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**CHRP**

Centre for Homelessness Research and Practice

 University of  
**Southampton**

# Psychological approaches to the complexity of homelessness: The British experience

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DO WHAT  
YOU SAY.  
AND  
BE  
Reliable.

# What's the problem?

Globally estimates of those without shelter variable, 300 – 330million

England official figure 4667 people sleeping rough

Netherlands 33,000 (inclusive)

US some proportion of 770000 people without shelter

UK mortality data – 1611 people died in 2024 whilst homeless, median age 44

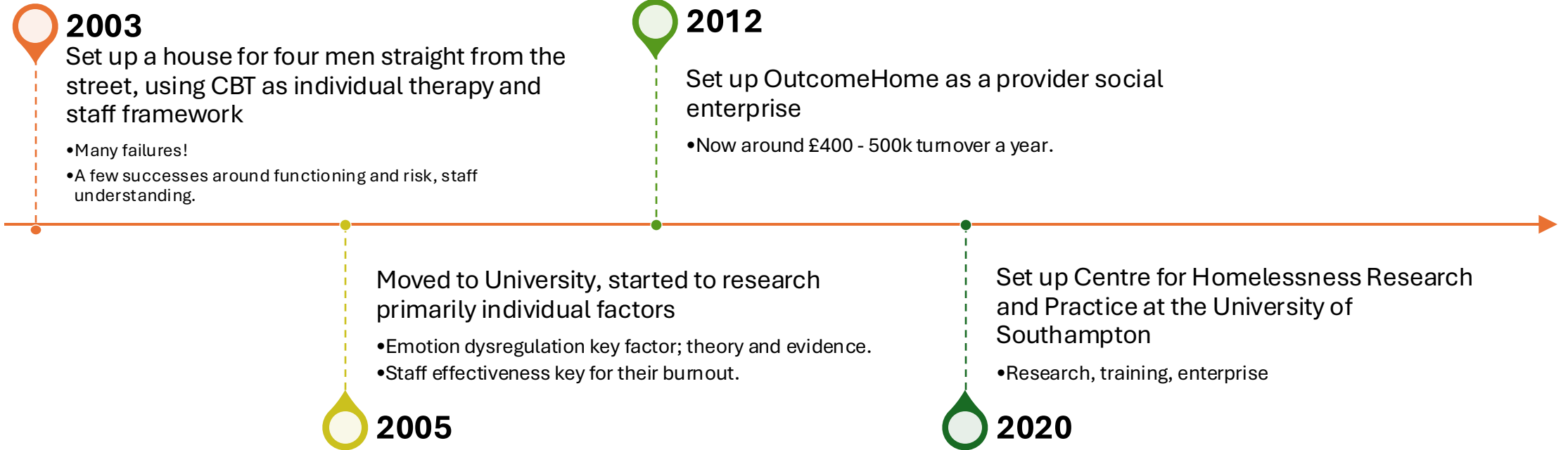
US mortality estimates between 5000 and 7300 in 2024, average mid 40s

No mortality data available for the Netherlands

Conclusion: Data picture is complex.

# Context...

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Numbers still rising.  
Why?

Wealth disparity.

## Complexity

‘For every complex problem  
there is an answer that is clear,  
simple, and wrong’.

HL Mencken





# Complexity

- Homelessness is a complex problem
- ... and a political one
- Politics requires simple messages and simple solutions
  - ‘Next new, big thing’
- Drives interventions that take no account of complexity
- Humans do not like complexity
  - E.g. perception and language
- We simplify through categorisation.

Pick your trimorbidity...

# Issues of 'tri-morbidity'

## Substance Misuse

**42% report an alcohol problem, 41% a drug problem (1)**

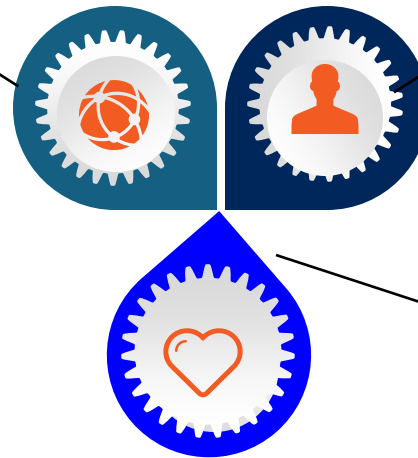
1. CHAIN ANNUAL REPORT GREATER LONDON APRIL 2018 - MARCH 2019 n=5352
2. Homeless Link - The unhealthy state of homelessness: Health audit results 2014 n=2500
3. Elwell-Sutton et al (2016) Factors associated with access to care and healthcare utilization in the homeless population of England n=2505

