



Scottish Centre *for*
Social Research

Homelessness: What does the public think?

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Shelter Conference,
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Scotland's leading independent social research institute



Overview of session

- Background to the study
- What do you think?
- Some findings
- Some implications
- Discussion



Why study public attitudes?

- Big changes to Homelessness legislation in Scotland
 - Priority need
 - Intentionality
 - Local connection
- Welcomed by charities
- But mixed views among service providers?
- And public views unknown



The study

- Funded by Scottish Government Homelessness Monitoring Group
- First large-scale UK-based research on public attitudes
- Key questions:
 - How do people feel about homeless people?
 - How do views vary between different groups?
 - How far are public attitudes in tune with the direction of Scottish Government policy?

The study

- Module of questions on 2006 Scottish Social Attitudes survey
 - Annual independent survey run by ScotCen
 - High quality sample and design
 - 1,594 interviews with adults aged 18+ in 2006



The study

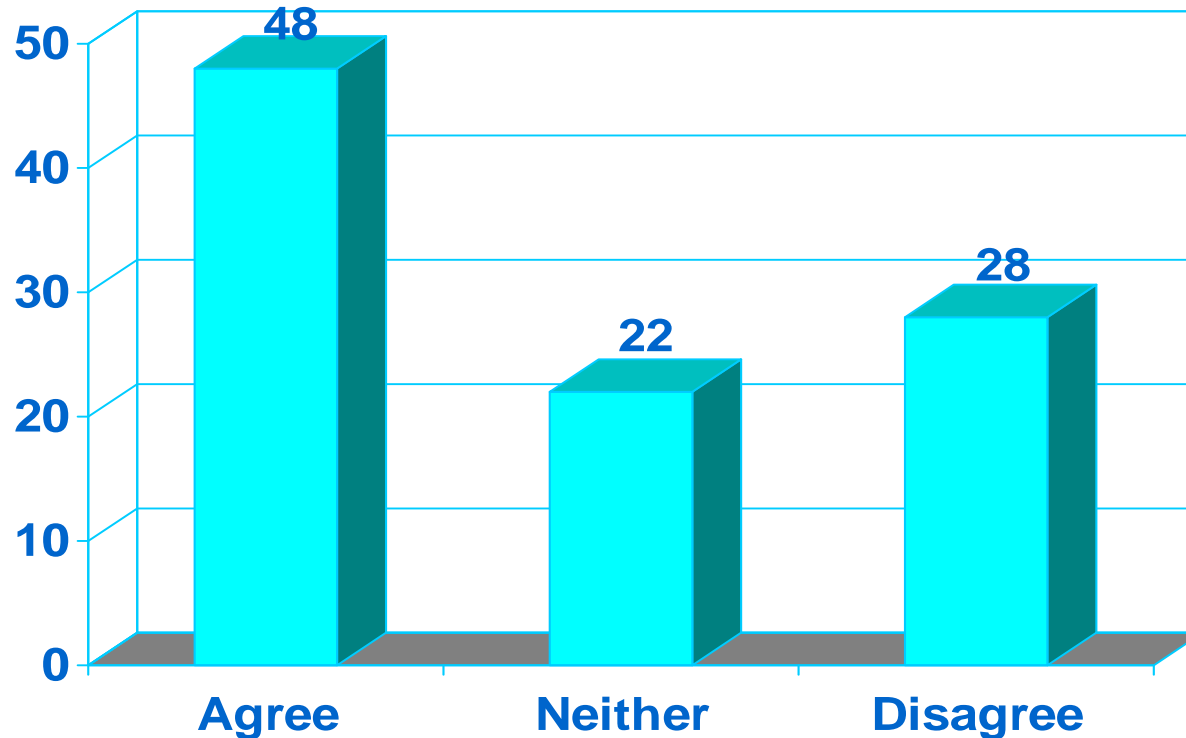
1. Personal experience and awareness
2. General attitudes to homelessness
3. Belief in 'myths' about homelessness
4. 'Deserving' and 'undeserving' homeless people (priority need)
5. Attitudes towards 'intentionally' homeless
6. Homelessness in the local area



What do you think?

