**Research Summary:**

**“My values keep me well… would they help other people?”: The values and values-based behaviours of people facing severe and multiple disadvantage[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Researchers:**

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**What was this research about?**

This project explored:

* the role of values for people who are facing/have faced severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD; at least three of the following: homelessness, mental health, substance use, contact with the criminal justice system, and domestic violence).
* what helps and hinders people’s ability to live in line with their values.
* whether services are/have been helpful in supporting people to engage in valued behaviour.

Values are what a person is passionate about, what is important to them, and what they want their life to stand for. Values motivate us. When people can live in line with their values, they are likely to report higher levels of wellbeing and lower levels of suffering, regardless of their situation. Also, when people behave or make changes based on their values, they are much more likely to maintain that behaviour or change.

Some examples of common values include:

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| * Humour
* Acceptance
* Fairness
 | * Gratitude
* Respect
* Cooperation
 | * Sensuality
* Challenge
* Pleasure
 | * Power
* Conformity
* Excitement
 |

**What did we do?**

* We interviewed 12 people who have experienced/are experiencing SMD. They told us their most important values are and talked about what helps or gets in the way of living in line with them.
* We looked in detail for common themes across what everybody said.

**What did we find?**

Four themes were identified in the interviews:

1. Values are Idiosyncratic and Interconnected
* All 12 participants had a wide range of interconnected, personally meaningful values. Many values were connected to each other, and each person applied their own individual meaning to each of their own values.
* Whilst values generally remain stable across the lifetime, some people highlighted that their current living context and/or experiences of relationships can shape and change the importance of a value, or how they try to act on it. As such, people experiencing SMD may experience shifts in their values across their lifespan.
1. The Benefits of Value Identification and Enactment
* Everyone offered lots of examples of times they were able to live in line with their values, which in turn improved their wellbeing.
* The way in which people enact their values are as individual as the people themselves. Some found that simply talking about their values made them feel more motivated to engage in more valued behaviour in the future. This indicates that even when facing SMD, identifying and acting on values may lead to meaningful change and improved wellbeing.
1. The Risks and Challenges of Value Identification and Enactment
* There are several risks to identifying and enacting values in their daily lives. Participants highlighted an overarching need to protect themselves: at times, staying physically and/or emotionally safe is more important than acting on other values.
* They also highlighted challenges in the system e.g., they need support from services to connect with and enact their values, but this is not always possible.
* Finally, individual factors (such as a person’s mental health) can get in the way of them being able to identify and enact their values.
* All of this suggests that people facing SMD may need support to identify the potential risks of engaging in valued behaviour. There may be complex challenges that need to be considered before someone is able to live in line with their values.
1. The Relationship Between Values and Support
* Everyone who took part felt positively about the possibility of services engaging in values-focused support i.e., staff / services supporting people to identify what their values are, identify what kind of value-informed behaviour they could engage in, and support them to do their chosen activity.
* The realities and risks of engaging in valued behaviour must be carefully considered, but participants felt that if services could adopt such an approach, this would likely be a very positive thing.

**What does this mean?**

* Service provision for people facing SMD may be enhanced by including values-focused support, e.g. staff spending time with service users helping them to identify their values and how they might be able to engage in values-based behaviour within their current context.

**What future research might be needed?**

* Further research may explore the effectiveness of taking a values-based approach to working with people facing SMD, for example exploring the impact on engagement, service user satisfaction, the extent to which people are able to enact their values with support.
* Research may also explore the role of staff members’ values, considering whether similarities/clashes in staff and service user values have any impact on the wellbeing of staff or service users.

**Want to find out more?**

This research has been published in the *International Journal on Homelessness:* <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/ijoh/article/view/15102>

If you are interested in knowing more about this research project, or would like a full copy of the research (including more background information, direct quotes from participants, and more suggestions on how to implement values-informed support) please contact Sophie Buckley (sophie.buckley@frameworkha.org)

1. ‘Severe and multiple disadvantage’ means experiencing two or more of the following: homelessness, mental health problems, substance misuse, offending behaviour, and domestic and sexual violence and abuse. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)