Understanding Patterns of Family Homelessness

The Case for a Mixed Methods Approach

Sarah Parker and Paula Mayock
Trinity College Dublin

@SarahSParker

Overview

1 Family homelessness: <u>What</u> do we Know and <u>how</u> do we know it?

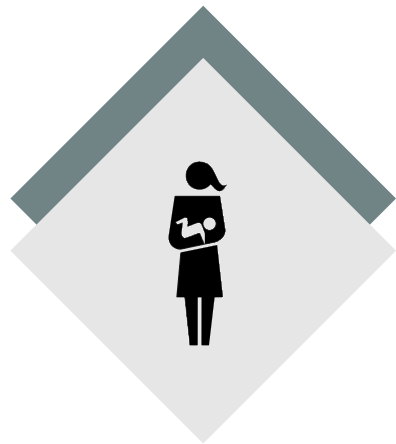**2** What does Mixed Methods Research Bring to the Table?

3 The Study

4 Mixed Methods Research: Some considerations

5 Conclusions: What will be Gained?

There is clearly diversity and heterogeneity amongst families that experience homelessness; however, research evidence points to some key patterns and trends:

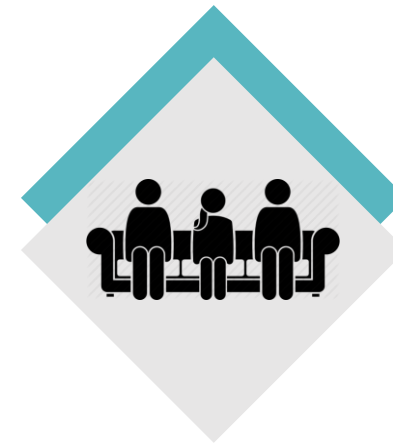| Young, Single-Mothers	Domestic Violence	Lower-level Needs	'Hidden' Homelessness	Migrant Families
(Rossi, 1992; Stretch and Kreuger, 1992; Rocha *et al.*, 1996; Wong, 1997; Shinn, 1998; Metraux and Culhane, 1999; Shinn *et al.*, 2005; Rog *et al.*, 2007; Paradis *et al.*, 2014; Baptista *et al.*, 2017)	(Wood, 1990; Bassuk et al., 1996; Bassuk and Rosenbery, 1988; Goodman, 1991; Paradis *et al.*, 2009; Pleace *et al.*, 2008; Baptista *et al.*, 2017)	(Shinn *et al.*, 1998; Roll *et al.*, 1999; Culhane *et al.*, 2007; Pleace *et al.*, 2008; Weinreb *et al.*, 2010; Shinn *et al.*, 2016; Baptista *et al.*, 2017 ; Donley, 2017)	(Shinn *et al.*, 1991; Pleace *et al.*, 2008; Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Baptista *et al.,* 2017; Stamp, 2017)	(Focus Ireland, 2017; Baptista *et al.,* 2017; DRHE, 2018)

There is clearly diversity and heterogeneity amongst families that experience homelessness; however, research evidence points to some key patterns and trends:

Young, Single-Mothers

Violence

Lower-level Needs

Homelessness

Migrant Families

Family homelessness has clear structural/economic drivers as well as a strong gendered dimension
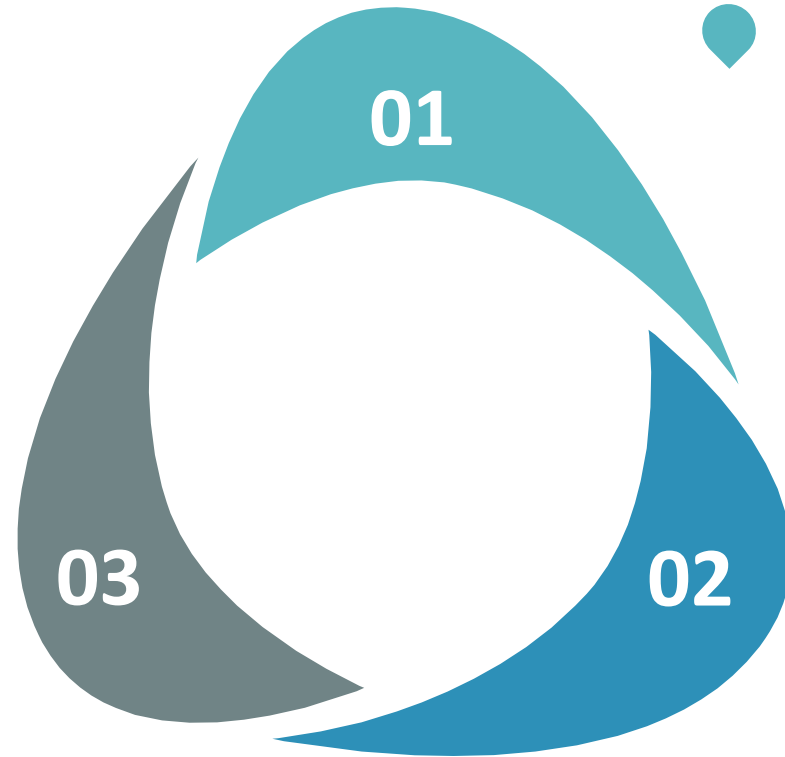
Family Homelessness: <u>What</u> do we Know?