Most homeless people have just been
unlucky in their lives

What the public think



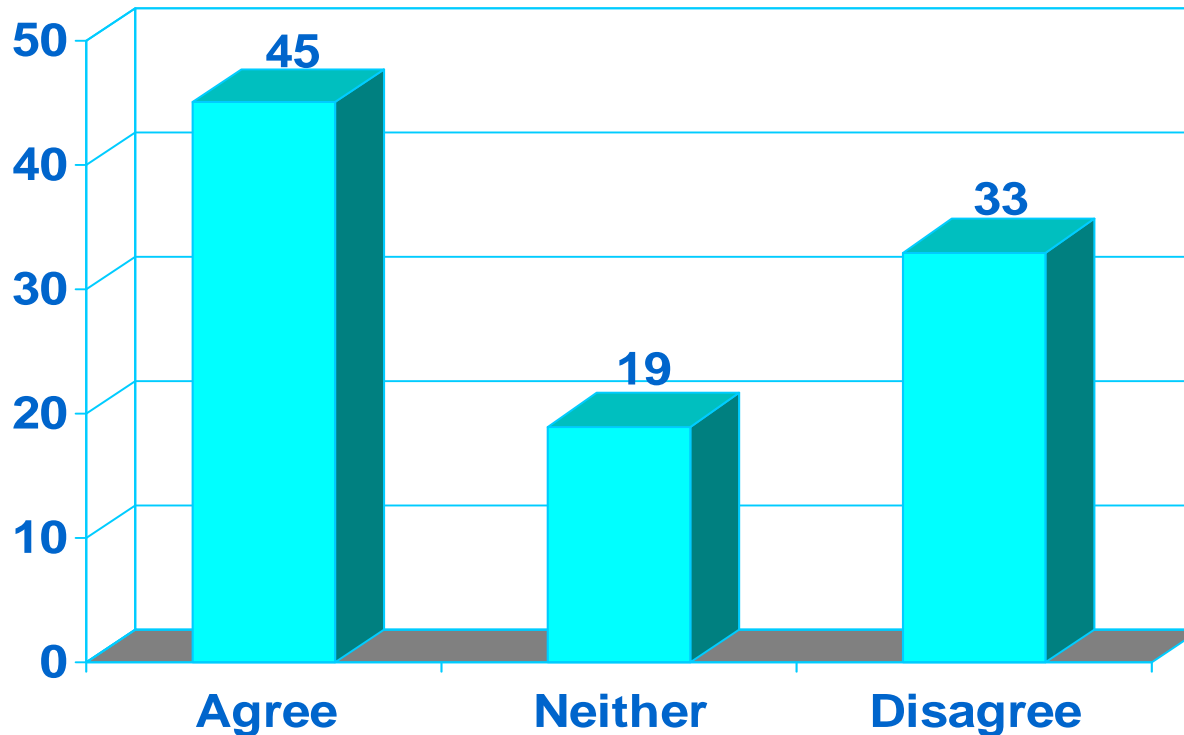
Most homeless people have just been unlucky in their lives



What do you think?

Most homeless people could find
somewhere to live if they really tried

What the public think



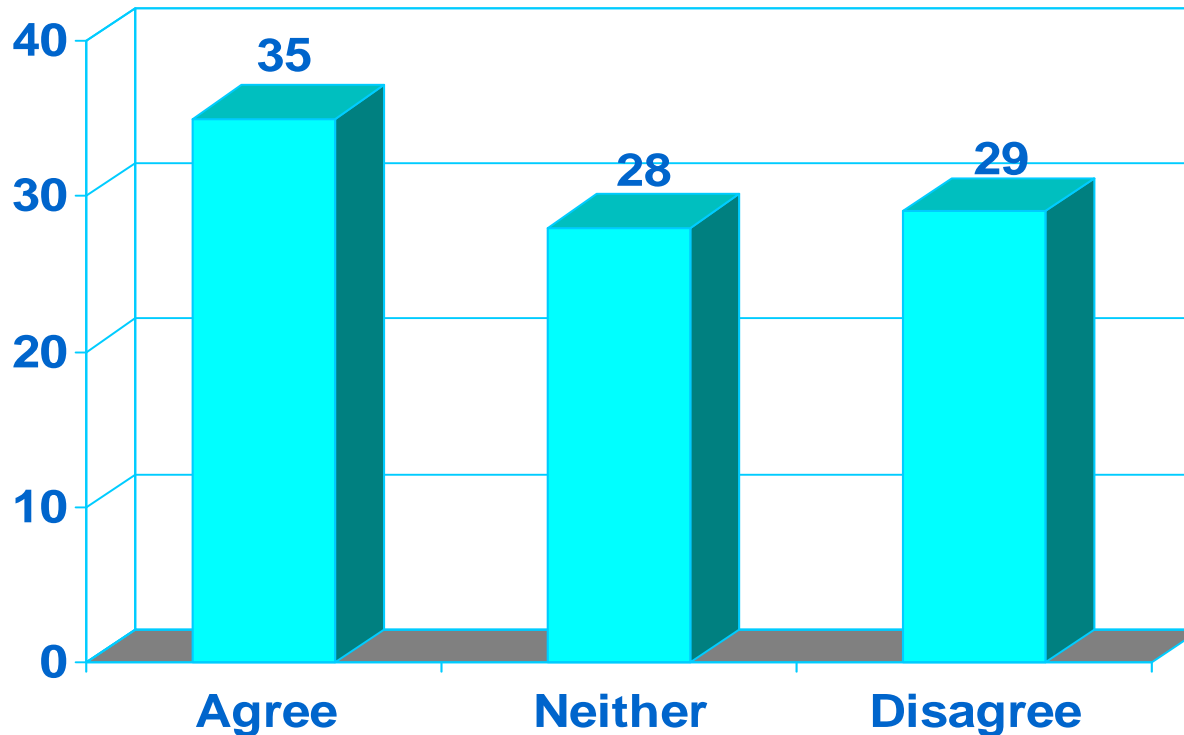
Most homeless people could find somewhere to live if they really tried



