

European Observatory on Homelessness

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## **EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF HOMELESSNESS**

### **Journal Philosophy**

The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal also assesses the lessons for Europe, which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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## Editorial

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As this edition of the EJH goes to print, many countries of the Global North are experiencing a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. In response to the first wave, governments expended unprecedented sums of public funding on services for households experiencing homelessness. This public funding provided additional emergency accommodation, primarily in hotels which were largely empty following the collapse of tourism due to travel restrictions, to accommodate those literally homeless, and to 'thin out' existing congregate temporary and emergency facilities to allow social distancing and self-isolation / shielding. Although data is scant and still emerging, these responses appear to have been largely successful in limiting the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases and Covid-19 related deaths amongst households experiencing homelessness.

Indeed, it has been argued that the response of central and local governments across a number of countries to meeting the needs of those experiencing homelessness during Covid-19 'stands out for its urgency and activism' (Parsell et al, 2020, p.4). They argue that the motivation for this 'urgency and activism' was motivated by a concern that households experiencing homelessness were at high risk of contracting Covid-19. This was due to the fact that many were accommodated in congregate accommodation facilities where social distancing and self-isolation were going to be hugely difficult to achieve, and for those who were literally homeless, the impossibility of 'staying at home' to prevent the spread of the virus, and hence the need to secure accommodation for them.

But they also argue that this unprecedented response was motivated by an additional concern; a concern that households experiencing homelessness were not only at risk of contracting the virus, but these same households as a consequence of their inadequate accommodation or absolute lack of, could also spread the virus to non-homeless households. They also note that these responses do not address the key drivers that result in households experiencing homelessness in the first instance such as housing insecurity and poverty. There was also ample evidence, prior to emergence of the pandemic in early 2020, of the ineffectiveness and high cost of providing congregate shelters as the primary response to residential instability and of the adverse consequences on the health, both physical and mental, of households experiencing homelessness. Although the reframing of homelessness as a public health issue rather than one of individual dysfunction and disability may on the surface seem a positive development, it may in fact negatively confirm a view

of those experiencing homelessness as a threat to the health of others, rather than households who are experiencing housing instability and exclusion. These issues of the underlying drivers of homelessness, how we conceptualise those experiencing homelessness and how to successfully prevent households entering homelessness in the first place, and to rapidly re-house those who do experience residential instability and homelessness are key themes in the contributions to this edition of the European Journal of Homelessness.

We have evidence that the moratoria on evictions in a significant number of countries (Kholodilin, 2020) arising from the pandemic dramatically slowed the rate of new entries to homelessness, and Stenberg and colleagues in their contribution to this edition of the EJH provide evidence from Sweden, based on an analysis of longitudinal data, of the policies changes required to prevent eviction and stem its consequences. Various legislative and administrative rules that restricted access to emergency accommodation for certain migrants were also suspended in many countries during the initial period of the pandemic. Bénoliel, in her contribution highlights the inability of the existing EU equality framework to effectively tackle this discrimination and offers a number of pointers to address this issue, and Oudshoorn and colleagues provide evidence from Canada on how to prevent refugees from entering emergency accommodation. In addition to legislative and policy changes that can stem the flow of households into homelessness, or restrict access to emergency services, if new evidence-based responses to homelessness are to be forged out of the pandemic, how we think and conceptualise homelessness also requires radical change, no more so than in relation to women's experience of homelessness as demonstrated in the contributions by Mayock, Sheridan, Mostowska and Dębska. In addition, Ayed and colleagues argue that a relational lens may provide greater understanding of people's experiences, the relationships they form and ways to redress the impact of homelessness.

Other contributions provide thoughtful analyses of the discourses surrounding begging on the London Overground rail network (Willmsen); and ethnographic account of the practices of individuals experiencing literal homelessness in St. Peter's square in Rome (Gesuelli); the experiences of front-line staff in homelessness services in finding a deceased resident (Valoroso and Stedmon) and accessing mental health services (Devine and Bergin); the importance and effectiveness of different models of peer-support to facilitate sustained exists from homelessness (Barker and colleagues), and the importance of local context in discussions of 'fidelity' in implementing Housing First outside of North America (Wygnańska). Finally, this edition concludes with a number of book reviews. We hope that you find the contributions to this edition of the EJH informative and stimulating as we rethink our responses to homelessness in these very challenging times.

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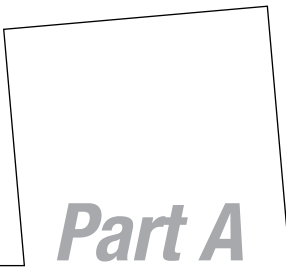
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# Articles



***Part A***







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# Women Negotiating Power and Control as they 'Journey' Through Homelessness: A Feminist Poststructuralist Perspective

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➤ **Abstract\_** *While homelessness is increasingly seen as differentiated by gender, dominant narratives only rarely incorporate the experiences of women. Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, this paper examines homeless women's trajectories through and out of homelessness based on data from a qualitative longitudinal study of women's homelessness in Ireland. Sixty women were recruited and interviewed at baseline and 'tracked' over a three-year period alongside the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork at strategically chosen sites throughout the duration of the study. At the time of follow-up, forty women were re-interviewed and reliable information was attained on the whereabouts of an additional nine participants. For the sample as whole, there was strong evidence that the presence or absence of children and the presence or absence of more complex needs impacted women's ability to access housing and exit homelessness. Those women who had transitioned to stable housing by the time of follow-up were more likely to have children in their care and to report lower levels of need related to substance use and/or mental health. A detailed examination of the women's service experiences and interactions reveals the complex way in which they engaged with the discourses embedded in the structures they encountered as they moved through the service system, very often along trajectories of long-term homelessness. The analysis uncovers women's agency, mobilised through acts of 'resistance' and 'conformity', as they navigated a landscape where assumptions about 'deserving' and 'undeserving' women prevailed and also significantly influenced their housing outcomes.*

► **Keywords\_** *women's homelessness; homeless trajectories, homeless exits, feminist poststructuralism, qualitative longitudinal research, ethnography, Ireland*

## Introduction

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There is strong evidence that women's homelessness is a significant global problem. Women constitute up to one-third of the total homeless population in many European countries, including Germany, Italy, Poland and Sweden, with significantly higher rates of female homelessness evident in France, Ireland and the UK (Hansen Löffstrand and Quilgars, 2016; Owen *et al.*, 2019). Likewise, in the US, recent State measurements indicate that women and girls represent 39 per cent of the total homeless population (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019), while Canadian data show that 27 per cent of those experiencing homelessness are female (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Finally, the most recent annual report on those in receipt of specialist homelessness services in Australia suggests that, of those accessing such services, 60 per cent are female (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).

Importantly, comparative analysis of the extent of women's homelessness across jurisdictions is significantly hampered by differences in the way in which homelessness is 'counted' (Busch-Geertsema, 2010), with estimates in many countries based on the most *visible* forms of homelessness (Hansen Löffstrand and Quilgars, 2016). Furthermore, definitions of homelessness, as well as dominant techniques of enumeration, operate on a gendered landscape in which women's experiences are marginalised, leading to the under-representation of women within homelessness statistics (Pleace, 2016). It is twenty years since feminist scholar, Sophie Watson, argued that "the conundrum at the heart of analysing women's homelessness" (Watson, 2000, p.161) is linked to the problem of definition and consequent underestimation of the scale of the problem:

If homelessness is defined in terms of men's experiences and practices or men's subjectivities, then women's homelessness becomes invisible. If it is invisible it is not counted and therefore it is underestimated (Watson, 2000 p. 61).

Homelessness research has long since been critiqued for its gender-neutral approach (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Watson, 2000; Doherty, 2001; Edgar and Doherty, 2001) and the experiences of homeless women have only received sporadic attention in the research literature (Baptista, 2010; Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Savage, 2016; Bretherton, 2017; Reeve, 2018; Bretherton, 2020). Nonetheless, a growing number of scholars have been "nudging forward" with efforts to produce

gendered understandings of homelessness (Reeve, 2018, p.166). Research has, for example, demonstrated that experiences such as childhood sexual abuse and violence, family adversities (related to poverty and neglect), relationship breakdown, intimate partner violence and maternal trauma push women along a trajectory of housing instability and homelessness (Jones, 1999; Reeve *et al.*, 2006; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Mayock *et al.*, 2012; Bretherton, 2020). While these experiences are not unique to women, they are gendered. The role of domestic and other forms of gender-based violence in women (including women experiencing single adult homelessness and women with children in their care) becoming homeless is possibly one of the strongest indicators that gender matters (Mayock *et al.*, 2016). There are of course other reasons, related to economic and housing problems, why women become homeless but, again, there are important gender dimensions to housing stress and instability. Across Europe and in North America, family homelessness is highly gendered, disproportionately experienced by households headed by a single female parent (Shinn *et al.*, 2013; Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2014; Baptista *et al.*, 2017; United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018; Long *et al.*, 2019; Owen *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, alongside the diversification of the profile of homeless people across Europe, women's susceptibility to housing exclusion has increased (Owen *et al.*, 2019).

Beyond research evidence pointing to the importance of gender in understanding the drivers of homelessness, there is now considerable evidence that women's experiences of – and their responses to – homelessness have distinguishing features. For example, women are more likely than their male counterparts to rely on informal networks, certainly during the early stages of their homelessness (Jones, 1999; Reeve *et al.*, 2007; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Mayock *et al.*, 2015; Bowpitt *et al.*, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2017; Bretherton, 2020). The tendency for women to live in situations of 'hidden' homelessness is undoubtedly related to the particular stigma attached to the 'unaccommodated woman' (Wardhaugh, 1999). Stigmatising discourses that depict homeless women as transgressing normative assumptions about women's roles as mothers, carers and home-makers are historically rooted (O'Sullivan, 2016). These discourses remain present today (Hansen Löfstrand and Quilgars, 2016) and may push women into spaces where their homelessness is concealed. The same applies to women who experience intimate partner violence and there is evidence that women's reluctance to access domestic violence services can be connected to cultural norms and beliefs (Mayock *et al.*, 2016). Migrant women, for example, may delay leaving an abusive home situation because of cultural prescriptions that prevent them from reporting violence (Mayock *et al.*, 2012). More broadly, for women and children who are impacted by

domestic abuse, their houses are no longer a place where they can exercise and enjoy control, an experience that has been likened to 'homeless at home' (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Wardhaugh, 1999).