Longitudinal research over the past 20 years has taught us that homelessness is a *process*, rather than a static event in an individual's life:

01

02

03

Most homelessness in transitory

Research has taught us that homelessness is much more likely to be transitional, with a smaller number experiencing episodic (recurrent) and prolonged (chronic) homeless episodes (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; Culhane *et al.*, 2007; Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015; Jones and Pleace, 2010; O'Donoghue Hynes, 2015)

Subsidised housing is key

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that, for a vast number of families, access to affordable, subsidised, or social housing is sufficient to achieve housing stability (Shinn *et al.*, 1998; Pleace *et al.*, 2008; Shinn, 2009; Shinn *et al.*, 2016; Gubits *et al.,* 2018).

Structural barriers to exiting

The primary predictors of families' length of stay in homelessness services are structural factors and apparent 'program and policy effects' rather than individual-level explanations (Culhane *et al.*, 2007; Weinreb *et al.*, 2010; Fisher *et al.*, 2014; Donley *et al.*, 2017).

Longitudinal research over the past 20 years has taught us that homelessness is a *process*, rather than a static event in an individual's life:

Families are increasingly represented in homelessness research; however, understanding of the nature, dynamics and lived experience of family homelessness, as well as 'what works' for particular subgroups, remains underdeveloped

Family Homelessness: <u>How</u> do we Know it?

The vast majority of the available research evidence on family homelessness is quantitative in nature and has relied heavily on administrative data:

- **Coverage & scale** – large sample sizes; facilitates robust statistical and sub-group analyses of 'hard to reach' populations
- **Cost & time efficient**
- **Longitudinal application –** useful for social policy planning and evaluation.
- **Data linkage across systems –** extends analytical depth and richness of datasets

- **Practical issues** – access; 'messy'; lack of documentation
- **'Found' vs. 'made' data** – may omit variables of (conceptual) interest
- **Underrepresents those who do not use services**
- **Rigid, pre-determined responses** – unable to capture context, process and lived experience

Family Homelessness: <u>How</u> do we Know it?