What do you think?

Many people say they are homeless
just to try and get a house from the
Council

What the public think



Many people say they are homeless just to try and get a house from the Council

Other findings

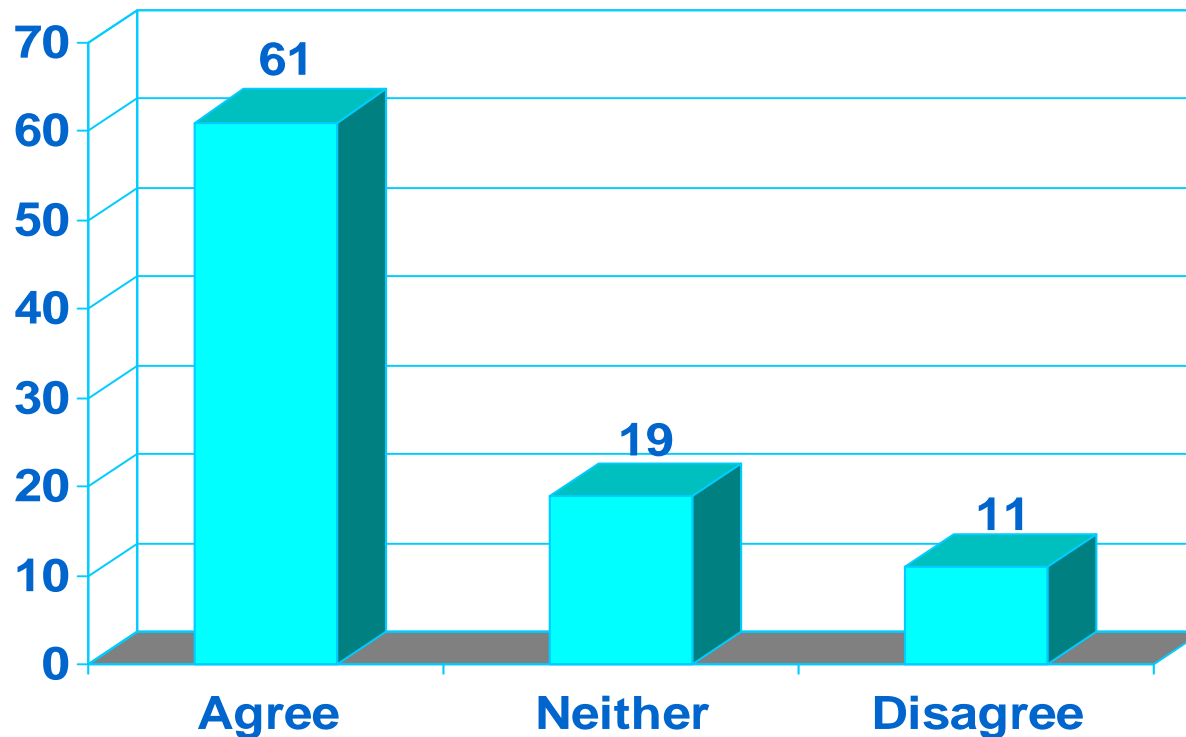
- Possible for individuals to be ‘sympathetic’ in one respect but more ‘judgemental’ in others
- Women are more sympathetic than men
- Attitudes vary by age, education, how liberal or authoritarian people are
- But tenure, deprivation, income, newspaper readership, class less significant