Far less is known about the paths that women take through and out of homelessness. However, there is evidence of women trying to resolve their homelessness independently; leaving the service system, often to take up (temporary) residence with family members or friends (Reeve *et al.*, 2007; Mayock *et al.*, 2015). These routes through homelessness also appear to be related to women's reluctance to remain in homeless hostels because of the inherently stressful nature of these environments (Bretherton, 2020). Again, findings such as these point to women using informal networks as a 'solution' to their homelessness even if these living situations are often not sustainable and lead many back to homeless service settings (Mayock *et al.*, 2015).

A reliance on cross-sectional research designs has significantly hampered understanding of the course of women's homelessness. However, a recent paper, based on data drawn from a large-scale longitudinal evaluation of an employment, education and training programme for homeless adults in six UK locations, examined women's trajectories through homelessness, identifying a number of pathways taken by the forty-seven women interviewed (Bretherton, 2020). This research reported relative success in the move towards housing stability, with thirty-three of the forty-seven homeless women who were 'tracked' over a two-year period describing themselves as "moving away from homelessness and toward mainstream social and economic life" (Bretherton, 2020, p.264). Equally, however, the findings raise important questions about what constitutes an exit from homelessness since many of the women who had 'exited' in fact continued along a path of housing precarity. In other words, while many had transitioned to housing, some did not perceive that they were secure from a return to homelessness. Enduring patterns of housing precarity among women have similarly been documented in the Irish context (Mayock *et al.*, 2015). Bretherton's (2020, p.13) findings draw attention to the possibility that women may need particular kinds of supports in order to exit homelessness and remain housed, even if gender is "unlikely to have a simple, 'binary' effect on homelessness trajectories".

While gender is increasingly recognised as influencing the ways in which homelessness is experienced and possibly resolved, there has been little progress in developing conceptualisations of homelessness that interrogate gender (Reeve, 2018). In particular, very little is known about the processes that support or, alternatively, act as a barrier to women exiting homelessness or about the normative assumptions and practices that influence the paths that women take through homelessness. Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, this paper examines women's

'journeys' through and out of homelessness based on data from a qualitative longitudinal study of women's homelessness in Ireland. Focusing on women's service experiences and interactions, the analysis reveals how subjectivities and individual action and response are constituted through the gendered discourses that surround women. The analysis uncovers women's agency, mobilised through acts of 'resistance' and 'conformity', as they navigated a landscape where assumptions about 'deserving' and 'undeserving' women prevailed and also significantly influenced their housing outcomes.

## **Feminist Poststructuralism**

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Housing theorists Sophie Watson and Helen Austerberry (Austerberry and Watson, 1983; Watson and Austerberry, 1986) were among the first to interrogate women's homelessness and housing exclusion through a feminist lens. Their analysis sought to explain how "patriarchal social relations, the sexual division of labour and the dominant family model in a capitalist society all serve to marginalise women in the housing sphere" (Watson and Austerberry, 1986, p.7). Women, they argued, lack power to exert control over their housing – independently from a man – because of the patriarchal assumptions in which housing systems are embedded; patriarchy, they posited, is a key driver of women's homelessness. Their analysis emphasised the centrality of family to housing policy and provision, highlighting the marginalisation of non-family households, and single family households in particular, within housing systems.

Watson and Austerberry's (1986) Marxist feminist perspective drew sharp attention to the wider patriarchal forces that define women's homelessness and to the shortcomings of homelessness and broader policy responses. However, this analysis has been critiqued on a number of grounds. First, it is argued that while patriarchy and gender inequality have their place within debates on homelessness, to single out patriarchy as a single oppressive force over-simplifies the causes of homelessness among women (Neale, 1997). A second critique focuses on the advantages offered to women within housing and broader welfare policy, particularly to women with dependent children, who frequently have enhanced access to crucial services and subsidised housing (Neale, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2005). Finally, and importantly, homeless women are not a homogenous group nor are they passive victims of circumstance who lack agency (Neale, 1997), as feminist housing theorists appear to imply. Feminist analyses therefore run the risk of overlooking and concealing the diversity of women's situations and of denying women agency and autonomy. This denial of agency may also serve to re-victimise women (Crinall, 1995).

Women, according to Weedon (1987, p.125), are “feeling, thinking subject[s]” who are “capable of resistance and innovations”; women “reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives” and, when making decisions, are “able to choose from the options available”. Poststructuralist feminists acknowledge that women are not a homogenous group (Weedon, 1987) and identify “the need for a multiplicit view of femaleness” (Crinall, 1995, p.43). Drawing heavily on the work of Foucault, feminist poststructuralism incorporates an analysis of power and power relations, focusing on how power works to ensure the maintenance of social hierarchy and adherence to the status quo (Weedon, 1987).

Power is ubiquitous and, in order to assert control Foucault argues, those who are deemed ‘outside’ of the mainstream are closely monitored, scrutinised and compared to normative ‘ideals’. Power and control are diffused and embodied in discourse since “[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (Foucault, 1990, p.100). Poststructuralist feminists who have taken up Foucault’s notion of discourse (Weedon, 1987; Butler, 1990) explore the ways in which gender governs how individuals think, feel and act. Subjectivity, which is constituted or constructed through language and discourse, refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1987, p.32). Shaped in interaction with one’s environment through the discourse of others, subjectivity is considered essential to understanding how women navigate and respond to the power structures that surround them.

Another critical element of poststructuralism is agency, which is discursively produced through social relations (Weedon, 1987). Where there is power, as Foucault argues, there is also resistance (Foucault, 1991). Where discourses and systems of power and control are present, individuals have the capacity to resist and contest the structures that surround them. As Watson (1988) observes:

Post-structuralism... allows for the possibility of a recognition of fragmentation. Within this approach individuals are buffeted by conflicting and often unconscious needs and desires and are situated in the midst of discourses not of their own making... Foucault’s contention that no relations of power exist without resistance provides an impetus to perhaps refocus our attention as feminists on women’s opposition to the forms of control they experience within the urban system (Watson, 1988, p.145).

People can thus take control and make changes in their lives, although Foucault does not, by any means, attribute unqualified agency to individuals; rather, he emphasises the possibility of resistance, thereby revealing greater scope for individual action. Poststructuralist theory can therefore expose the complex power

dynamics present in women's lives and the way in which policy and service responses may – inadvertently or not – serve to pathologise, divide and 'problematise' those who are socially excluded or marginalised (Watson, 2000; Parker and Fopp, 2004). Importantly, in a context where homelessness research – when it does include women – tends to merely note their presence and characteristics (Pleace, 2016; Bretherton, 2017), a poststructuralist feminist approach has the potential to capture the multidimensional ways in which homelessness is experienced by women, paying attention to their agency and producing an understanding of how homelessness and housing instability is negotiated (differently) by women.

## Methodology

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The research, which is qualitative and longitudinal, was designed to track the homeless and housing transitions of women over time. Qualitative longitudinal research is concerned with uncovering temporal change across lives (Saldaña, 2003), detailing the intricacies of the journey and allowing for transitions other than those defined by the researcher to emerge (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Investigating homelessness over time has the potential to reveal how individuals respond to their situations and can also expose elements of control and agency as people negotiate circumstances of precarity and uncertainty. Unlike cross-sectional studies, which can offer only a point-in-time snapshot (Snow *et al.*, 1994), longitudinal research on homelessness enables the identification of experiences and processes that influence the moves that people make, including their transitions to stable housing as, and if, they transpire over time.

The research was initiated in January 2010<sup>1</sup>. Over a seven-month period, ethnographic observation was carried out in four strategically chosen sites in the Dublin region, including two homeless service settings (one female only and one mixed gender) and two food centres. Ethnographic immersion involved regular (weekly) visits to these sites and constant interaction with women and men who were accessing these services. The conduct of ethnographic observation exposed the researchers to the multiple realities of homelessness and to the everyday interactions of women who occupied these service settings. Ethnographic data in the form of fieldnotes, which recorded the meanings and concerns of the individuals present, provided strong insight into homeless women's social worlds and the social and interactional processes that impacted their everyday lives (Agar, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> Ethical approval for the conduct of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

Alongside the conduct of ethnographic observation, biographical interviews were conducted with 60 women in Dublin, Cork and Galway at baseline (Phase 1 of the research)<sup>2</sup>. Closely aligned to feminist thought (DeVault, 1999), biographical accounts allow women's voices "to be heard, analysed, and theorised" (Atkinson, 1998, p.19). Biographical interviewing enables participants to exert more control over what is discussed in the interview situation (Roberts, 2002) as they reconstruct the 'plot' of their past, present and future lives and produce a contextualised 'story' (McNaughton, 2006). This approach to interviewing permits the identification of salient themes and patterns of experience as well as respondents' own interpretation and understanding of personally significant life events (Denzin, 1989).

To be eligible to participate in the biographical interview at baseline, women had to be: 1) homeless or have lived in unstable accommodation during the past 6 months; <sup>3</sup> 2) aged 18 years or over; 3) single with no children or a parent living either with, or apart from, her children; and 4) Irish or non-Irish. Recruitment to the study was guided by a purposive sampling strategy that attempted to capture variation in terms of the range of services women were accessing as well as socio-demographic characteristics related to age, ethnicity and migration status. As the fieldwork process unfolded, snowball and 'targeted' sampling techniques were used, guided by aim of achieving diversity in the recruitment of this 'hard-to-reach' population (Watters and Biernacki, 1989). Sampling at baseline was significantly influenced by the learning arising from ongoing ethnographic engagement across the four observational sites.

All interviews commenced with an open invitation to women to tell their 'life story', producing an initial uninterrupted narrative (Gubrium and Holstein, 2004). Following this, several topics were probed for questioning with the women, including their early life experiences, homeless histories and the experiences and circumstances that impacted their movements. The topic of motherhood was explored (where

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<sup>2</sup> The interviewing process was not initiated for a period of two months, following a period of early immersion in the ethnographic field sites. During this time, the researchers also met with managers of numerous homelessness services catering to the needs of women to explain the aims of the research and garner their support, as 'gatekeepers', to recruit women who met the study's eligibility criteria. Engagement with service personnel also enabled us to gather important information on the 'landscape' of women's homelessness, which in turn helped to inform the sampling and recruitment processes.

<sup>3</sup> This eligibility 'marker' was deliberately broad in that it went beyond women residing in emergency accommodation and incorporated all four ETHOS categories: Roofless, Houseless, Insecure and Inadequate. The participants recruited at baseline were primarily 'Roofless' or 'Houseless', either currently or during the previous six months. However, a large number of the women had moved into and through 'Insecure' and/or 'Inadequate' accommodation since the time they first experienced homelessness and repeatedly, in the case of a large number, over the course of the study (see Findings).



relevant), as were experiences of violence or abuse. Family and social supports were discussed and participants were invited to provide information on their physical and mental health, drug and alcohol use and criminal justice system contact. At the core of the interview was a commitment to learning about women's perspectives on their situations, past and present, and their views on their service interactions and experiences.