The vast majority of the available research evidence on family homelessness is quantitative in nature and has relied heavily on administrative data:
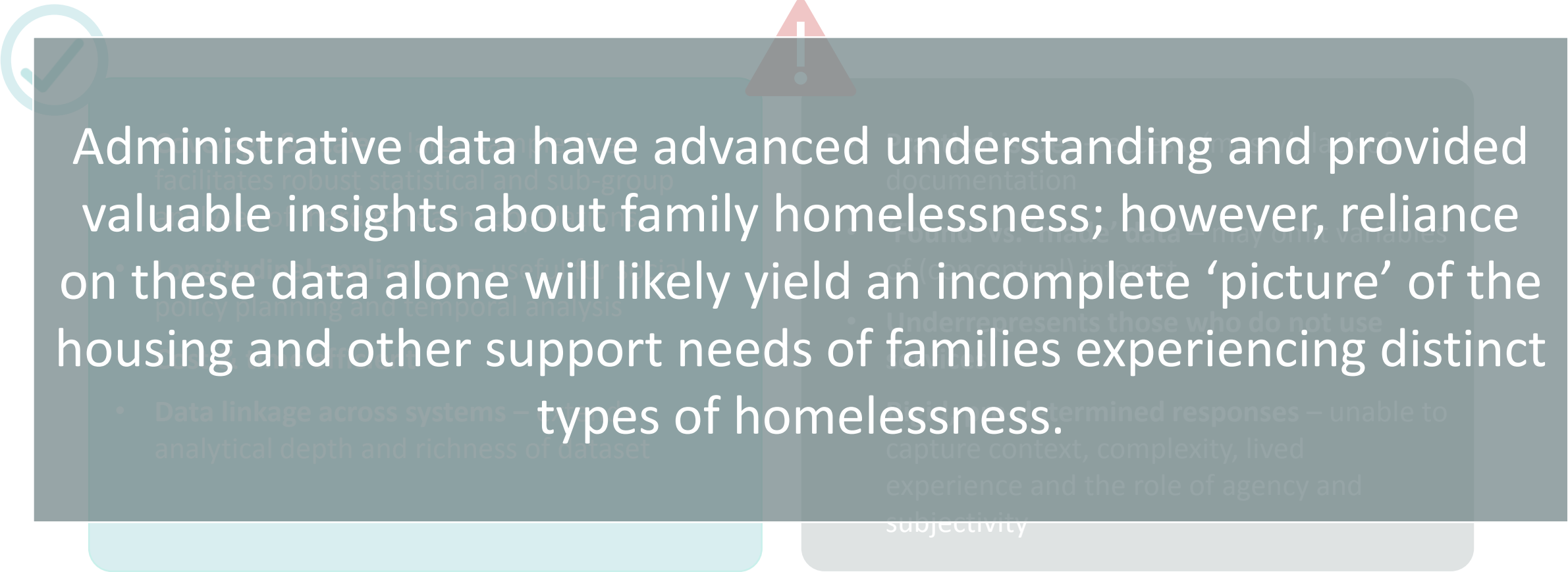
Administrative data have advanced understanding and provided valuable insights about family homelessness; however, reliance on these data alone will likely yield an incomplete 'picture' of the housing and other support needs of families experiencing distinct types of homelessness.

So, What does Mixed Methods Research Bring to the Table?

"An element of qualitative, lived, observed experience lies at the heart of every number"
(Bazeley, 2018: 176)

Combines the reach and rigour of QUANT techniques with the depth and nuance of QUAL understanding

01

Integrates two fundamental ways of 'thinking' about complex social phenomena

02

Facilitates deeper understanding that is innovative, but grounded

03

So, What does Mixed Methods Research Bring to the Table?

"An element of qualitative, lived, observed experience lies at the heart of every number"
(Bazeley, 2018: 176)