‘Myths’ about people experiencing homelessness

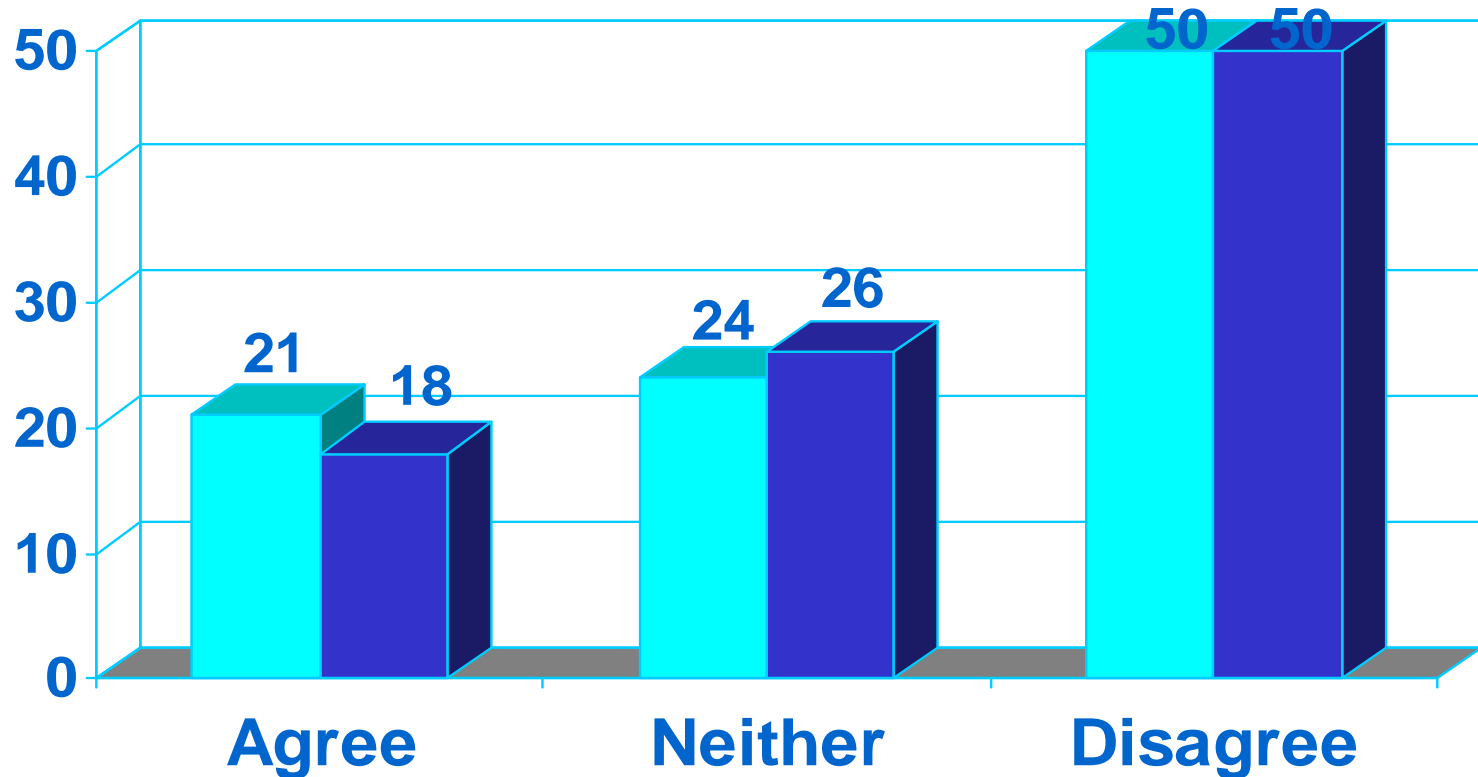
- Most homeless people sleep rough outside at some point
- Most people end up being homeless simply because they drink too much
- Most homeless people use hard drugs

