyses are depicted in the path model in Figure 2. Attitudes to authority and identification as homeless affect identification with support services. This in turn affects subjective norms. Higher subjective norms, higher perceived control and
higher identification with support services are each associated with increased intention to use outreach services. Higher subjective norms, more favourable attitudes, identification with support services and stronger attitudes to institutional authority all lead to increased use of outreach services. However, the effect of intention on behaviour is moderated by subjective norms. Intentions have a stronger impact on uptake of outreach services when...
subjective norms are weak than when they are strong. Almost all of the accountable variance in behaviour is attributable to these variables, and no further variance is accounted for by demographic variables or by prior behaviour. The regression equations for this model reveal that 45.7% of the variance in behaviour, \( F(5, 81) = 13.64, p < 0.001 \), and 35% of the variance in intention, \( F(3, 110) = 19.85, p < 0.001 \) are accounted for by the predictors.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical implications

For the theory of planned behaviour our results offer mixed news. Consistent with the idea that intentions are arrived at through deliberative and systematic information processing, intention was affected by subjective norm and perceived control. However, participants’ evaluations of using the outreach services did not affect intention. This is surprising given that many studies (particularly laboratory research using students as participants) reveals attitude to be the primary predictor of intention (Armitage & Conner, 2001). The larger role of subjective norms is, however, consistent with other research that has been conducted in the context of membership of very meaningful social groups or relatively important choices (Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1988; Abrams, Hinkle, & Tomlins, 1999; Terry, Hogg, & McKimmie, 2000; Terry et al., 1999).

According to the TPB, intention and perceived control should be the primary predictors of future behaviour. However, we found that behaviour was most strongly predicted by subjective norm, identification with support services, attitude to authority, and to a lesser extent, attitude toward using the outreach service. This would appear to be inconsistent with the TPB, but highly consistent with the idea that social identity and group membership affect behaviour directly (an issue we discuss later). Furthermore, the TPB model was qualified by the presence of the subjective norm \( \times \) intention interaction. Consistent with research by Terry and others (Terry & Hogg, 2000), the interaction indicates that personal intention covaried with behaviour most when individuals were not influenced by strong social norms.

Also, consistent with Farrington and Robinson’s study, self-categorization as homeless emerged as a precursor of more specific and well-defined social identification with particular support services. In turn, identification with support services increased uptake of the services both directly (a non-deliberative, identity-based behaviour) and indirectly, by strengthening subjective norms to use the services (identity-based normative pressure). The theoretical message from these findings is that there is considerable advantage in combining the TPB within a conceptual framework that also encompasses the role of group memberships and social identity.

The present study also revealed the potentially substantial impact of homeless people’s attitudes to formal authority, consistent with the theorizing that those who use outreach services are likely to have a better articulated position (opposition) toward official institutional frameworks. In this respect, our findings echo the conclusions from Colson’s (1990) study of 535 homeless outreach programme users, and Sosin’s (1992) smaller scale study. Indeed, attitudes toward formal authority were correlated with behaviour more highly than all the other measures were. However, the present research also shows that attitudes to institutional authority might bear on behaviour by several different routes. Specially, we observed both a substantial direct effect, but also an indirect effect because these
attitudes also influenced identification with support services. Identification, in turn, directly and indirectly (via subjective norms) affected behaviour. One interesting conclusion to draw from this evidence is that homeless people’s use of outreach services does not merely reflect deliberative processes, such as weighing up the pros and cons of using services. A further important element is whether they have an ideological or principled orientation to their relationship with institutional authority, and whether they see the service as being on their own side of that relationship.

