

Paula Mayock & Eoin O’Sullivan (2007)

***Lives in crisis:
Homeless young people in Dublin***

Dublin: The Liffey Press, 301 pages, €19.95

Pillinger, J. (2007)

Homeless Pathways: Developing effective strategies to address pathways into, through and out of homelessness

Dublin: Focus Ireland, 73 pages

These two recent studies from Ireland both utilise a ‘pathways’ approach to understand the routes into, through and out of homelessness. This approach recognises the importance of taking a life-course approach to explaining homelessness (and housing careers more broadly), highlighting the experiences and perspectives of people and what works for them in practice (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2005). The study by Mayock and O’Sullivan (2007) focuses on the experiences of forty young people in Dublin, aged between fourteen and twenty-two, whilst Pillinger’s (2007) study draws on the experience of seventeen people across various ages and circumstances, who had used the services of one particular agency, *Focus Ireland*.

Mayock and O’Sullivan have produced a substantial book that does credit to the biographical approach to qualitative research. The voices and perspectives of young people dominate this comprehensive account of the experience of homelessness. A useful first chapter provides a detailed historical context on the development of services for homeless children and young people in Ireland. Chapters 2 and 3 expand this to provide an international perspective before explaining the benefits of adopting a pathways approach. The substantive findings from the interviews are organised thematically in five chapters covering: ‘becoming homeless’; ‘the homeless experience’; ‘drugs and crime’; ‘health’; and ‘services’. These chapters deserve to be read in their entirety as the chapter titles do not do justice to the rich and complex accounts of the meaning of being ‘out of home’ (not all

young people defined themselves as 'homeless') and the impact of this on young people's lives. For example, three main pathways into homelessness for young people are identified: a care history; household instability and family conflict; and negative peer associations and 'problem' behaviour. However, the full accounts reveal a number of key cross-cutting issues that centre around long-term poverty, difficult childhoods (with services continually letting these children down), bereavement and/or loss, and the profound 'dislocation' experienced by most people, usually before homelessness, as well as part of the process of being homeless.

For many readers, the main disappointment of the Mayock and O'Sullivan book, acknowledged by the authors, is that it only presents Phase One of what is a longitudinal research study. The study, therefore, can only examine pathways into and (partly) through homelessness, but currently lacks insights into the pathways out of homelessness. Given the high quality of the first volume, the promised second volume should provide an important analysis to help address the relative lack of research on pathways out of homelessness.

Unlike Mayock and O'Sullivan, the Pillinger study provides an opportunity to consider routes into, though and out of homelessness, albeit utilising a retrospective study design rather than a longitudinal methodology. This study also begins with a more limited, but still useful overview of existing literature and details of the research approach. An interesting and ethically robust part of their approach involved a second interview with all respondents approximately four to six weeks after the first interview, intended to verify the biographical account with each person. The first substantive findings chapter provides an overview of homeless people's pathways, as well as providing summaries of the pathways of each of the seventeen respondents. Chapter 5 focuses on risk factors and triggers that lead to homelessness. Whilst this aspect of homelessness is already quite well documented in the wider homelessness literature, the study nonetheless illustrates the range of risks that people face, linked to structural, social and personal/individual factors. Chapter 6 details people's pathways through homelessness, particularly focusing on the different accommodation services used. This focus is narrower than that of Mayock and O'Sullivan, who also examined key issues such as health status, however both studies came to the same conclusion – that too many people become 'stuck' in homelessness, with longer lengths of time spent homeless leading to increased risks, more enduring social problems and greater difficulties in exiting homelessness. The penultimate chapter identifies effective routes out of homelessness, looking at accommodation and housing support issues, as well as the importance of access to employment and training together with engaging with public services.

The final chapter of Pillinger's study identifies a series of recommendations for informing the alleviation of homelessness in Ireland. In particular, the study highlights the need for a greater focus on prevention and early intervention if homelessness is to be addressed adequately in the future. This includes improving the supply of good quality and affordable social and private rented housing. It also argues for more longitudinal research in this area, akin to the Mayock and O'Sullivan study. From a reader's perspective, the conclusions appeared a little simplified given the complexity of people's experiences, although it was good to see them attempted. The Mayock and O'Sullivan study stopped short of specific policy recommendations although there were some quite powerful emerging implications from their work (for example, the move from hostels for young people to those for adult homeless people is associated with a transition to 'real' homelessness from a young person's perspective).

Both studies amply demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of homelessness, supporting Anderson and Tulloch's (2000) comment that each person has a 'unique pathway' through homelessness, at the same time as being able to identify discernable patterns that can be utilised to improve policy. The two studies complement each other well, with Pillinger providing an overview of pathways through homelessness, with Mayock and O'Sullivan demonstrating the benefits of a more detailed study for a specific group of homeless people. Together they represent a useful contribution to the ongoing development of pathways approaches to homelessness research, particularly in the Irish context.

Anderson, I. and Tulloch, D. (2000) *Pathways Through Homelessness: A review of research evidence*, Edinburgh: Scottish Homes.

Clapham, D. (2005) *The Meaning of Housing: A pathways approach*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

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