"In genuinely integrated studies, the quantitative and qualitative findings will be mutually informative. They will talk to each other, much like a conversation or debate, and the idea is then to construct a negotiated account of what they mean together" (Bryman, 2007: 21)
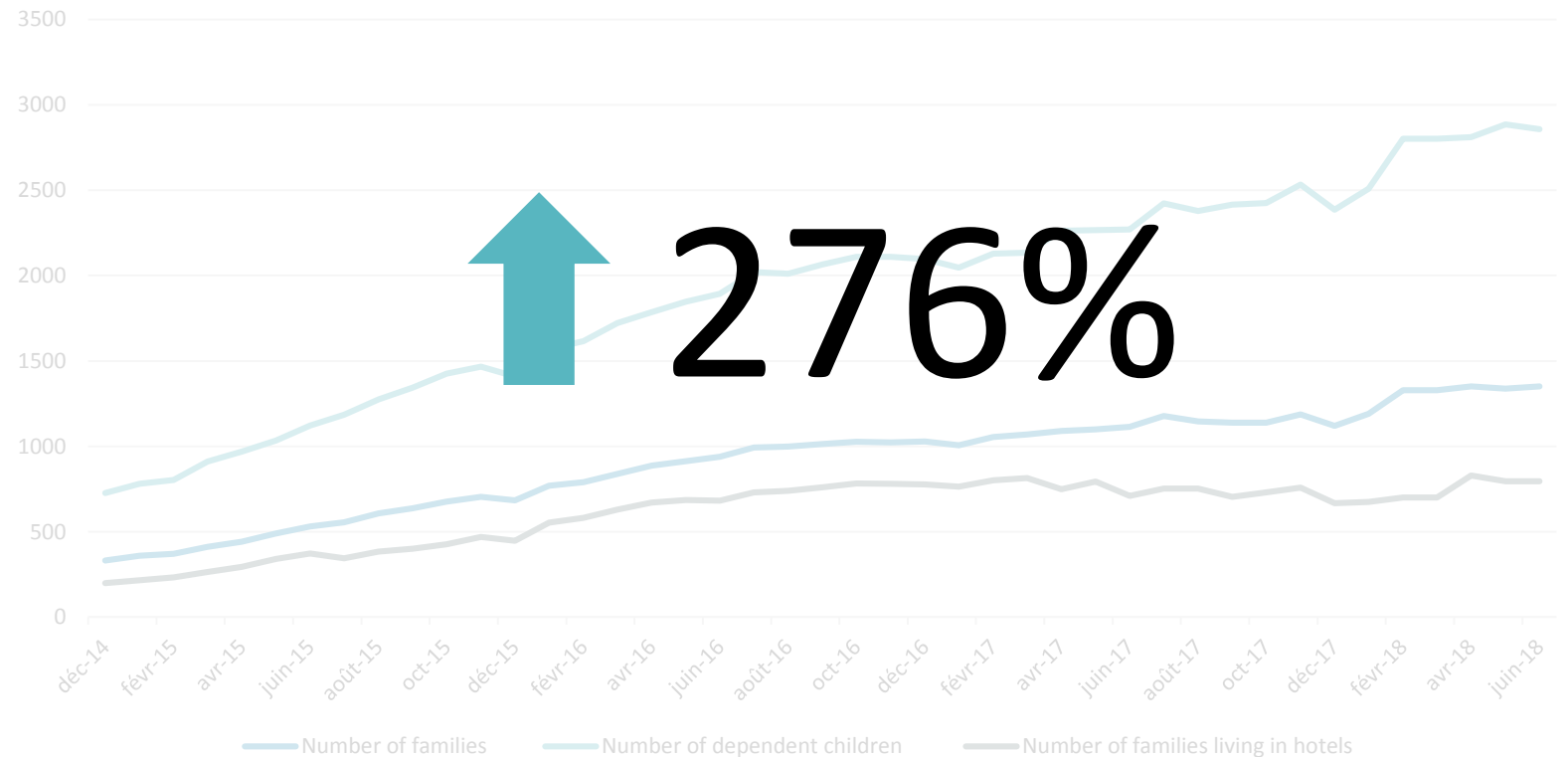
The Study

Overview

- Seeks to generate **in-depth knowledge of the nature and temporal dynamics** of family homelessness in the Dublin region.

- Employs a **sequential (explanatory) mixed methods design** to examine families' trajectories through and out of homelessness services.

- A key objective is to provide nuanced understanding of the **individual, contextual and structural factors** that conduce distinct patterns of family homelessness.

Research Context

Family Homelessness in Dublin, Dec 2014 – June 2018

— Number of families   — Number of dependent children   — Number of families living in hotels

Sources: DHPCLG, 2014-2017; DRHE, 2014-2017

The Study: Data

Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS)

2011-2016

N = 2536 families

+

Local Authority Housing List (Dublin City Council)

2014-2017

1) Permission to access these data was obtained from the Dublin Region Homeless Executive.

2) Linked using a unique identification code that is allocated to each client across both systems.