## Mental Health

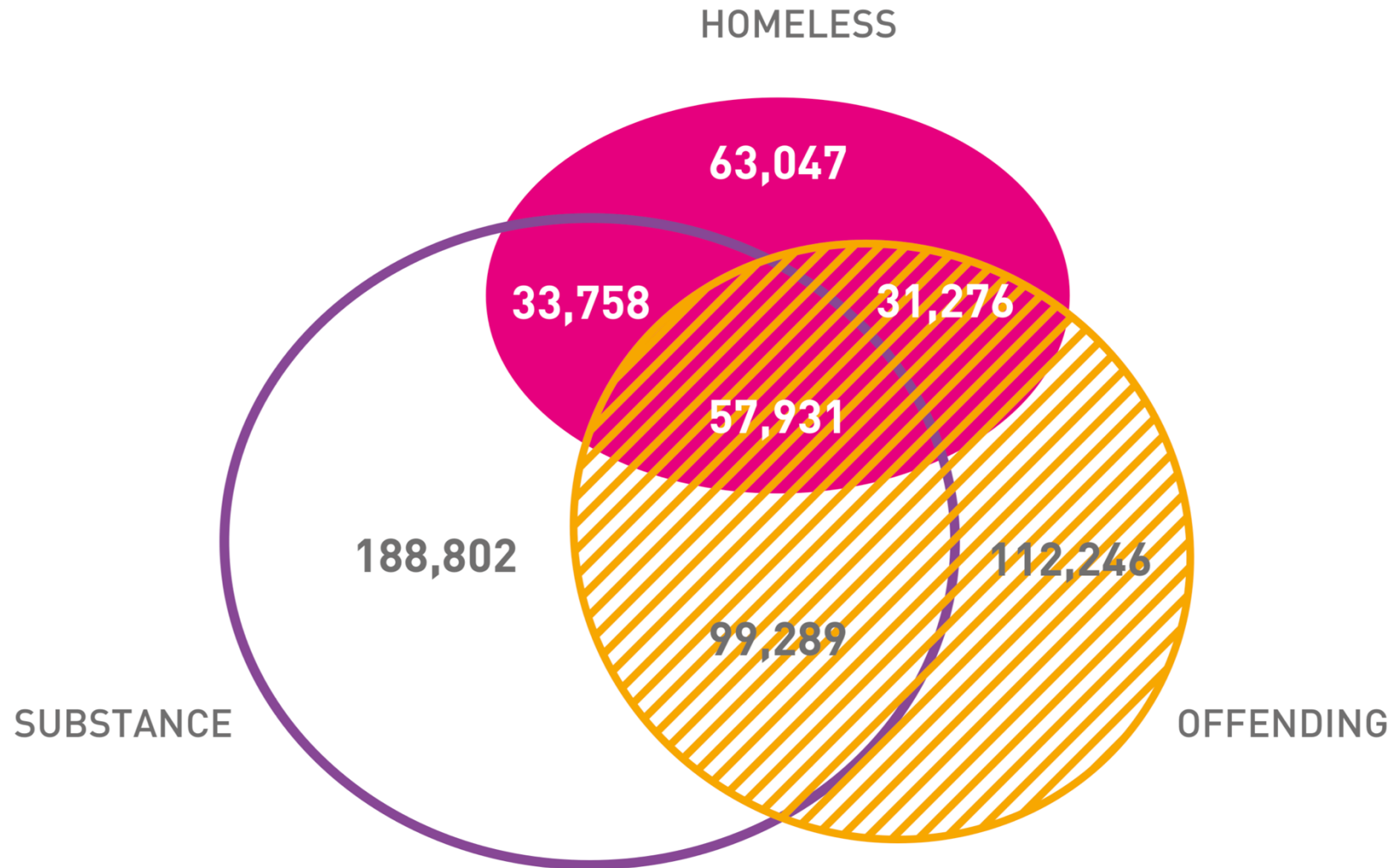
**80% report a mental health problem, 45% have a diagnosis (2)**