Phase 2, the follow-up phase of the research, was initiated in November 2012 and extended for a period of one year. Ethnographic observation was again carried out at four service settings in Dublin and the process of tracking study participants was initiated<sup>4</sup>. Re-locating the study's women almost three years subsequent to the conduct of the Phase 1 was predictably challenging. However, the process was supported by the ethnographic arm of the research, which enabled the cultivation of strong positive relationships with staff members and service users over the course of the study. During Phase 2, 40 of the study's 60 women were successfully tracked and re-interviewed. Reliable information on the living situations of an additional nine women was obtained at the time of follow-up<sup>5</sup>, though for various reasons it was not possible to re-interview these women. Three of the women were deceased at Phase 2. The study's retention rate of two-thirds for a face-to-face follow-up interview is satisfactory given the recognised challenges associated with tracking and retaining mobile populations (Conover *et al.*, 1997; Gerlitz *et al.*, 2017)<sup>6</sup>.

A characteristic of qualitative longitudinal research is the immense volume of data generated, which can present analytical challenges. A number of systematic, integrated strategies were therefore used to interrogate the study's ethnographic fieldnotes and the rich narratives garnered from the two phases of data collection. At baseline, a "case profile" (Thomson, 2007; Henderson *et al.*, 2012) was prepared

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<sup>4</sup> As was the case at Phase 1, ethnographic observation was conducted at Phase 2 of the research in order to capture the everyday worlds of women who were accessing these homeless service settings. This process led to meetings with women who did not feature in Phase 1 but also to encounters with a very considerable number who continued to circulate through the homeless service system. Ethnographic engagement during the follow-up phase also facilitated the 'tracking' process in that service providers and service users were frequently able to provide information about the whereabouts of study participants.

<sup>5</sup> Direct telephone contact was established with three of these women and, over a number of phone conversations, they shared details about their lives and the places where they had lived. In the case of six other women, information obtained about them was deemed to be reliable when direct contact was made with them or, alternatively, when information about them was verified by a number of individuals (for example, homelessness service staff and/or two or more other research participants).

<sup>6</sup> At Phase 1, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. All identifying information (names of services, places and people) have been removed from the narrative excerpts presented in this paper to preserve the anonymity of the study's participants.

for each participant and this was updated following the second wave of data collection. This profile focused strongly on recording continuity and change in the lives of the women over the course of the study and summarised issues deemed central to understanding their homeless and housing transitions (for example, their movement between services settings and living places; their personal, social, intimate and family relationships; and their interactions with and perspectives on services and the service system). Alongside the preparation of the 'case profiles', a coding scheme – comprising both conceptual and descriptive categories – was developed to facilitate the labelling, sorting and synthesis of data using the data analysis software package, NVivo. The data were analysed synchronically (across time) and diachronically (through time), thus permitting us to chart individual biographies while also locating them in wider social and spatial contexts (Thompson *et al.*, 2004). This in turn served to illuminate the mechanisms that brought about change, or a perceived lack of change, in the lives of the women. The analysis presented in this paper – which draws on the study's longitudinal biographical and ethnographic data – was sensitive to narrative change, that is, change in the unfolding of individual stories (Vogl *et al.*, 2018) and to participants' interpretation of their experiences over time (Calman *et al.*, 2013).

## The Study's Women

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At baseline, the women ranged from 18 to 62 years, with the average age for the sample being 34.8 years. The largest number (n=26) were between 30 and 39 years, 20 were aged 18-29 years while 14 were over the age of 40. Forty-three of the 60 women were of Irish or UK origin and, of these, six were Irish Travellers<sup>7</sup>. The remaining 17 women were migrants, with 10 having arrived from the Eastern European countries of Poland (n=4), Latvia (n=2), Slovakia (n=2), Estonia (n=1) and Romania (n=1). One woman was from Greece while six were born outside the EU, including in Bangladesh, The Philippines, India, Pakistan, South Africa and Bolivia.

At Phase 1, over two-thirds of the women were either mothers (n=41) or pregnant (n=4). A majority had between one and three children and roughly three-quarters of the children were under the age of 18 years. However, only 14 of the women who were mothers were caring for their children at the time of interview, with just over half (n=21) reporting that at least one of their children had been placed in a State residential or foster care settings or that their child(ren) was being cared for by a relative. The remaining mothers (n=6) had adult children who were living independently.

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<sup>7</sup> Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority and have been officially recognised as such in the Republic of Ireland since 2017. The total number of Irish travellers enumerated in the last national census was 30987 persons, representing 0.7 per cent of the population (CSO, 2016).

The women's biographical narratives almost always referenced a range of childhood deprivations and adversities, including experiences of poverty, neglect and family conflict and/or violence (Mayock and Sheridan, 2012). Twenty-eight, including five migrant and 23 non-migrant women, reported sexual abuse during childhood and 12 women, all of Irish or UK origin, reported histories of State care. Disruptions to schooling were commonly reported and levels of educational achievement were low for the sample as a whole<sup>8</sup>. A majority had grown up in low income households and a considerable number (n=18) first experienced housing instability or homelessness as teenagers. Only one woman was employed at the time baseline interviews were conducted and the employment situations of the women had not changed at Phase 2. The vast majority therefore depended on social welfare payments. Finally, at baseline, one-third of the women (n=20) reported a drug use or drug dependency problem and a further 10 reported heavy problematic alcohol consumption.

## The Women's Homeless and Housing Transitions

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At Phase 1, almost half of the women (n=28) were living in emergency hostel accommodation. Four were residing in a domestic violence refuge; four in long-term supported accommodation while three women were 'doubling up' in the accommodation of a family member or friends. A further 12 women were residing in transitional homeless accommodation. Seven of the women had recently moved to private rented accommodation following a period of homelessness; one was sleeping rough with her partner and the remaining participant was residing in a house that was unfit for habitation (and considered herself to be homeless)<sup>9</sup>. Of the 60 women interviewed, nine were living in 'wet' homeless service settings, that is, services that permit residents to consume alcohol on the premises.

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<sup>8</sup> Over one-third of the women interviewed at baseline (n=21) had no educational qualification. Fourteen (23 per cent) had reached Junior Certificate level before leaving school and 12 women (20 per cent) had completed their Leaving Certificate. A smaller number (n=8) held a third-level diploma or a third-level degree (n=5). Nine of the 13 who had attained a third-level qualification were migrant women.

<sup>9</sup> Currently in Ireland, the official definition of 'homeless' for the purposes of gathering statistics is defined as those individuals accessing state-funded emergency accommodation arrangements that are overseen by local authorities. Thus, in relation to ETHOS Light, homelessness in Ireland is defined as a combination of 'People in Emergency Accommodation' and 'People Living in Accommodation for the Homeless' (Daly, 2019). The monthly data reports published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government do not include rough sleeping, hidden homelessness, those in long-term supported accommodation, facilities accommodating migrants seeking asylum or women (with or without children in their care) accessing domestic violence refuges. Thus, the study participants recruited at baseline included women who are not *officially* enumerated as 'homeless' in Ireland.

Even at Phase 1, the reported duration of homelessness was lengthy for the sample as a whole. More than half ( $n=34$ ) had homeless histories of more than two years and 21 of these women had experienced six or more years of homelessness. Thus, a large number had embarked on trajectories of long-term homelessness (Mayock *et al.*, 2015), with approximately half reporting prolonged episodic homelessness, that is, a cycle of exiting and returning to homelessness. These findings confirm that the extent of unresolved homelessness among women is likely to be more commonplace than is routinely recognised (Pleace, 2016), a picture further reinforced by the study's follow-up data which revealed a pattern of ongoing homelessness or housing instability for a large number. The women's living situations at Phase 2 were categorised according to ETHOS and are presented in Table 1<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 1: The Women's Homeless and Housing Situations at Phase 2 (n=49)**

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY	OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	NUMBER OF WOMEN
<b>Housed</b>	1. Living in a stable place of habitation that satisfies all physical, legal, and social requirements.	21
<b>Insecure</b>	1. People living in insecure accommodation. 2. People living under threat of eviction. 3. People living under threat of violence.	9
<b>Houseless</b>	1. People in homelessness accommodation. 2. People in women's shelters. 3. People due to be released from institutions (i.e. prisons, residential drug/alcohol treatment and residential care). 4. People receiving longer-term support due to homelessness.	12
<b>Roofless</b>	1. People living rough. 2. People staying in emergency accommodation (i.e. night shelters).	6
<b>Inadequate</b>	1. People living in unfit housing. 2. People living in extreme overcrowding.	1

As demonstrated in Table 1, by Phase 2, 21 of the 49 women (43 per cent) had transitioned to stable housing while 28 (57 per cent) either remained homeless (that is, they were 'houseless' or 'roofless') or had entered into a living situation that was 'insecure' or 'inadequate'. This represents a low rate of exiting homelessness, particularly given the three-year time lapse between Phases 1 and 2 of the research. A majority of the women had continued along a path of ongoing homelessness or housing insecurity and many struggled to envision a route to housing stability: "I am

<sup>10</sup> The data presented here are based on the accounts of the 40 women who were re-interviewed at Phase 2 as well as the nine women for whom reliable information on their living situations was available. This practice of including information provided by participants who were not available for interview or by a third party has been used in other qualitative longitudinal studies of homelessness (Williamson *et al.*, 2014).


still in the same situation as I was three years ago. I am still homeless even though they told me there's an apartment there for me. I am waiting for it. But the bottom line is I am still homeless]" (Stephanie, 35).

### Women's 'Journeys' Through Homelessness

Most of the women reported multiple accommodation transitions between Phases 1 and 2 of the research. In other words, their 'journeys' were characterised by high levels of mobility and residential instability. Only five of the women who were successfully 'tracked' continued to live in the same accommodation, with the remaining participants having moved between living places, often on multiple occasions. The average number of accommodation transitions reported between Phases 1 and 2 of the study was 3.4.

Women who remained homeless or were precariously housed by Phase 2 reported a far greater number of transitions between living situations than those who were housed. The chronology of one of the women's living places is presented in Figure 1 for illustrative purposes.

**Figure 1: Carol's Accommodation Transitions between Phases 1 and 2 of the Study**

<b>Phase 1 Living Situation</b>	Intervening period: 2 years, 10 months								<b>Phase 2 Living Situation</b>
Homeless Hostel									Homeless Hostel
	PRS (x3)	Caravan	PRS (x2)	Prison	Homeless Hostel	DV Refuge	Relative of Partner	Prison	

Carol (age 42 at Phase 2) had lived in private rented sector (PRS) accommodation on five separate occasions between Phases 1 and 2 of the study. She reported periods of hidden homelessness and had also slept rough sporadically. The private rented accommodation that Carol had secured during this time was almost always substandard. She had received eviction notices on a number of occasions due to the aggressive behaviour of her partner and noise disturbances related to the heavy drinking on the premises. Carol had experienced violence from multiple partners, both prior and subsequent to her Phase I interview and, since Phase I, had been incarcerated on two occasions. Almost three years after her first interview, she was residing in a homeless hostel: "It's mad that I am back here [hostel] again after three years. The years just go faster and faster and so much happens and months go into years... and back here again".

