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# The interactions between paramedics and homeless patients and the implications on patient care provided

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## Paramedic Critically Appraised Topic (CAT)

**Title:** The interactions between paramedics and homeless patients and the implications on patient care provided

**Reported By:** Alyson Cochrane

**Introduction:** Paramedics often interact with the homeless to provide care. It is important for the paramedic to be an advocate for their patient and to provide the same adequate care that they would provide to any other patient.

**Research Question:** Do the interactions between paramedics and homeless patients affect the care provided?

### **Search Strategy:**

PubMed database: ((homeless) OR homelessness) AND (((paramedic) OR prehospital) OR ambulance) Filters: Publication date from 2000/01/01 to 2018/12/31; Humans

CINAHL database: ( (MH "Homeless Persons") OR "homeless OR homelessness" ) AND ( paramedic or ems or emergency medical service or prehospital or pre-hospital or ambulance or emergency medical technician or emt ) Filters: Year 2000-2018; Humans; English

Filters were applied to both databases for studies published within the years 2000-2018 to expand the number of relevant results.

### **Search Outcome:**

PubMed: 30 results

CINAHL: 53 results

**Relevant Papers:** 2 were chosen as relevant for this CAT.

Author, Date	Population: Sample Characteristics	Study Design	Outcomes	Results	Strength/Weaknesses
Zakrison, Hamel, & Hwang, 2004	160 people from 18 shelters and drop-in centres for the homeless in Toronto 40 individuals on the street interviewed	Survey interviews -rated the interactions with police and paramedics	-the level of trust the homeless feel with police compared to paramedics -trust and its implications on health	92% willing to call paramedics in an emergency (69% police) -higher levels of trust in paramedics	<u>Strengths:</u> -adequate sample size (200 total) -population from Toronto has direct relevance to Ontario paramedics -did not provide prompts during interviews to avoid bias <u>Weaknesses:</u> -definition of trust can be subjective and

					therefore should be clearly define -although sample size is adequate, compared to the homeless population size in Toronto the size could be larger
Zrinyi & Balogh, 2004	Total of 150 nursing students (100 in second and third year, 50 in fourth year) 50 paramedic officers in training contacted -study conducted with participants in Budapest, Hungary	Cross-sectional descriptive research design Developed 58-item instrument to assess professional behaviours and attitudes (Likert-type scale assessment)	-attitudes of nursing students (primarily) and paramedic officers towards the homeless -quality of care nurses provide to homeless patients	-overall attitudes towards homeless were neutral -negative perceptions equal between nursing students and paramedic officers -homeless patients may not receive the same adequate care -paramedic officers felt less afraid and nursing students felt more compassion	<u>Strengths:</u> -developed a tool to use that was more specific for the population -anonymous data gathering -acknowledged inability to identify validity  <u>Weaknesses:</u> -does not specify how many paramedic officers participated (50 initially contacted) -the focus of the discussion was primarily on the results found for nursing students (lack of discussion for paramedics) -may not apply to Canadian nurses and paramedics due to difference in culture

**Comments:** There are limited relevant studies on the research topic and paramedics in the literature. The study by Zrinyi and Balogh (2004) was selected although the primary focus of the study was on nursing students. The results of the study are applicable to paramedics in understanding how personal experience and increased exposure to the homeless may have a positive influence on the interaction. The study by Zakrisson, Hamel, and Hwang (2004) does not directly answer the research question, but the results are important in understanding the influence of trust on the interaction between the homeless and paramedics.

**Consider:** *Why would you not change practice based on these articles?*

As mentioned above, there are limited relevant studies in the literature which focus on paramedics and if their interactions with homeless patients influences the care provided. The

results of a number of studies are not a direct application to paramedic practice, therefore further research should be conducted within the field.

**Clinical Bottom Line:** The field of paramedicine should investigate the attitudes of paramedics towards homelessness and if there is a relationship with the care provided for homeless patients. The results of future research studies may indicate if further education on homelessness or ethics should be considered for paramedics.

**References:**

- Zakrison, T. L., Hamel, P. A., & Hwang, S. W. (2004). Homeless people's trust and interactions with police and paramedics. *Journal of Urban Health, 81*(4), 596-605. doi:10.1093/jurban/jth143
- Zrinyi, M. & Balogh, Z. (2004). Student nurse attitudes towards homeless clients: A challenge for education and practice. *Nursing Ethics, 11*(4), 334-348. doi:10.1191/0969733004ne707oa