## Physical Health

**87% report at least one physical health problem (3)**

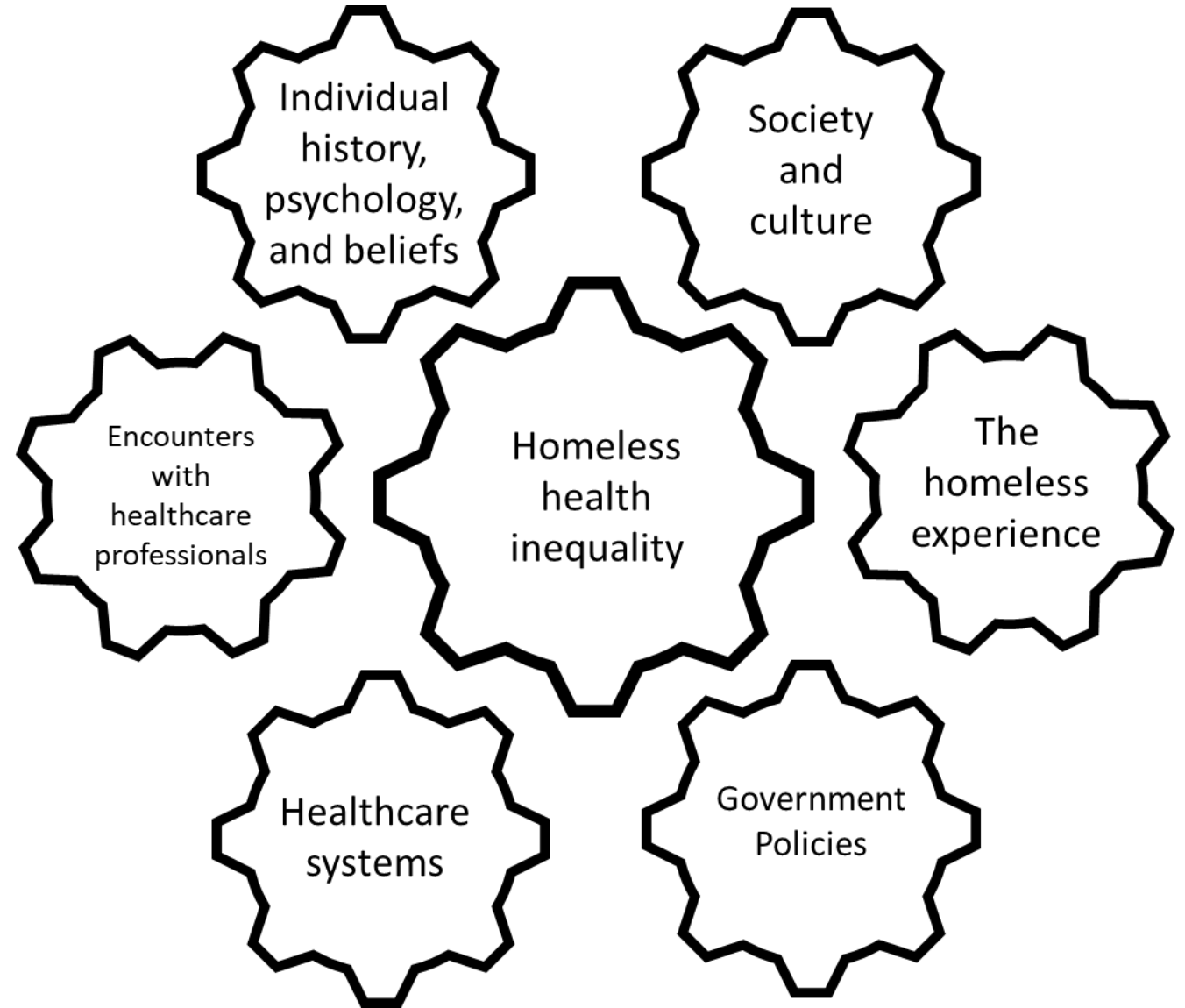


# Another 'trimobidity'



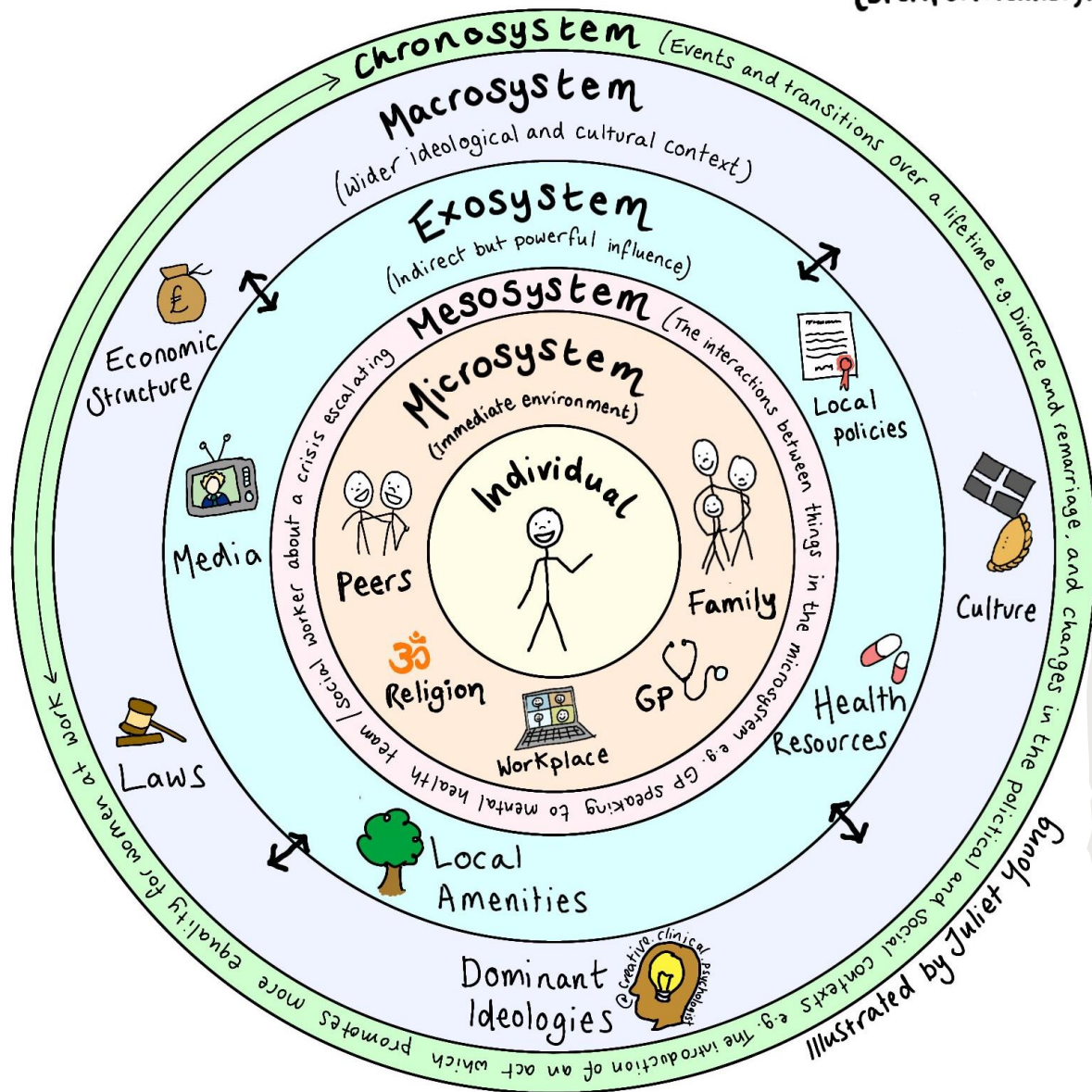
# Complex interactions contributing to homeless health inequality

Scott, Barker & Maguire (in Prep)



# Ecological Systems Theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



- Bronfenbrenner, 1979
- Credit to Juliette Young, 2021

# Individual, organizational and structural interventions

# Psychological therapies

- Provision of psychological therapies directly is useful.
- Motivational Interviewing and CBT useful and fairly cost effective
  - Bodley-Scott et al (2024)
- Issues:
  - Engagement
  - Working with substance and alcohol use
  - Place to provide therapy
  - Systems and support
- Context

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# Other individual interventions

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- Many interventions (e.g. case management, psychological approaches, housing approaches) can be effective at an individual level.
- Pharmacology less so
  - Opiate replacement therapies and depot antipsychotics

Luchenski, Maguire et al (2018)

# Organisational interventions

The effect of KPIs

Inter-organisational  
competition

- Minimal group paradigm

Enable organisations  
to collaborate

- Change commissioning processes



## Macro interventions

- Use your vote
- Influence policy decisions with research