Like Carol, the vast majority who continued on a path of housing precariousness or homelessness had exited the service system on several separate occasions over the course of the study, often to private rented accommodation. However, they were unable to sustain these tenancies for a variety of reasons, including an inability to maintain rental or utility bill payments or because of the substandard condition of the rental property. A large number had lived temporarily in situations of hidden homelessness, meaning that they had moved between visible and invisible homeless spaces, while others had spent time in prison, psychiatric or acute hospitals and/or residential drug treatment centres. Debbie told of her movements through a range of institutional or quasi-institutional settings.

*"I got out of [psychiatric hospital 1] to go to the B&B and I overdosed and ended up in [psychiatric hospital 2]. Then I moved to a B&B and I was there for nine months. And I started shoplifting and then started going into prison... I went to a half-way house from prison but I've never been given any help... this is the places that I get, like here [hostel 1] or [hostel 2], that is all they'll give me" (Debbie, 27).*

This pattern of institutional cycling (DeVerteuile, 2003; Mayock *et al.*, 2015) was distinctive, highlighting a tendency for women to occupy spaces that render them invisible and beyond the reach of official systems of enumeration. At the point of leaving institutional settings such as a prison or psychiatric hospital, women invariably returned to homelessness services.

Significantly, women with children in their care were more likely to have moved to stable housing by Phase 2. Of the 21 women who exited homelessness, 17 were mothers: 13 of these mothers had children living with them, two women had adult children who were living independently while two reported that their children were in the care of relatives. These women had shorter homeless histories and were less likely to report complex support needs related to substance use, mental health and/or criminal justice contact. Overall, there was strong evidence that the presence or absence of children and the presence or absence of more complex needs significantly impacted women's ability to exit homelessness. Women (and men) articulated a strong awareness of the barriers faced by 'single' homeless people who do not have children in their care, as demonstrated in the following researcher interaction with service users in a food centre during Phase 1 of the research.

Her name was Kate. She was in her forties, with long brown hair and brown eyes. She was sitting with two men. One didn't say a word for the time I was there while the other was a very open and keen to have his say. Kate told me that she has three children, aged seventeen, fifteen and thirteen years. At present they move between her mother's and her sister's homes. Her seventeen-year-old recently had a baby so Kate is now a grandmother. Kate's main goal is to get her



own home where she can have her children: “All I want is a home”, she said with more than a hint of melancholy, “that’s all”. Kate and her friend continued to talk about the difficulties they face in trying to access housing. They feel that the Council doesn’t listen to them because they are ‘addicts’. Her friend then said he felt that single male addicts are the most marginalised because “they always house the women with children first” (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Food Centre, Phase 1).

### **Women’s Experiences of Homeless Service Settings**

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Attention now turns to women’s interactions with the service settings they accessed and, in particular, to their perspectives on the marginal spaces they occupied as they ‘journeyed’ through homelessness. As might be expected, the women’s service experiences were diverse and varied according to their expectations and level of familiarity with ‘the system’, even if very many, including those women who were housed, considered themselves to be ‘veterans’ of homelessness services, certainly by Phase 2 of the study.

Women sometimes expressed gratitude for the shelter and other basic amenities that homeless hostels provided: “Well here [hostel] I have a roof over my head, it’s warm, it’s cosy, there’s anything you want” (Maeeve, age 43). However, hostel life was more commonly described in sharply negative terms. Women spoke candidly about living in stressful environments where they feared for their safety and many had experienced intimidation, victimisation or violence in hostels and other homelessness services. Rosie recalled her early experiences of accessing homeless hostel accommodation.

*“[Hostels] are horrible, you know, because there are grown women who have kids... and I was only a kid myself, 15, 16 [years old]. And I kind of, you grow up fast, you know. I just coped with it, I just got on with it... just prayed that I won’t be hurt and just kept quiet, you know” (Rosie, 38).*

Negative experiences and interactions with services and service providers were also very present in the women’s accounts, drawing strong attention to what they perceived as a lack of control or ‘say’ in their everyday lives. Permeating these narratives were the themes of surveillance and infantilisation, both closely associated with disciplining practices perceived by women as attempts to ‘order’ their lives, often with significant negative ramifications.

### ***Monitoring and Surveillance***

While we drank tea, Mary listed a number of complaints she had about [drop-in support service for homeless people] and [food centre]. She felt that there is a pressure placed on women to figuratively ‘bow down to the staff’ because they are the charitable ‘givers’ and, so, in a position of power... She said she feels she is ‘being watched’ [while in the food centre] and, as she said this, scanned the room for cameras, which make her feel mistrusted by staff (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Food Centre, Phase 2).

A large number of the women talked about the intense sense of surveillance they experienced within homeless service settings, frequently describing feeling watched, monitored and controlled. Women referred to the presence of close circuit TV cameras, routine room checks and bag searches, as well as to a raft of rules, albeit differing between service settings, that dictated their movements and interactions. Delilah, who had moved with her child to subsidised private rented accommodation by Phase 2, described the lack of privacy in the hostel where she had resided with her daughter for almost two years.

*“They [staff in homeless hostels] have keys and they can open your room, even if you are not there, and sometimes they do that and it feels a bit creepy, you know” (Delilah, 33).*

Viv continued to move between homeless service settings at Phase 2 of the study and described a similar experience.

*“You come in [to the room in the hostel] and you get the feeling that someone else [referring to staff member] was in there... It felt like a bit of a prison” (Viv, 38).*

Viv, like several others, attributed this scrutiny of their lives to a lack of trust on the part of service providers, frequently expressing resentment about what they depicted as overt, unnecessary surveillance techniques. Several framed this experience as denying them power, dignity and respect.

*“We feel we are not being treated properly. Well, we go into places [referring to homelessness services] and they are just giving us the run around... When we go in, it’s like they’re treating us like kids, like they’re talking to us like kids... It’s not nice like. It’s horrible” (Nicole, 28).*

Significantly, a number of women who were housed by Phase 2 of the study talked spontaneously about the effects of having lived – often for lengthy periods – in service environments where they felt their movements and interactions were ‘policed’, often referring to the significant adjustments required after they transi-



tioned to housing. Bernadette's account highlights the enduring impact on her and her children of the institutional regulation of daily life within homeless and domestic violence service settings.

*"You see they [children] were under an awful lot of pressure as well because it was a huge adjustment... I had lived in [transitional housing] for so long, it was like the 'Big Brother' house and then the [domestic violence] refuge before that. But that's three and a half years. I was constantly thinking [after move to local authority house], 'Am I going to get into trouble for that or the kids going to get into trouble for this?'"* (Bernadette, 37).

Freedom from the constraints of living in and managing homeless 'spaces' was frequently articulated as the single greatest benefit that accompanied the transition to stable housing, as demonstrated in Donna's account.

*"Everything is mine and to know that, I can sit here in comfort and it's mine. And nobody can tell me otherwise... nobody knocking at the door, asking for this or asking for that, you know? Nobody. It's just, you know, it's so secure and so safe"* (Donna, 38).

Conversely, women like Eve who remained homeless, continued to feel controlled by the service system.

*"Normal would be having my own place, a secure place, cooking dinners for the kids, [her new partner] coming over at the weekends... I want that back in my life, you know, I want all that back in my life. My own freedom, as such. I am not free. I am definitely not free"* (Eve, 61).

### ***Experiences of Infantilisation***

While a considerable number of the women valued their relationships with their key worker or others who they perceived as supporting them in their efforts to secure housing, there were very many accounts of feeling diminished or demeaned in the context of their daily encounters with service staff. Women who were separated from their children frequently asserted that they were treated like children, with no recognition of their status as mothers.

*"Just being in a hostel, you know that there's people watching you, looking over you, knowing you can't do this and can't do that... We're not teenagers, we're adults in this place... I'm not stupid, you know what I mean. When we go in it's like they're treating us like kids, like they're talking to us like kids; kids that have kids"* (Karen, 26).

Reports of infantilising experiences within service environments tended to be linked directly to how women felt treated by staff members. For example, some described being scolded and punished for rule-breaking. These encounters were invariably framed as dehumanising.

*“She [referring to staff member in homelessness service] treated me like as if I was only a two-year-old child, do you know, the way you just scold a child sometimes. I couldn’t get over it and even now I still can’t over it. I am still kind of saying, ‘That can’t be right’. I was shocked” (Imelda, 34).*

Others referred to disciplining practices that served to alienate and humiliate. A number recounted the use of a “bold bench” in one women-only hostel, a seat where they were directed by staff if they were considered to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they returned to the hostel. Dervla explained.

*“They [staff] treat you like, God I don’t know? I had a drink on me once and if you come in with drink on you, you have to sit on a bench for a while. Imagine at 36, sittin’ on a bench until they tell you to go over to your quarters? It’s like being in prison. But 36 and being told to sit on a bench – madness” (Dervla, 36).*

This practice on the part of service staff of asking women to remove themselves as a response to rule-breaking emerged as a regular topic of discussion between women, as illustrated in the following excerpt from observational fieldnotes.

On my fourth observation visit to [homeless hostel], there were two women in the sitting room. They were both watching *EastEnders* in silence. I knew they were interested in the programme so joined them and we watched the last five minutes of the episode together. After the episode finished Sabrina initiated conversation by asking had I been to [name of women-only hostel] yet. I told her I had and she started to talk about her experiences there. She said that she was placed on a bench for four hours for being drunk and that the staff call it “the bold bench”. I asked if she had to sit there continuously for four hours and she said that the women were allowed to leave the bench for a cigarette break. She said all of the women there have spent time on the bold bench and most of them leave the hostel as soon as they can because of that and the other rules. She disliked many other aspects of the accommodation, including the way the staff search the women’s bags, lights out at 1.30am and cameras everywhere. She then spoke angrily about the staff, who she said had called social workers on mothers who they felt were not fit to be a mother and their children were taken away: “The staff wanted the girls to lose their children” (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Women-only Hostel, Phase 1).

Women were aware of the range of spoken and unspoken rules and conventions which, as they perceived them, attempted to govern their lives: "I can't properly read and I'm not brainy or whatever but like I know what's going on around me, I'm not stupid" (Nicole, 28). Like Nicole, others who were separated from their children expressed resentment about how they were 'labelled' by the homeless service system.