What the public think



Most homeless people sleep rough outside at some point

What the public think



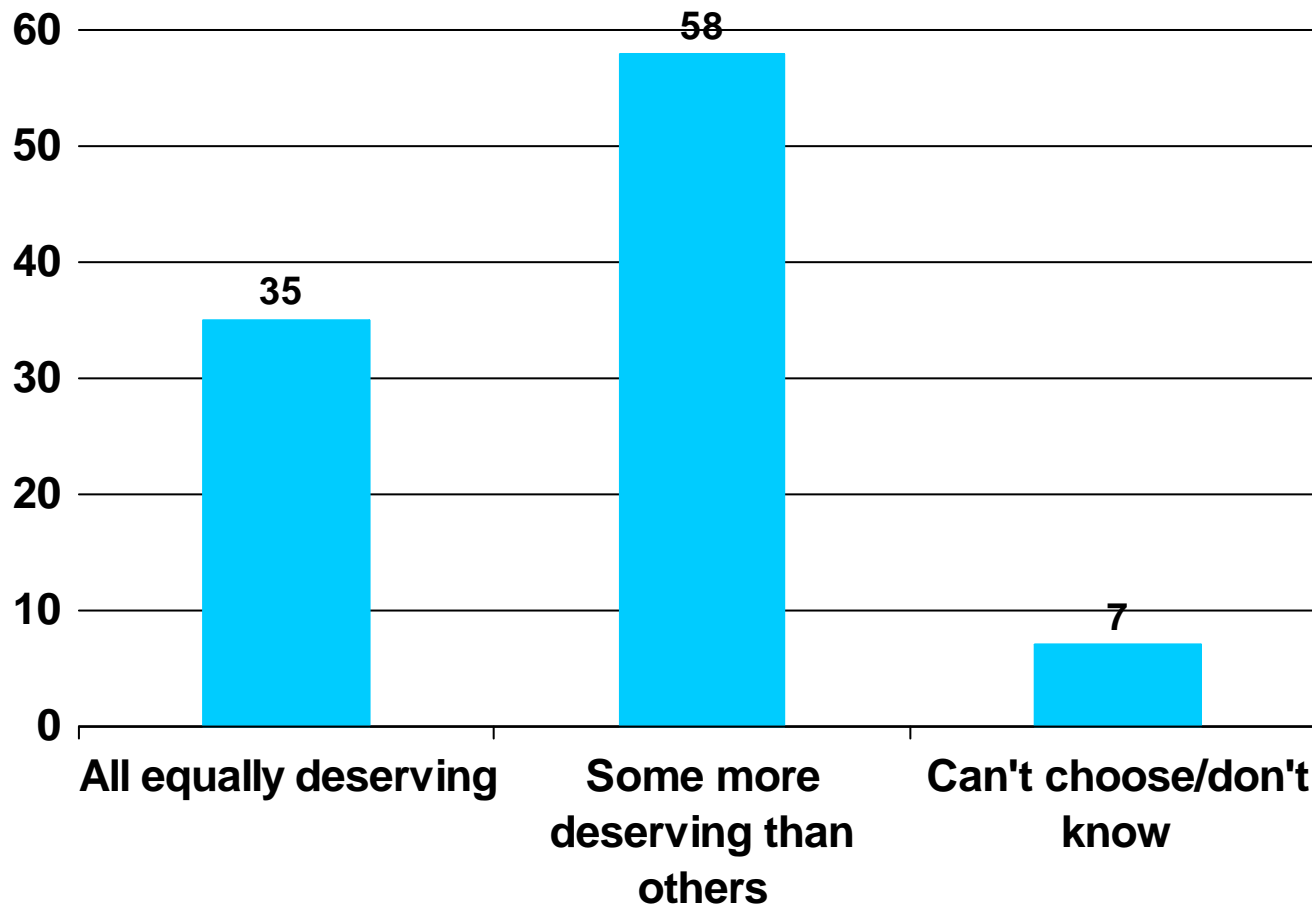
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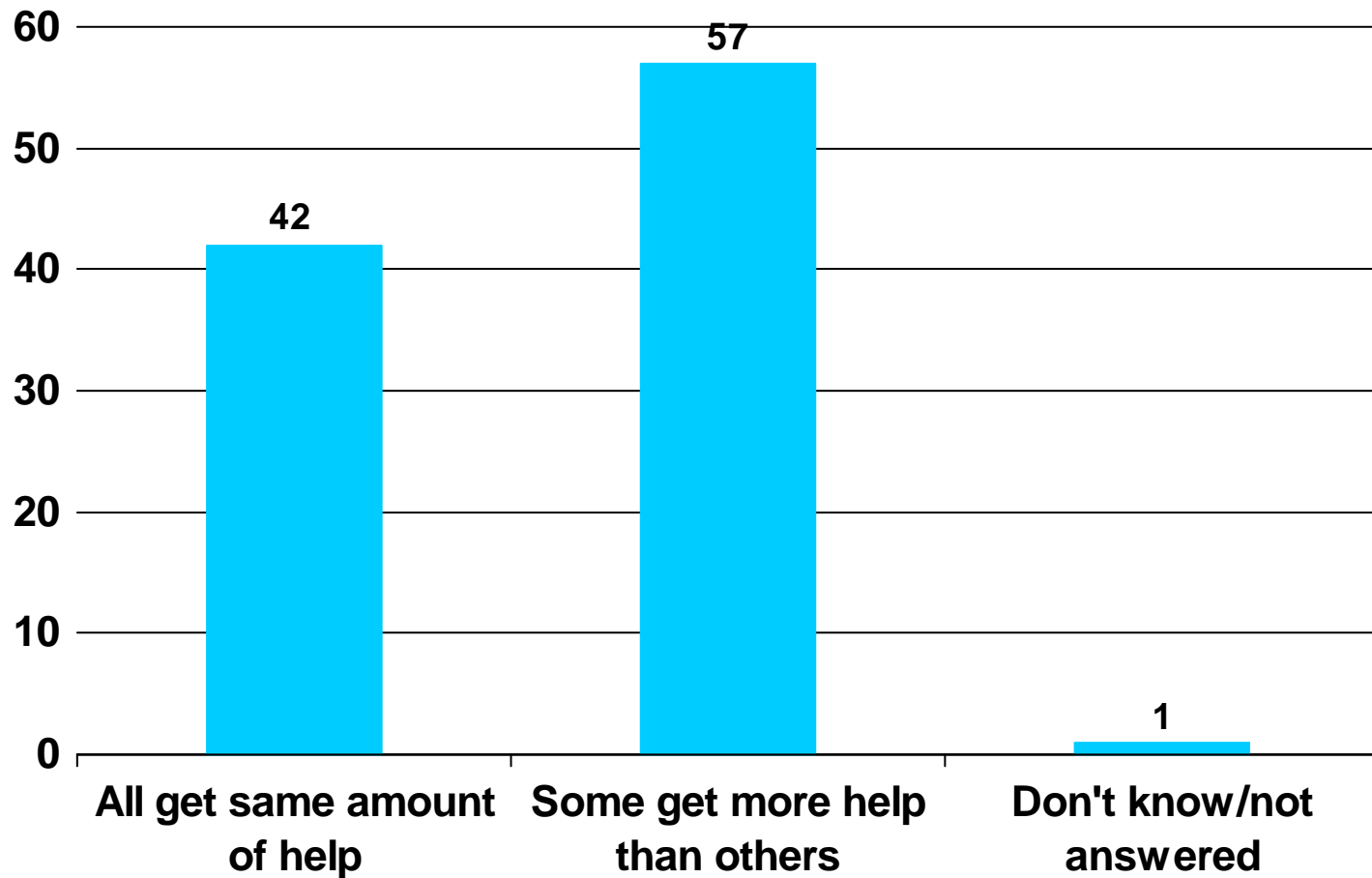
‘Deserving’ homeless people?