- Think generationally
- Maintain hope.



## What did we learn?

- Interactions are more useful than categories
- Engage with the complex vs simplify enough to enable a clear intervention
- Some basic psychological theory can be really useful
- Collaborate at all levels. Leave egos at the door. Be aware of epistemological arrogance.
- Be activists at all levels
  - Individual – systemic – societal and structural
- **Relentless compassion** and **humility** are key.

# References

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Bodley-Scott, E., Ward, R. J., Tarabay, J., Fagbamigbe, A. F., Barker, S., & Maguire, N. (2024). The effectiveness of psychological interventions for people experiencing homelessness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 34(5), e2863.

Luchenski, S., Maguire, N., Aldridge, R. W., Hayward, A., Story, A., Perri, P., ... & Hewett, N. (2018).

What works in inclusion health: overview of effective interventions for marginalised and excluded populations. *The Lancet*, 391(10117), 266-280

A photograph of a weathered wooden cabinet. On top of the cabinet, there is a brush with a wooden handle and a blue pen. The front panel of the cabinet has a message written in yellow paint. The message is arranged in four lines: 'DO WHAT', 'YOU SAY.', 'AND', and 'BE Reliable'. The background shows a cluttered outdoor area with a blue tarp and various items.

DO WHAT  
YOU SAY.  
AND  
BE  
Reliable.