3) Only collect information on those accessing emergency homelessness accommodation funded under Section 10 of the Housing Act in Ireland.
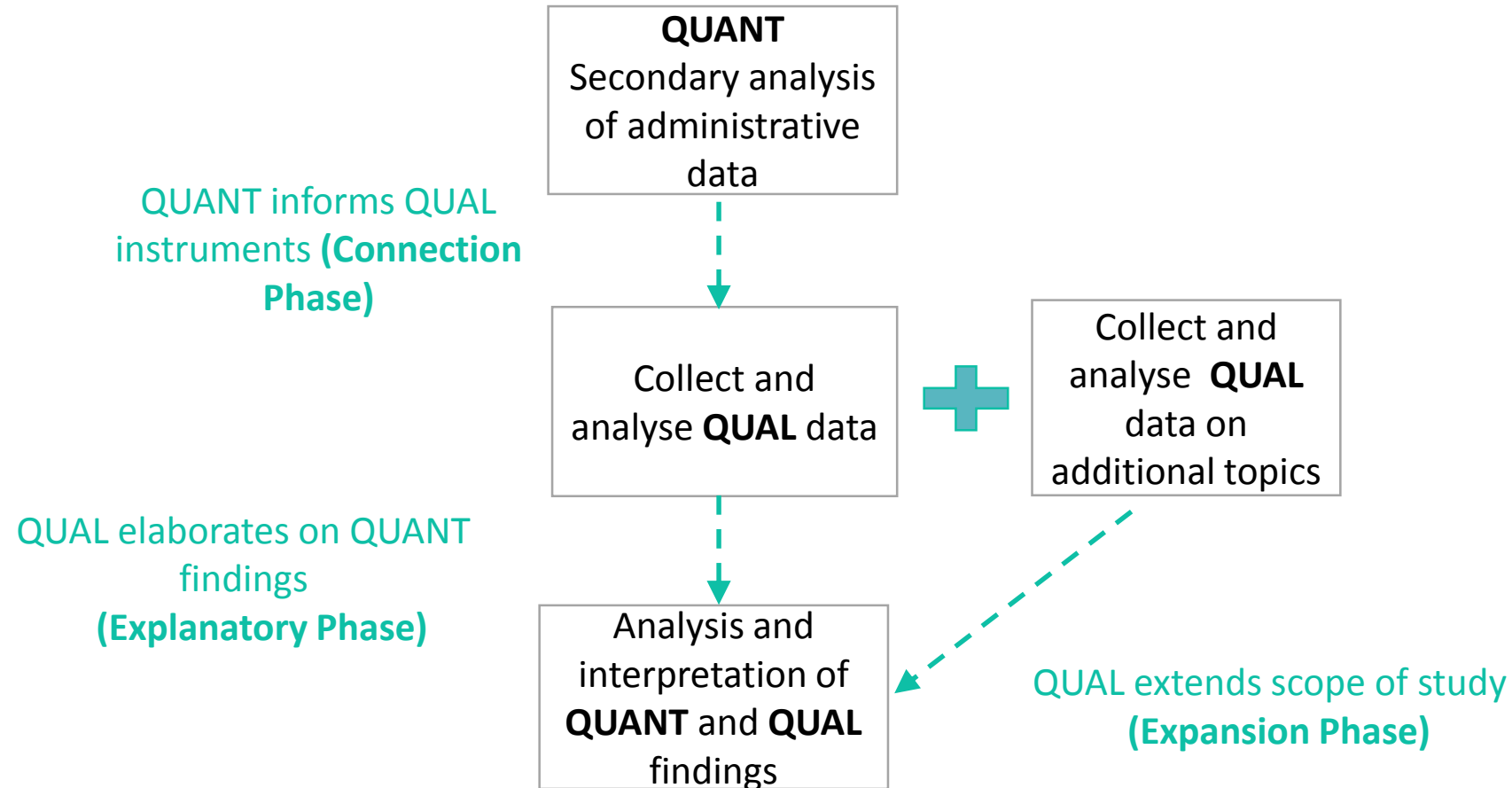
QUAL Sample (in-depth interviews)

2018

N = 30 (approx.)

1) Families currently accessing State-funded accommodation or have recently exited homelessness.

2) Diversity will be sought according to:

- The frequency and duration of their homelessness (chronic, episodic and transitional); and
- Family types (two-parent, single-parent, male or female headed, migrant families, family size and so on).
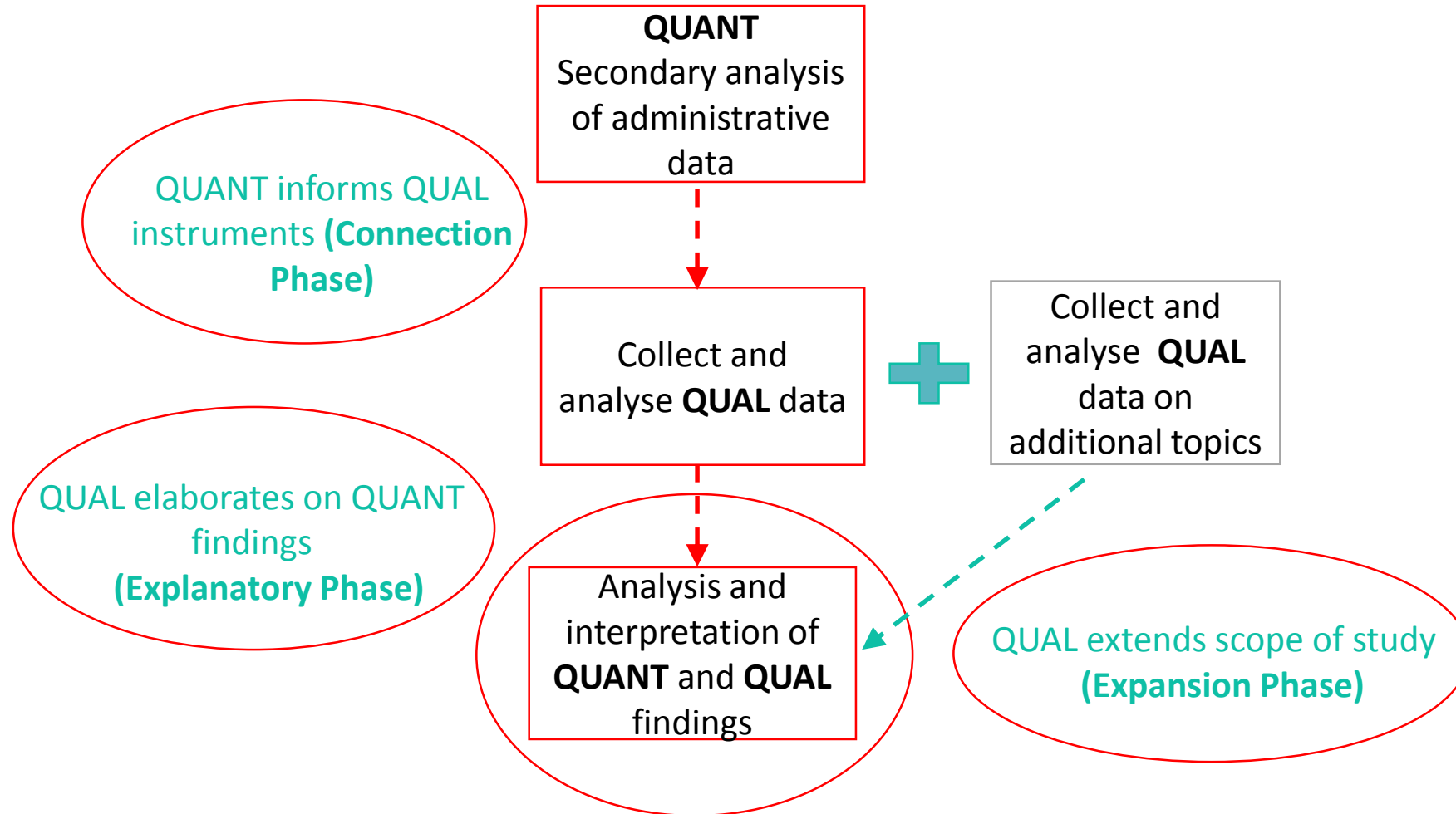
The Study: Integration

Mixed Methods Sequential (Explanatory) Design

QUANT
Secondary analysis of administrative data

QUANT informs QUAL instruments **(Connection Phase)**

Collect and analyse **QUAL** data

➕

Collect and analyse **QUAL** data on additional topics

QUAL elaborates on QUANT findings
(Explanatory Phase)