Implications for housing and homelessness literature

Our study offers several advances on previous research into homelessness. First, this is one of the few studies that have employed quantitative methods to examine the entire set of variables that we studied. Second, it is one of the few to examine sociological variables at the same time as employing a theory-driven framework derived from social psychology. Third, perhaps due to the complexity and resource-intensive nature of studying homeless people, relatively few studies have adopted the systematic sampling technique employed in our research (Jahiel, 1992; Susser, Conover, & Struening, 1989; Toro et al., 1999), and the majority of studies have relied on smaller samples. Furthermore, very few studies have studied behaviour prospectively (Christian & Abrams, in press; Christian & Armitage, 2002; Christian et al., in press; Colson, 1990). Fourth, most studies have reported either mean differences associated with demographic variables, or have used a univariate approach to data analysis (Christian & Armitage, 2002; Colson, 1990; Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Toro et al., 1999). The present study is one of the few to employ a multivariate approach that assesses the fit between a specific theoretically derived model and the data.

The present findings are largely consistent with the wider body of homelessness and housing policy research (see Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; Hutson & Clapham, 1999; Kennett & March, 1999). For example, considering the relationship between identification and service uptake, Randall and Brown’s (1995) investigation of London’s homeless revealed that those who were more reluctant to use services gave reasons that included feelings of stigmatization, which were perceived as coming from both staff and other members using the projects. This is consistent with the idea that stronger identification with support services helps to increase service uptake.

The present study also clarifies other questions emerging from the literature on homelessness. For example, the results demonstrate unambiguously that there are no distinctive or unique effects associated with gender, marital status or age. Any effects of those variables are fully mediated by the TPB, social identity and attitude to authority measures. This has important implications for policy development because demographic variables are difficult or impossible to influence, but social psychological variables are susceptible to intervention. Therefore, it is likely that effective interventions to increase uptake of outreach services should focus on these social psychological variables.

Potential limitations

We are aware that our study has several limitations. One of these is the relatively short period during which we monitored behaviour. When analysing frequency data it is obviously useful to have as many opportunities to sample the behaviour as possible. For several reasons, however, a longer period would have caused problems for the study. First, we had to ensure continuity of contact between the outreach service workers and the research team, so as to ensure that records were kept up to date. Second, homeless people
may not stay within one area over very long periods of time, and it seemed likely that we would suffer attrition from the sample if we used a longer period between the initial interview and the behaviour measure. A second potential limitation of our study was that we did not retrieve the behaviour data for some 32 of our sample. Although our statistical checks indicated that the non-retrieved participants were no different to the retrieved participants this does mean that we had lower statistical power for detecting effects for behaviour than we did for intention. However, the results indicate that we certainly had sufficient power to reveal several significant relationships, and therefore we are quite confident that the sample size was adequate to reveal the relative strength of different influences on behaviour.

Owing to limitations of time and capacity, our measures of identity were fairly restricted. In particular, it is possible that if we had employed a multi-item measure of homeless social identity, that variable might have had an even stronger impact on other variables, and it is conceivable that it, rather than identification with support services, could have had a stronger relationship with behaviour and subjective norms. Logically, it seems likely that a more general social identity (homeless) is necessary for a subordinate one (identification with support services for the homeless) rather than vice versa. However, this remains an interesting avenue for future research.

Finally, the present data were collected in Birmingham, a large city in the UK. It is possible that different variables might be influential in circumstances where the institutional framework for homeless people is set up differently, where the role of support services is different, and where outreach services are provided differently (cf. Christian & Abrams, in press). In addition, the present study only explored identification with one category—support services. It is likely that identifications with other categories and groups may play an important role in the behaviour of homeless people. Therefore, further research should explore how homeless people develop identification with specific subcategories, and the way these identifications relate to different types of behaviour. Given the complexity of conducting such research it is obviously important to determine these variables theoretically and on the basis of the particular social context within which the research is conducted.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research brings a social psychological perspective to bear on a problem that has significant societal ramifications, and has been the focus of research in sociology and social policy for many decades. As well as enriching the literature with a substantial empirical study, the research was designed to test hypotheses derived from the social psychological literature on the prediction of intentions and behaviour. The results show very clearly the benefits of including measurement of group-based identity and attitudes, and the important role of subjective norms social behaviour that has life-relevant consequences, and is consistent with the idea that group-related variables should normally be included as a part of any efforts to predict such behaviour (cf. Hogg & Terry, 2001).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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