

Public Protection Unit



Research into Deaths of Residents of Approved Premises *An Initial Project Summary Report*

INTRODUCTION

- 1-1 For some time now there has been concern, both from probation areas and from the National Probation Directorate, that not enough was known about why residents of approved premises* die, and how best to begin to try and reduce the number of deaths.
- 1-2 Between June and October 2002 a small group was set up to conduct some initial research into this. The working group comprised of Eunice Dunkley, General Secretary of the National Association of Probation and Bail Hostels (NAPBH), Alan Holland, Senior Probation Officer in London Probation Area, and William Payne and John Russell from the National Probation Directorate. The group were assisted by Colin Pinfold, Assistant Chief Officer of Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Area, and by a group of senior probation officers from the West Midlands Probation Area. We are very grateful to everyone who gave up their time to assist with this project.

CONTEXT

- 2-1 Before presenting our findings, it is necessary to put this work into context. There has been some formal research work done on a wider subset of those who die while under community supervision, but our project was only a small scale study looking solely at approved premises. We should also make it clear that some of the data we were working with was incomplete. We have, however, sought to lay out some emerging findings. Because of the very small numbers involved, these need to be treated with caution, but nevertheless we hope they will be of assistance as this work progresses.
- 2-2 We are pleased to be able to say that the numbers of deaths of residents of approved premises over the last 4 years is relatively low, especially given the vulnerability of the client group. It is clear that there is good practice taking place in approved premises across England and Wales. Nevertheless, any and every death is a tragedy. The loss of life is painful, not least for the immediate family of the victim. And every death also has a major impact on staff who have been supervising and caring for the resident.

**Approved probation and bail hostels, or approved hostels, are now known as approved premises, under section 9 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000*

STATISTICS AND EMERGING FINDINGS

3-1 We have been advised of the deaths of 75 residents of approved premises over the 4 year period from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2001. We have split these into 4 very broad categories to show the cause of death; either Suicide, Overdose, Natural Causes, or Accident. These categories have to be treated with some caution, as some of our data was incomplete. Also, the category marked "Overdose" is a very broad one which covers death as a result of drug or alcohol abuse as well as one death as a direct result of "glue sniffing". In many of these cases it is difficult to say with any certainty whether the overdose was accidental, or a pre-determined deliberate act of suicide – but we have made some value judgements on the basis of the information we have.

TABLE A

YEAR	Suicide	Overdose	Natural Causes	Accident	Total
1998	3	11	3	3	20
1999	4	4	1	0	9
2000	8	13	2	1	24
2001	3	12	5	2	22
TOTALS	18	40	11	6	75

We have also been notified of 12 deaths so far this year (up to 30 September 2002). In 3 of the cases we await further information, as the coroners enquiries have not taken place yet. Of the other 9, 5 were from Natural Causes, 2 were Drug Overdoses and 2 were Suicides.

Taken together, including the deaths up to the end of September 2002, this can all be shown as follows -

TABLE B

Number of deaths, between 1 January 1998 and 30 September 2002 – 87
Number of Suicides – 20 (24%)
Number caused by Overdose – 42 (50%)
Death by Natural Causes – 16 (19%)
Number of fatal accidents – 6 (7%)

SUICIDES

Of the suicide incidents between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2001, where the status of the resident is recorded – 88% were Bailees

Of the suicide incidents between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2001, where the age of the resident is recorded – 53% were aged 40 years or over

OVERDOSES

Of the deaths by overdose recorded between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2001, where the status of the resident is recorded – 58% were Bailees

Of the deaths by overdose recorded between 1 January 1998 and 31 December 2001, where the age of the resident is recorded – 63% were less than 30 years old

SUICIDE AND OVERDOSE DEATHS COMBINED (Between 1/1/98 and 31/12/01)

32 deaths (60% of those where this information is known) occurred within the first 3 weeks
6 deaths (11% of those where this information is known) occurred after 3 months

- 3-2 One of the key emerging findings from this piece of work is that we need to do more research. We hope to be able to appoint a researcher in the near future to do formal research work into this area. Other key findings that seem to emerge from this initial work are that the first 3 weeks after admission are a key risk time. Also, bailees seem to be more at risk than any other category of resident. Another significant finding which emerged from discussions with residents and approved premises managers was that it appeared that quality time spent with residents could be just as effective at preventing suicide, if not more so, than regular 15 minute suicide checks.

CONCLUSIONS – FUTURE WORK

- 4-1 We will now take forward the following work:

- Formal research
- Further joint work with Prison Service
- We will review what is currently available in terms of local probation area suicide and self-harm prevention strategies.
- The Hostels and Offender Housing CLAN have set up a sub group. This small working group will begin to consider a national suicide and self-harm prevention strategy. This group will also consider training needs.
- We will ensure that these findings are taken into account when the Design Guide for Approved Premises is re-written next year.
- We will ensure that suicide and self-harm awareness issues are incorporated into all work that is done in approved premises.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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