Analysis and interpretation of **QUANT** and **QUAL** findings
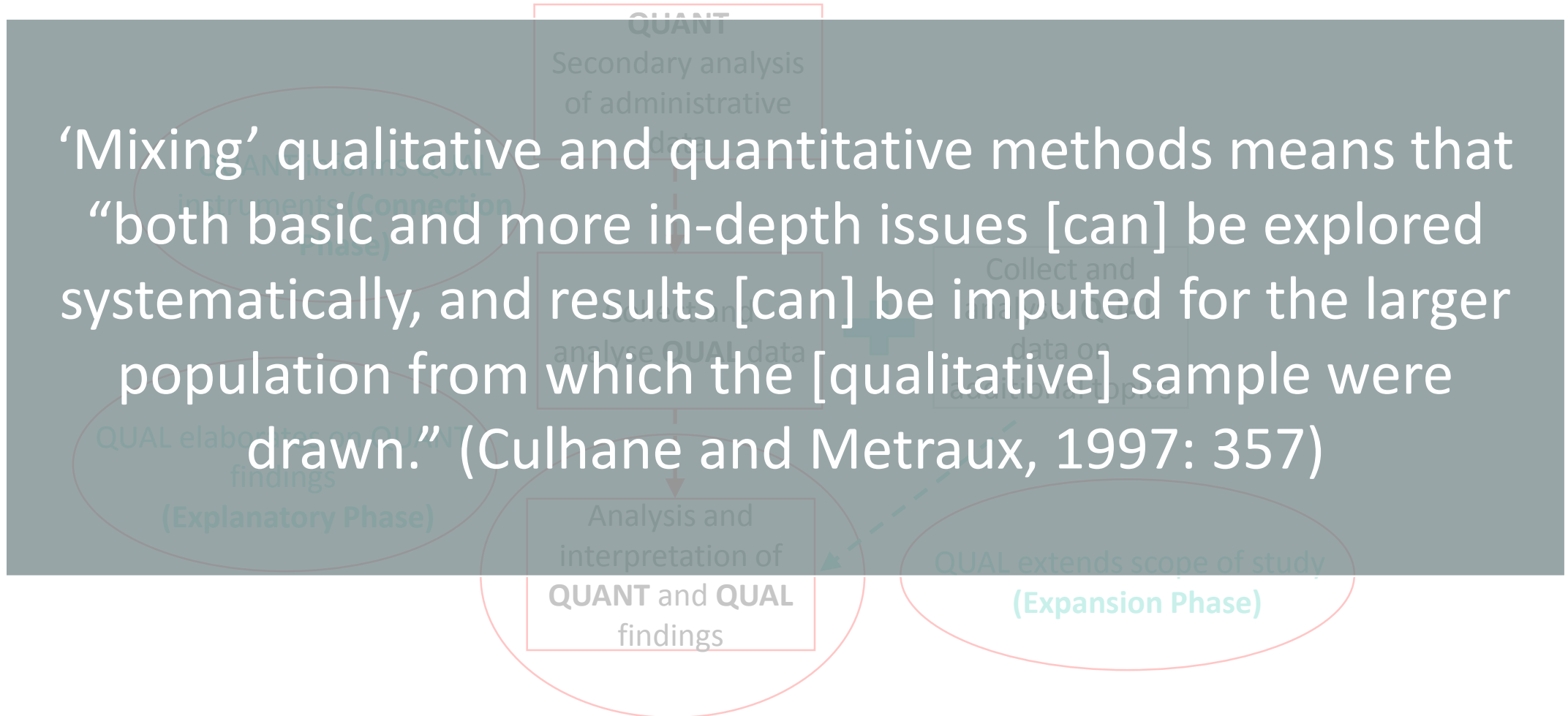
QUAL extends scope of study
(Expansion Phase)

Mixed Methods Sequential (Explanatory) Design

Mixed Methods Sequential (Explanatory) Design

'Mixing' qualitative and quantitative methods means that "both basic and more in-depth issues [can] be explored systematically, and results [can] be imputed for the larger population from which the [qualitative] sample were drawn." (Culhane and Metraux, 1997: 357)

Mixed Methods Research: Some Considerations

Two methods are <u>not</u> always better than one. Methods are only strong or weak in *relation to particular purposes* (Sandelowski, 2003; Bazely, 2018).

Mixed methods research **necessitates philosophical/paradigmatic clarity** (Fielding, 2012).

'Mixed' vs. separated findings: "separation of different components ... is likely to lead to a report which is disjointed and potentially repetitive" (Bazeley, 2002: 9).

Integration is undertheorized (Greene, 2007).

Though arguably not 'new' (Pelto, 2015; Maxwell, 2015), it is **still a developing (and less established) research approach**.

Practical issues: time & cost; skills & knowledge; page & word limitations (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Conclusions: What will be Gained?

1 Synthesising quantitative and qualitative methods has the potential to **contribute to fuller understanding of the 'what, why and how'** related to the mechanisms that either facilitate or block paths to housing stability:

- Gets beneath statistical findings and 'puts the meat on the bones' of quantitative data
- Illuminates unanticipated relationships and new insights
- Identifies the influence of structural, contextual, individual and processual factors
- Considers the role of agency and subjectivity in shaping outcomes

2 By building this level of depth and scope into research that seeks to learn more about the diverse needs of homeless populations, we can **advance knowledge of the housing and service mix that is best suited to ensure that individual and families exit and successfully remain housed.**

Thank you!

Sarah Parker | 🐦 **@SarahSParker** ✉️ **parkers1@tcd.ie** ℞ᴳ **/sarah_parker19**

Dr. Paula Mayock | 🐦 **@PaulaMayock** ✉️ **pmayock@tcd.ie** ℞ᴳ **/Paula_Mayock**