- Do people think some homeless people are more deserving of help than others?
- Who is most and least deserving?

People who become homeless for different reasons?



Different kinds of people?





* PN prior to 2003 Act

+ expanded PN post-2003

	Most deserving (%)	Least deserving (%)
+Victim of domestic abuse	40	1
* Family break-up	30	1
* Mental health problems	29	*
+ YP leaving children's home	26	1
Drug or alcohol problem	12	17
+ Leaving hospital	10	1
Financial problems	10	4
Leaving overcrowded accommodation	5	5
+ Leaving prison	4	14
Just moved to Scotland	2	14
Evicted for being a noisy neighbour	1	35
(All equally deserving)	(35)	(35)



Which kinds of people should get most help?

	(%)
*Young single parent with children	39
*Married couple with children	31
*Someone aged over 65	30
Middle-aged person who has just got divorced	5
Young single woman	3
Young single man	1
Other	1
Should all get the same amount of help	42



Policy implications?

- Challenge the myth that most homeless people sleep rough
- Highlight the background and situation of different homeless people
- Convince people of the rationale and desirability of abolishing distinctions between homeless people
- Increase understanding of circumstances of those considered 'less deserving'
 - E.g. prison leavers, those who have just moved to Scotland, those with drug and alcohol problems.



Questions for discussion

- How (if at all) do public attitudes to homelessness affect your work?
- Do the findings of the survey reflect your experience of public reactions to homelessness?
- Which views do you think most need challenging?
- How could this be done (and by who)?



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