*"I am just down [listed] as a single person. Even though they know that I have three kids. But I am down as a single person"* (Stephanie, 35).

### **Women Negotiating the Homeless Service Sector**

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Women were not without agency and, aware of the assumptions that surrounded them, they actively responded. As documented earlier, most were experienced service users with extensive knowledge about the rules and regimes governing individual service settings. Women who were separated from their children invariably described the negative impact on their lives and mental health resulting from rules that did not permit them to have visitors in the hostel settings where they resided.

*"I can't bring [children] up to the room [in hostel] or anything. If they come and visit I have to walk the streets with them because I have nowhere to go. I have lost out on a lot of time with the kids over it"* (Dervla, 36).

The topic of children was always an emotive one for women who did not have their children with them. The following excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes was recorded after a visit to a women-only homeless hostel.

After a lull in the conversation, Deirdre and Anna asked more about the research, with Deirdre saying, "So what are you tryin' to do like?" I replied, saying that we are trying to learn about homeless women's lives and experiences. "Well it's a fuckin' hard life let me tell ya", she responded. Anna then interjected saying, "Listen love, I will tell you about my life and I swear to God you won't believe the things I have been through, you actually wouldn't believe it". She went on to say that she was in a relationship years ago, that they were engaged to be married and she had a house; but, before long, one thing after another fell apart. She lost her breath suddenly when speaking as emotion took over: "Now, I'll admit it, I'm no angel, I do drink". Deirdre then began to speak over her, "I have been in hostels for two years now and I'm after losin' me baba. I'm gonna get him back though", she said, and was visibly upset (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Women-only Hostel, Phase 1).

Women responded to rules – for example, in relation to curfews, visitation rights and substance use – and these responses, in turn, influenced their movements. Several who were active substance users identified instances of feeling ‘punished’.

*“It’s like they’re [services] punishing you, you know? And then you go down to them... and they’re like, ‘What do you want? What are you doing down here? What do you want today?’ You know? They don’t welcome you... like, you just felt like they were treating you different to everyone else...”* (Katie, 28).

*“I felt like as if I was – you know, like she [housing officer] degraded me down to like as if I was begging on the street or like as if my life was worth nothing or my children... She thought I was feckin’ doing drugs or drinking, that is the impression that she gave me... I was shocked, I am still reeling over it. It is like, to me, it was like as if someone gave me a good hiding [beating], that is the way I feel inside”* (Imelda, 34).

Roisín, who was a daily drinker, explained that she was sometimes refused entry to hostel settings, describing how she used her knowledge of the system to avoid street homelessness.

*“I know by drinking you can’t come into [hostel 1] and then you end up in [hostel 2]... I got myself barred twice just to be out of [hostel 1] but I’d be able to get back down to [hostel 2]”* (Roisín, 37).

By contesting or resisting rules, women like Roisín demonstrated an awareness that they had earned a ‘bad name’ or reputation with some service providers. At Phase 2, Fionnuala, who had a history of institutional care during childhood and was not a substance user, told that she was perceived by service providers as “dysfunctional” and “needy”; branded as “an awkward customer” because she regularly challenged service providers’ assumptions about her housing and broader support needs.

*“[The service] wanted to kind of take over and I didn’t want that. I didn’t want them telling me what to do. As if I was incapable! I didn’t want people dictating to me... as though I was kind of dysfunctional, needy... people like me are considered just awkward, an awkward customer, a crank...”* (Fionnuala, 61).

Feeling controlled and believing that her personal preferences were not respected, Fionnuala disengaged from this service.

*“I hate being monitored, I hate coming under anyone’s umbrella... I think it’s to do with my institutional past. People controlling me, I don’t care what physical position I am in, or what mental position I am in, I think you have got to let people be free”* (Fionnuala, 61).

Some months after interviewing Fionnuala, during an ethnographic field visit, a staff member who had worked with Fionnuala previously – and was aware of her decision to “boycott” the service – asked about her whereabouts.

The staff member who had worked closely with Fionnuala arrived to the service and immediately approached me. She asked if had I been speaking to Fionnuala lately and seemed concerned for her well-being. I informed her that we had been in email contact since the interview but did not offer any further details. The staff member confirmed what I was already knew: she said that Fionnuala had decided to “boycott” the service, remarking that the staff were “in her bad books”. The worker added that she believed that it was something that she had said that angered Fionnuala but did not elaborate. She then sighed and said, “It’s a shame Fionnuala doesn’t come in, I was very fond of her”. There was a moment of silence before an incoming telephone call brought our conversation to an end (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Food Centre, Phase 2).

Notwithstanding the concern expressed by the staff member in the excerpt above, when interacting with service users during the course of ethnographic fieldwork, there were many instances of women recounting a sense of powerlessness in their dealings with service providers and a number told of their attempts to challenge decisions or actions that negatively impacted their lives. In the following excerpt, Maura described her efforts to contest her eviction from accommodation provided by one homelessness service.

As I was waiting to speak to [staff member], I took a look around and saw that only about twenty per cent of the people eating there [food centre] were women. Sunlight was pouring through the large windows in the roof which created a cheery atmosphere. Maura [a woman who I had met and spoken to previously in the food centre] was sitting at the end of the room opposite another person. When she saw me approach she jumped out of her seat and changed to another table where there was nobody sitting. I sat opposite her but, not wishing to be intrusive, positioned myself half facing her and half facing the room. She instructed me to turn around fully to talk to her. She explained this by saying, “there’s a lot of nosey people in here and I don’t want them hearing my business, I am careful who I talk to”. She then told me of a very negative experience she has had with [homelessness service]. She was residing in accommodation provided by [the service] when she was suddenly given a 28-day notice to vacate her bedsit [which was a supported rather than independent living situation]. She struggled to find alternative accommodation and one day when she was out, the staff went into her living quarters and took all her belongings and threw them out. They left her valuables such as money and jewellery behind but a cleaner subsequently removed these. She went on to explain that she had challenged the homelessness organisation

and threatened to take them to court for illegally evicting her. Smiling to herself, she said, “[Manager] runs a mile now when she sees me” (Ethnographic Fieldnote, Food centre, Phase 2).

Thus, in an attempt to assert and reclaim autonomy, some women responded to the control they felt was exerted over their lives by challenging and resisting. Others, however, adopted an opposing stance, choosing to behave in ways that they felt would be rewarded. These women deliberately displayed passivity and conformity and worked to form positive relationships with service providers in the hope that they could secure a move out of homelessness. Although Chloe remained homeless at Phase 2, she emphasised the need to “play the game”.

*“We have to just keep at it. Just keep doing what we are supposed to do, just play the game”* (Chloe, 29).

Some therefore sought to improve their prospects of becoming housed by ‘surrendering’ to service expectations. There was also evidence of some women seeking to conform to the female ideal, often through demonstrations of ‘respectability’. Aisha, a mother with one child who was housed by Phase 2, told that she had consistently emphasised her ‘status’ as a mother in her interactions with homelessness service providers and housing organisations. She also felt that her personal attributes – a non-drinker and a person who was “trying to make a better life” – had earned her favourable treatment by the housing officer in her local authority area.

*“I have been there [to local council office] and the housing officer, she saw me from inside, she was not interviewing me, but she saw me from inside and she saw I am crying and everything, and studying in further education... So, she saw me and she offered me this place [referring to local authority house]... I think she saw me, she found me as this person who was trying to make a better life, I am not a woman who is drinking and had no future...”* (Aisha, 34).

A considerable number of others talked about their efforts to make a good ‘impression’ on landlords, explaining that these strategies had helped them to secure housing. Mother-of-two Alexandra, who had transitioned to private rented accommodation by Phase 2, explained that in her interactions with prospective landlords, she demonstrated competency and dependability in addition to making her mothering role visible.

*“All the houses that I was going to see, all the landlords was very nice to me and they all said to me, ‘I think I want to give you the house because you seem to be, you know, proper, clean’. I don’t smoke, I don’t drink, you know. They saw me with the children, they saw me with the car, so they said, ‘Ok, I think you’re going to be a good tenant’. Three of them offered to give me the house, I chose one”* (Alexandra, 33).

Thus, women were attempting to take control by challenging, resisting or managing their situations through acts of conformity. Some worked their way through the system strategically in order to appear 'worthy'. Those who displayed and conformed to conventional gender roles – as mothers with children in their care and/or by communicating expressions or manifestations of femininity, gratitude and passivity – reported more positive relationships with staff within both homeless and housing service sectors. Those, on the other hand, who did not conform to conventional gender roles – women who were separated from their children, who had substance use and/or mental health problems and/or who were 'outspoken' – were more likely to be 'disciplined'.

## Conclusions

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This paper has examined the women's homeless 'journeys' through the lens of feminist poststructuralism, a framework that privileges personal experience, subjectivity and the contextual meanings of relations of power. Feminist poststructuralism recognises agency and women's responses to the discourses embedded in institutional structures and practices (Weedon, 1987). Thus, while women may be constrained within existing or available discourses, they are actively involved in negotiating and resisting such discourses, albeit in different ways and with different outcomes.

Before discussing the study's findings it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research and to reflect on the extent to which a feminist poststructuralist perspective can inform understanding of women who experience homelessness. As with all qualitative studies, the sample size is relatively small, although efforts were made to build diversity into the sample based on the knowledge accumulated through ongoing ethnographic engagement and close interaction with both homeless individuals and service providers. Importantly, the study's longitudinal approach enabled us to 'track' women's movements over time, revealing both their visibility and invisibility as they 'journeyed' through homelessness. Their biographies and a detailed understanding of the unfolding nature of their homeless (and housing) trajectories were therefore privileged over any claims about generalisability. A key strength of this research approach is its ability to capture complexity and women's roles as "active participants in the experience, negotiation and (re) creation of their personal and social histories" (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995, p.497). An analysis of power and the power relations embedded in discourse – a critical element of feminist poststructuralist thought – exposed the forces that make it likely that some women "will fare worse than others in the housing stakes" (Neale, 1997, p.53). Thus, while there is no single oppressive force (Weedon, 1987), there are structures and 'micro-powers' (Foucault, 1991) that seek to preserve the status

quo. Critically, acknowledgement that women respond differently to the normative assumptions that surround them opened up the 'space' to interrogate difference as well as similarity in how women who experience homelessness are positioned – and position themselves – within dominant discourses. There is, of course, a risk that attention to subjectivity and agency – often with a focus on localised contexts – may obfuscate the power of macro social structures, thereby limiting the practical application of feminist poststructuralist analyses to social policy (Neale, 1997). However, as discussed later in this concluding section, the findings presented in this paper have implications that extend beyond 'the local'; highlighting the gendered discourses embedded in policy and how they serve to delineate and 'divide' women who experience homelessness.

Permanent, stable housing had not become a reality for a majority of the study's women. For a large number, the 'journey' through homelessness was characterised by enduring and extreme instability as they navigated a path that involved ongoing contact with homeless service settings punctuated by periods spent in situations of hidden homelessness, precarious living places and/or institutional settings. For the sample as a whole, exit routes from homelessness were highly constrained and only 21 of the 49 women who were successfully 'tracked' had transitioned to stable housing. Women who remained homeless or precariously housed by Phase 2 of the study reported longer homeless histories and were more likely to report ongoing support needs related to substance use and/or mental ill-health; they were primarily 'single' in the sense that they did not have children in their care, although a large number were mothers with children living elsewhere. Conversely, those women who had moved to independent, stable housing tended to have children who they cared for full time; these women reported lower levels of need in relation to substance use and mental health and most had shorter homeless histories.

Whether housed or homeless at the time of follow-up, women's experiences of homelessness were marked not only by high levels of mobility and residential instability but by surveillance in the homeless spaces they occupied. The rules and regulations that dictated the pace and rhythm of everyday life were perceived by women as controlling, dehumanising and infantilising; communicating powerful messages about their 'position' and whether and to what extent they might be deemed 'worthy' or, alternatively, subjected to (further) techniques of 'discipline'. In Foucauldian terms, the women were subjected to power through normalising 'truths' that shaped their lives and experiences and this power both moulded and delimited the ways in which they are able to conceive of their lives and their futures. As Foucault (1991, p.194) puts it, power "excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals'". The analysis presented in this paper reveals the extent to which women experienced authority and power as they 'journeyed' through homelessness and their exposure to "powerful aspects of the dominant



discourse which asserts that they are to blame for their homelessness” (Parker and Fopp, 2004, p.147).

The study’s women were not passively situated in discourse but rather actively negotiated positions within the discursive constraints that surrounded them (Weedon, 1987). Some resisted the perceived power and control exerted over them – either in subtle or more overt ways – as they moved through the service system, simultaneously aware that these same actions and responses could serve to further marginalise them and reinforce their position as blameworthy and, therefore, ‘undeserving’. While strategies of resistance were evident, so too were acts of conformity, with others performing “the dance of the dutiful dependent” (Passaro, 1996, p.11); intent on demonstrating their ‘worthiness’ and opting to ‘play the game’ of service expectations. For these women, ‘the game’ was a ‘technique’ of conformity which, as they perceived it, could potentially bolster their chances of achieving a route out of homelessness. Importantly, women’s actions and behaviours and their interactions with homelessness and housing service providers did play a role in their housing outcomes. Persistence and perseverance on the part of women – and self-presentation as a mother and ‘respectable’, with the potential to be a good tenant and homemaker – yielded positive results for some. Conversely, dominant discourses were demobilising for those women who could not see themselves within them (Watson, 2000) and were rejected by a considerable number. This does not mean that women who resisted service expectations did not demonstrate agency nor does it imply that those who conformed lacked resistance. Rather, both were versions of agency but the behaviours of those who conformed to normative assumptions around the family and women’s place and role within it were more likely to be rewarded.

Focusing on differences (as well as similarities) between women who experience homelessness, the findings presented in this paper demonstrate the complex and multifaceted nature of gendered homelessness. Women were subjected to ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault, 1982), highlighting the role of social institutions in the construction of the category ‘homeless women’ (Marpsat, 2000). Equally, the findings illuminate women’s awareness of how they were positioned within prevailing discourses. As Watson (2000, p.167) observes, “[n]ot only do material practices matter – for example how homeless people are treated – but also how different discourses act to produce certain outcomes”. One important implication arising from the findings is that to understand women’s homelessness – and, in particular, to understand which women will remain homeless (for longer) and who will exit (more quickly) – it is critical to look to the gender imperatives embedded within policy and service responses. While women who experience homelessness may, in a general sense, be better protected by welfare policies and state provision (Neale, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2005), these same policies and provisions appear to be

contingent on them fitting into particular 'categories'. In many parts of Europe, homeless women with children are categorised as 'family' and prioritised for accommodation. Thus, "it is the presence of a child or children – not the status of motherhood – which is the main determinant of accessing housing" (Hansen Löffstrand and Quilgars, 2016, p.59). Therefore, policy and service responses and practices, at least implicitly, draw a sharp distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' women, a delineation closely connected to the notion of 'worthiness' and, more specifically, to underlying assumptions about, and constructions of, 'worthy' homeless women.

Homelessness policy is only beginning to engage with the notion of gendered homelessness and the prominence of women within policies is highly variable across Europe (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016). However, as Hansen Löffstrand and Quilgars (2016, p.42) point out, "[g]endered images and discourses permeating policies and practices... affect women's risk of homelessness and their chances of exiting homelessness". There is an urgent need for a re-appraisal of the situations and experiences of homeless women and for the development of homelessness policies and service responses that respect women's autonomy and eradicate conditionalities of access to service and housing support based on deep-rooted assumptions about 'family', 'femininity' and 'motherhood'.

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# 'Where was I to go after divorce?': Gendered Family Housing Pathways and Women's Homelessness in Poland

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- **Abstract\_** *In this paper, we introduce the concept of Family Housing Pathways to analyse the dynamics of a housing situation within the family context. It is an attempt to overcome some shortcomings of previous studies, to identify how housing resources are managed between households within families, and to recognise the gendered and temporal dimensions of individual transitions through these housing resources. We use life story narratives collected from older women living in shelters in Poland. We analyse their Individual Housing Pathways in order to identify structural and individual homelessness risk factors. Their biographies mirror the gendered history of the Polish socio-economic transformation since 1990. Many of them have had ill health, disabilities, and low education; earlier they were combining low-skilled factory work with farm and care work. Many have had experience with family violence. Family breakup was the major cause that made most of them destitute and alone at old age. In the analysis of their Family Housing Pathways, we notice an intricate set of family relations that impact the managing of property. Our interviewees were the first to be excluded from extended family's housing resources, as priority was given to their (ex-) husbands, brothers, and sons.*
- **Keywords\_** *Women's homelessness, housing pathways, family relations, gender*

## Introduction

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Homelessness, social systems, and institutions (social support, health care, family) work in a gender-selective way (Connell, 2009). Studies show that women experiencing homelessness report a higher proportion of mental illnesses, more chronic health problems and sexual or physical abuse than men (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Grenier *et al.*, 2016). One of these “systems” that has not been explored enough is management of family housing resources. We analyse this by looking at the life and housing narratives of our interviewees – older women in homeless shelters in Podkarpackie province in Poland. We introduce the concept of Family Housing Pathways as a way to analyse the dynamics of women’s housing situations within their families’ context. We build upon the housing pathways approach and feminist perspectives on homelessness (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Neale, 1997; Mayock and Bretherton, 2016), and attempt to overcome some of the shortcomings of previous research (Clapham, 2003; Clapham, 2005).

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, we analyse the pathways approach to housing and homelessness. We look at its gender dimension, as well as the household/family aspect that is missing in most analyses. We scrutinise also the question of graphic representations of housing pathways. Secondly, the context of our project, the background of Podkarpackie province and the state of knowledge of women’s homelessness in Poland are introduced. The main part of the text is divided in two segments: first we introduce the general housing situation of our respondents and then we present Individual and Family Housing Pathways of two women in detail to explain our method of illustrating the new approach of studying gender- and family-sensitive housing biographies and what could be revealed by this method. We conclude with some possibilities for future uses of the Family Housing Pathways concept.

## New Orthodoxy and Pathways in Homelessness Research

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The individual vs. structural dichotomy has prevailed in homelessness research for decades. In the 1990s a new concept of homelessness causation referred to as “new orthodoxy” emerged (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Pleace, 2016). In this approach, homelessness is “a negative assemblage of structural and individual disadvantages” (Pleace, 2016, p.21), a multifaceted and complex set of risks and triggers that result in homelessness. Individual stories are influenced by personal capacities, as well as access to formal and informal support, that compensate for one another or reinforce each other. For instance, structural vulnerabilities such as unemployment can be resisted by individual competences or informal support. On the other hand, individual problems such as mental health issues can be exacer-

bated by lack of institutional support. As Pleace (2016) notices, new orthodoxy is very imprecise in showing how the interplay of factors in an individual case causes homelessness. Also, seeking patterns and distinguishing subgroups within this approach portray people who experience homelessness as victims deprived of agency. The pathways approach is an attempt to include more than just structural, institutional, and individual factors in the analysis.

“Housing pathway”, both in the academic and in lay language, describes transitions between different housing situations. In research, “homelessness pathways” are often not clearly defined or theorised. For instance, Anderson and Tulloch (2000) present a typology of “most frequented” pathways into and out of homelessness as parts of “trajectories”, such as work trajectory, income trajectory, and housing trajectory. Similarly, MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2003) identify three homelessness pathways: housing crisis career, family breakdown, and transition from youth to adult homelessness. Casey (2002) classifies chronic, long-term, and situational homelessness and distinguishes different pathways into and out of homelessness for each group. Some other researchers have used similar concepts and metaphors, but have not used the term “pathways” (Fopp, 2009; Mostowska, 2020).

An analytical framework of housing pathways was proposed by David Clapham (2002; 2003; 2005). He has been building upon, among others, the concept of a “housing career”, which focuses on the price, physical space, location, and quality of a dwelling. Housing career signifies especially changes in tenure, spatial, and upward mobility of households. Clapham extends the analysis to include a social constructionist perspective, focusing on meanings that people attach to their housing experiences. Clapham sets his concept in the context of the postmodern world of globalization, alienation, and risk, where lifestyle choices and search for identity play a crucial role. He points both to the importance of personal agency as well as structural constraints. He begins with Giddens’ structuration theory, where the structure is (re)produced by interactions and social practices. Also, the pathways approach takes into account the ways in which society constructs norms and expectations about housing choices, transitions, and qualities (Clapham, 2005).

For Clapham thus pathways are “defined as patterns of interactions (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space” (Clapham, 2002, p.63). Housing pathway is foremost a metaphor (Fopp, 2009) and it is neither a definite theory nor a concrete research methodology. The proposed “analytical framework” still has to be tested in empirical studies, to see to what extent it improves the understanding of the housing field (Bengtsson, 2002). Clapham himself (2005) focused on meanings and discourses, for instance, those concerning family, work, finances, home, and neighbourhoods but on a global or national level. Still, he postulates the use of ethnographic and biographical methods (2005, p.239), as biographies have

the potential to “provide insight into the perceptive world” of an individual which influences the construction of their identity and their behaviour (Clapham, 2003, p.123). These would enable, for instance, the study of the interactions between landlords and tenants, allow definition of “rules of the game” and discourses of “proper behaviour”.

Upward mobility, for instance, becoming a homeowner or climbing the career ladder, is relatively better studied than downward mobility (Gulbrandsen and Langsether, 2003; Grundy, 2005; Mulder and Smits, 2013). However, homelessness pathways may also be viewed as parts of housing pathways (Clapham, 2003). In cases of homelessness, though, choice is severely constrained. The importance of housing becomes perhaps even greater when an individual or household have no capacity to make choices, as they are excluded from lifestyle choices available to others (Clapham, 2005, p.17). In looking at homelessness parts of housing pathways, Clapham (2003) stresses the importance of analysing the structural elements, biographies, and public policy interventions. This has been done earlier, for instance by Fitzpatrick (1997), who emphasised the significance of the dynamics of the situation of young people experiencing homelessness. She also showed the importance of family members. Fitzpatrick based her six distinctive pathways on variables such as status (official or unofficial support), stability of housing episodes, and location (city centre or wider). For example, the first pathway among her respondents is the one where young people rely most on family members and friends. They frequently return to the parental home, stay there for days or months, then leave again, couch surf at other family member’s (usually older siblings) or in “junkies houses” (1997, pp.103-104). In another study, authors looked at in whose housing women were living, as abusive situations were among the most common reason for leaving accommodation. Women relied on parents, social services, and male partners – everywhere a situation of subjugation (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995). Unfortunately, it was not further explored exactly why these young women could not stay or move to other family members’ homes; perhaps it was taken for granted that it had been a matter of limited family resources and conflicts.

## **Graphic Representations of Housing Pathways**

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Surprisingly, few researchers were inspired by the pathways approach to graphically represent sequences of individual housing transitions in time (for exceptions see: Reeve *et al.*, 2007; Robinson *et al.*, 2007). It seems that diagrams were not Clapham’s intention, as he emphasised that the pathways approach is focused on meaning (Clapham 2005, p.239). However, the pathways metaphor is so powerful that the graphic illustration seems a clear way to represent the dynamics of events in time and the interplay of life events, contacts with services, and informal support.

There are two other areas that, in our view, have not been sufficiently developed in pathways studies on homelessness. First, despite the feminist critique of homelessness studies (Neale, 1997; Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Bretherton, 2017), the gender dimension of housing pathways has not been explored much. Women's housing pathways are not only influenced by domestic violence, services and welfare support for children (that affect women disproportionately and differently than men), but also for various reasons, women make different personal choices and utilise different strategies (see e.g. Mayock *et al.*, 2015).

Second, pathways are usually limited to personal, individual stories. Clapham acknowledges the need to study households and that households cannot be treated as black boxes: "people consume housing as households" (Clapham, 2005, p.37). Even though Clapham writes about households being made, unmade, and remade (Clapham, 2005, p.52), he analyses the dynamics only within a stable household. He underlines the need to look at the internal household dynamics, the way decisions are negotiated between household's members, how responsibilities and tasks are divided, how planning is undertaken (Clapham, 2005, pp.53-55). There should thus be a "twin focus" both on individuals and on households (Clapham, 2005, p.26). Still, the allocation of housing resources between households within the same extended family is not considered, even if, as mentioned above, informal support is an important part of studying housing exclusion.

Life-course perspective has been applied in a study of housing transactions in Norwegian families (Gulbrandsen and Langsether, 2003). Authors show how along the life-course family's wealth, debt, needs, and owner-occupancy change and how individuals and families depend on and have obligations towards family members: for instance, parents towards young people in education who live with them or adult children towards their ageing parents. Authors distinguish housing transactions such as inter vivos transfers and inheritance, but also other types of support: gifts, loans, co-residence, renting on preferable terms, sale on the "commercial family market", and other financial assistance not directly related to housing situation. Authors pose many important questions concerning changes in welfare state, urbanisation, class habituses, attitudes, needs, and emotional relations that influence family housing transactions. They focus on vertical family ties mostly (children – parents), thus not entirely acknowledging the process of forming new households, where the roles of partners may become unequal (parents versus parents-in-law). Expansion of welfare states, urbanisation, and higher mobility have diminished the importance of family transfers and caused a decline in intergenerational co-residence (Grundy, 2005), even though resources and class differences are crucial here. These studies, however, have been based on quantitative data: the British Retirement and Retirement Plans Survey from 1988/89 (Grundy,

2005) and Norwegian data from 1973 and 2001 (Gulbrandsen and Langsether, 2003). To our knowledge, no study has addressed gender and family dimensions of housing pathways on micro level, yet.

In the article, we address the weaknesses of previous studies and combine the two postulates to include both gender and extended family perspective to pathways approach. We expect that management of family housing resources is also highly gendered. Gender dimension of housing has been studied on a macro level in relation to housing policy, allocation of social housing, and affordability (Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Watson, 2000; Savage, 2016). There is also quantitative data on how extended families manage their housing resources in terms of intergenerational transfers, providing shelter and care for older or sick members of the family, inheriting housing, exchanging housing, splitting houses, supporting buying or mortgage payments (Mulder and Smits, 2013). For instance, it appears that apart from other factors, children are “rewarded” with financial transfers and support in buying a home also for “merit” (such as education or marriage). This happens regardless of children’s gender, but even in very egalitarian societies such as the Dutch, it appears that women are more supervised by parents when leaving the parental home and that conflicts at home (for instance parental divorce) affect them more than men (Blaauboer and Mulder, 2010). In general, however, it is mostly the resources and family structure that affects leaving the parental home. Owning a house is the main asset of European families. A large part of homeowners acquires housing not by buying but through non-financial transfers, gifts and inheritance (in 2016 in Poland, respectively 15% and 11% of owners) (NBP, 2017). These transfers of ownership, occupancy, and funds should also be considered when studying individual housing pathways. Individual resources are not limited to informal support that an individual can count on (for instance, relying on a family member to take in to live in a spare room), but also a place in a family’s hierarchy in terms of access to family’s housing resources (for instance, which child – eldest/male – inherits parents’ house).

Patterns of inheritance, allodial titles, patri- and matrilocality, and housing allocation have a long history in classical anthropological studies (Lévi-Strauss, 1963; 1971). They have also been critically analysed from a gender perspective (Irigaray, 1977). In contemporary Western societies, these patterns of managing family housing resources are probably much more varied and dependent on a social and spatial context. In cases of limited material resources however, the hierarchy of values and the order of family members emerge. For instance, Cox (2015) writes about teenage women in a Detroit shelter that had to leave home when their mothers found new partners; also teenage or young women who became pregnant had to leave overcrowded apartments of their mothers and siblings in London in time of “austerity urbanism” (Watt, 2018).

Clapham's idea of housing pathways was criticised for focussing too much on the "postmodern" lifestyle choice and identity, whereas housing choices are usually structurally far more constrained (Bengtsson, 2002). We pay our attention to a variety of modes of functioning of individual and family housing pathways. Housing career implies upward movement and gradual improving one's housing standard. However, as we try to highlight, it is crucial to observe both individual agency of participants of our study and these moments when they are subjected to actions of others (e.g. welfare office workers, shelter managers, members of their families, etc.). In some cases, the latter is experienced as oppression, sometimes – albeit very rarely – as a positive change in one's life if there is somebody willing to help. Also, because we deal with people in very difficult situations, we would like to think about housing/homelessness pathways as emanation of their habitus rather than a lifestyle choice. Thus, apart from reconstructing Individual Housing Pathways of our respondents, we attempted to include the housing resources that were in the possession of the closest family (also friends, if they could rely on staying there) and all housing situations where our respondents were staying. The article has thus a twofold aim of introducing the concept of a Family Housing Pathway and its graphic representation, as well as analysing the gendered nature of managing family housing resources. We present this on data concerning older women in homelessness services in Podkarpackie province in Poland.

## **Women's Homelessness in Poland**

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The latest released numbers on homelessness in Poland are from a national homeless one-night count that was conducted in February 2017. About 15% of people counted were women. Relatively highest rates of women were found in crisis centres (most of the inhabitants there are persons fleeing domestic violence) and single mother homes. About 2500 women were counted in homeless shelters and emergency night shelters. Women in these services are probably older, single, and without dependent children (MPiPS, 2017).

There were about 1100 homeless people identified in Podkarpackie province in 2017 (MPiPS, 2017), a very similar number to the previous counts. In 2015, only 10% of those counted in Podkarpackie were women, much below the national average. In a small survey conducted in 2014, 42 women experiencing homelessness in Podkarpackie were questioned, 29 of them were above the age of 50, the average period of homelessness was 5.4 years (a year less than for men) (ROPS, 2014). In our view, these numbers reflect services available to women in that province rather than the scale of homelessness among women there (Mostowska, 2020). In the 2003-2013 period, Rzeszów's welfare centre information on homelessness recorded only a handful women, clearly depending on the social work conducted

rather than actual cases of homelessness (for instance, in 2007, 2009, and 2011 no women in the city were recorded) (Szluz, 2016, pp.137-138). Much more reliable data from another province (Pomorskie), gathered in a time series across the whole region, shows the aging of the homeless population, including women: from an average of 40 in 2003 to almost 50 years of age in 2013 (Dębski, 2014). From this study, we learn also that on average women were relatively in better health than men, and more often than men received financial benefits. Still, surprisingly many women were living in allotment gardens; in 2007 in Pomorskie, 30% of homeless women lived sometime during the previous year there (Dębski, 2008). This data is supported by other studies; a high share of women in the national count is visible in vacant buildings and allotment gardens (18.3%) (MPIPS, 2017). Robust research on women's homelessness in Poland is still lacking; we also do not have much information about the specificity of the Podkarpackie region. Szluz (2010) studied women in shelters in the province but her work hardly refers to the local context.

## **Podkarpackie Context**

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The region has traditionally been one of the poorest and least urbanised with a large share of national minorities. Industrialization was planned for the North-western part of the province before WWII, but the socialist urbanization and industrialization came only in socialist Poland (Długosz, 2007). Aviation and mechanical factories were set up in larger cities along with housing and educational opportunities. The postwar boomer generation was the first one to have an opportunity to migrate to cities (or see their towns industrialise and urbanise). Many became farmer-factory workers combining factory work with running a small family farm.

Negative consequences of transformation to free-market economy concentrated in Podkarpackie. State-owned enterprises became a burden on the economy; many of them were privatised and/or shut down. Farmer-workers were left with no work in the industry and small inefficient farms that could not support families. Unemployment rose to more than 20% in 2002. Many households relied on retirement pensions of older family members that were the sole source of income (Długosz, 2007, pp.67-68). High emigration abroad aggravated the processes of poverty trapped in remote, local communities with a large proportion of older inhabitants. For many of the province's inhabitants, the early transformation was a time of constant uncertainty and disillusion. Długosz (2007, pp.76-82) considers this period a collective trauma that leads to passive, fatalistic and sometimes authoritarian attitudes, lack of security and nostalgia for good old days. In the last decade, however, Poland experienced rapid economic growth. It contributes to the uneven development of the province. The transformation from heavy industry to the service and knowledge economy is apparent especially in the regional capital. Still,



there are large pockets of very high unemployment (especially among young people) and low labour market participation (especially among young and older women) in the province (Walawender, 2016, p.104). Many farms are too small to sustain families or to compete with their products on the market; there is limited access to education and healthcare in the rural areas. Podkarpackie is also standing out as one of the most conservative regions in Poland, with the highest church attendance and lowest divorce rate.

## About the project

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This paper is based on a larger project on women's homelessness in Poland. Since the project concerned only women, no men were interviewed. Clearly this data does not allow us to make any comparisons or draw more general conclusions about gender as an independent variable. While aware of the limitations of the study, we find it important to present the concept of Family Housing Pathways and to point to the area of gendered management of family housing resources. These processes of exclusion from housing resources on the family level could be explored further in the future on a larger sample of men and women using the Family Housing Pathways concept.

Fieldwork was conducted in the Podkarpackie region in 2018. There are four women's shelters run by a Catholic non-governmental organisation, two single mothers homes run by nuns, and one women's shelter run by a Catholic church organisation. There are also four crisis centres, which are a part of the national system of support for "victims of family violence", where many single women with children find temporary accommodation. In total, for the population of about 2.5 million, the province offers around 200 beds for women in homelessness, most of them in homelessness services. One of the shelters is in a small village of about 5 000 inhabitants. There are two in towns of 40-50 000 inhabitants and one is located outside the regional capital. With the exception of one of them, they are all small facilities for about 40 inhabitants. The largest shelter is for both men and women and counts about 120 beds.

Shelters offer places for single women without dependent children, which means that most of their inhabitants are older women with chronic health problems and disabilities. Many find themselves there because of lack of beds in nursing homes. Nursing homes provide medical care, but are also much more expensive for municipalities. Some women are sent to homeless shelters from other municipalities (even faraway ones) if these have no women's facilities, which is a situation in many Polish municipalities.

Twenty-five women were interviewed in four shelters during fieldwork in February and May 2018. Some interviews were too incomplete to include in the analysis, some were conducted with younger women, whose housing pathways were obviously shorter and were not keeping with the parameters of this study. After careful consideration we also excluded material gathered in one of the shelters due to ethical problems, which will be described below.

Interviews were conducted either in private rooms of inhabitants or in a common room that was made available to us for the purpose. Some interviews were audio recorded. If participants did not agree to record, one of the researchers was leading the conversation as the other took shorthand notes. Interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to 70 minutes. Interview protocol was based on a life story narrative interview where participants were asked to tell something about themselves, whatever they found important. This was carried further by researchers asking about childhood, adolescence, adulthood and current situation. Finally, additional questions were asked about housing situations and transitions, which also helped to clarify the sequence of life events and fill in the gaps in the story.

We ensured all our interviewees about anonymity and confidentiality of data they would share with us – both in future publications and in contacts with the staff of the facility. We use code names and anonymise names and some details from participants' narratives. We did our best to create an atmosphere of openness and privacy in which they could feel comfortable to talk about their concerns and express complaints: about their own situation, their families, and the shelter. Our interviewees had varying capacities and capabilities to tell their story. Some of them have mental disorders. For some of them, storytelling was not an easy task. Still, most of them probably rarely have an opportunity to be listened to without being judged. This is why we needed to use the method of an autobiographical narrative interview more elastically than it is often presented in methodological literature (see Schütze, 1983 or Peta *et al.*, 2018).

We analysed the interviews by coding themes that are considered in research as causal factors leading to homelessness (precarious employment, family relations, victimization, support networks). We graphed them reconstructing Individual Housing Pathways, especially to capture spatial-temporal dimension of housing entangled in individual biography. Our participants entered homelessness for the first time at older age, only one of them clearly had an addiction problem. We thus funnelled our analysis on the codes relating to housing and family resources to understand if this could be one of the factors contributing to their current situation, which finally lead to developing Family Housing Pathways.

## **“Ethical turbulence”**

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Working with vulnerable participants, people experiencing homelessness in particular, involves much “ethical turbulence” (Cloke *et al.*, 2000). Conducting research in homelessness services is also specific. Shelter managers act as gatekeepers – access to inhabitants of such institutions is only possible through them and staff may inadvertently place pressure on individuals (COH, 2016). The relation between the manager and inhabitants is very unequal. Especially in larger shelters the distance between the manager and inhabitants seems bigger and their relations are more formal. In each shelter, we only could approach inhabitants who were asked if they wanted to participate by the manager first. Some refused right away, before talking to us. Some did not agree when we explained our study to them directly. When they agreed to an interview, we explained that they can withdraw at any moment, or do not have to answer questions that they rather not answer. None of our interviewees terminated an interview early, but some expressed that they were tired and wished to finish soon, which we did.

In one of the shelters the manager directed inhabitants individually to the library, where we were conducting interviews. Inhabitants might have felt pressured to talk to us. Hence some of them were reluctant to talk about their lives at first. After we explained our purpose for being there and the aims of our study some talked to us openly. Others were very brief and did not say much. If any of the women refused to talk to us, we respected it fully. We do not feel that we had taken advantage of the situation or caused any harm to participants (both those who talked to us and those who did not). Even if some of them expressed resignation and doubts if their participation can change anything, others spoke about being glad that they could talk to us (for positive aspects of being interviewed see for instance Finch, 1984). It gave them an opportunity to talk about themselves; it was also a possibility for them to complain about drawbacks of the shelter. However, given the context of this situation, material from this shelter was excluded from the analysis

## **Life Stories within the Regional and Historical Context**

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Life stories of our respondents reflect gendered social history of the region and the Polish transformation after 1989. Most participants of our study are from a generation that experienced rapid modernization of the country during the communist times. They were usually raised on a family farm, where their parents kept livestock and cultivated some land. Sometimes the father had an extra job in town. In the 1960s, many aviation factories opened in the Podkarpackie region, where our respondents performed low-skilled work, working as dispatchers, spraying paint, testing rubber tires, and managing tools storage. Only one woman had a job as a clerk in the factory,

dealing with driver's licenses and the like. Some of them moved to bigger towns and multi-family housing when they started work and/or got married. The end of their professional careers coincided with rapid deindustrialization and transformation to a free market economy at the beginning of the 1990s. Often they prematurely lost their jobs due to the privatization of factories, and as an effect have very low pensions now. The generation of their children, on the other hand, took advantage of the opening of the borders and many of them emigrated to work in the EU, others moved to larger cities in Poland, like Kraków, Warszawa, and Poznań.

Poverty is an underlying background for the life stories of our respondents. Even if they did not consider themselves and their families poor, their situation severely deteriorated when they (or their partners) lost their jobs, when a partner died or left, or when they had to live off a low pension. Many women come from rural areas of the province and they had experienced severe housing deprivation at their countryside or small town homes. The scale of deprivation is apparent in the stories when women talk about warmth and food in the shelter ("shelter is warm", "nice and warm", "it's warm in the shelter"). Heating problems appear in many stories, for instance when an older woman is left alone in a dilapidated home and she can no longer manage with a wood-heated stove, domestic animals, collapsed roof, no running water, etc. Many homes of our respondents were old wooden structures, some of them burnt down, homes of two women had to be vacated because of risk of collapse.

Most women in our group worked outside of home. It was usually manual labour, often in factories with hazardous health conditions (spraying paint, etc.). They also performed domestic work on their own and work on the farmstead belonging to the household. All in all, their health quickly deteriorated, they had no possibility to earn extra money, and their pensions are very low now. Some, who did not work professionally, do not receive a pension, only a social benefit, which is about 600 złotych per month (140 euro, and is about a half of the minimal pension).

On the meso-level of institutions and social policy, homelessness pathways of our respondents illustrate that women's homelessness is not apparent in mainstream policy responses. For instance, welfare centres routinely offer a homeless shelter as an ultimate solution for older women. Some of them could still be independent if support was offered in their home, or if they could be offered a comfortable dwelling instead of a run-down house with no amenities. It seems that the condition of some of our respondents is serious enough, and they should be provided with medical care (psychiatric and/or physical). Nursing homes, however, are expensive and overcrowded.

Family violence appeared in less than half life stories, the perpetrators were usually husbands or partners, but also a father, son or stepmother. In most cases, interviewees' intimate relationships broke down because of the death of husband or

separation from husband (due to violence, addictions, sickness). Relations with children and siblings are usually also strained. Participants of our study were often not aware that – probably – they were legally entitled to some financial family resources (for example, part of the property) or alimony from children neglecting their duty to support parents living in destitution.

## Individual and Family Housing Pathways

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In the following section we present the stories of two of our interviewees in detail and explain the narratives of their housing pathways graphically. Individual Housing Pathways (IHP) illustrate the transitions of the respondent through different dwellings. We owe this concept to Reeve *et al.* (2007) who graphically represented women’s “homelessness journeys” through “homelessness landscapes” in England. In the figures presented below, subsequent living situations are placed along the vertical time axis. There are also life events and forms of support in neighbouring columns, and links between them that represent the navigation of an individual through these conditions, dealing with favourable and adverse events, formal and informal support (or lack of thereof). Vertical arrows represent the temporal sequence of houses and arrows connecting boxes from other columns represent causation or influence (Figures 1 and 3).

While analysing and illustrating IHPs, we found out that some crucial information is missing from these diagrams. The Family Housing Pathway (FHP) adds another dimension to the IHP. A horizontal location axis is added, perpendicular to the vertical time axis. Dwellings used by an individual are placed along this horizontal axis. An individual’s transitions in time and between dwellings are represented by the black arrow. Other persons’ transitions are represented by dashed arrows. In our case, those are siblings, husbands, parents, etc. of our informants. Dwellings are represented by boxes, and height corresponds to the time when family members resided in the dwelling (or it was available to our informant); captions add information on how it entered the family and how it was lost (Figures 2 and 4).

We thus sketch not only individual transitions between different housing arrangements (Figures 1 and 3), but also look at all housing resources that were available in our interviewees’ families. In some stories, an unequal and gendered distribution of extended family’s housing resources is very apparent. This gendered distribution of family’s housing is illustrated by the two housing pathways reconstructed from women’s narratives.

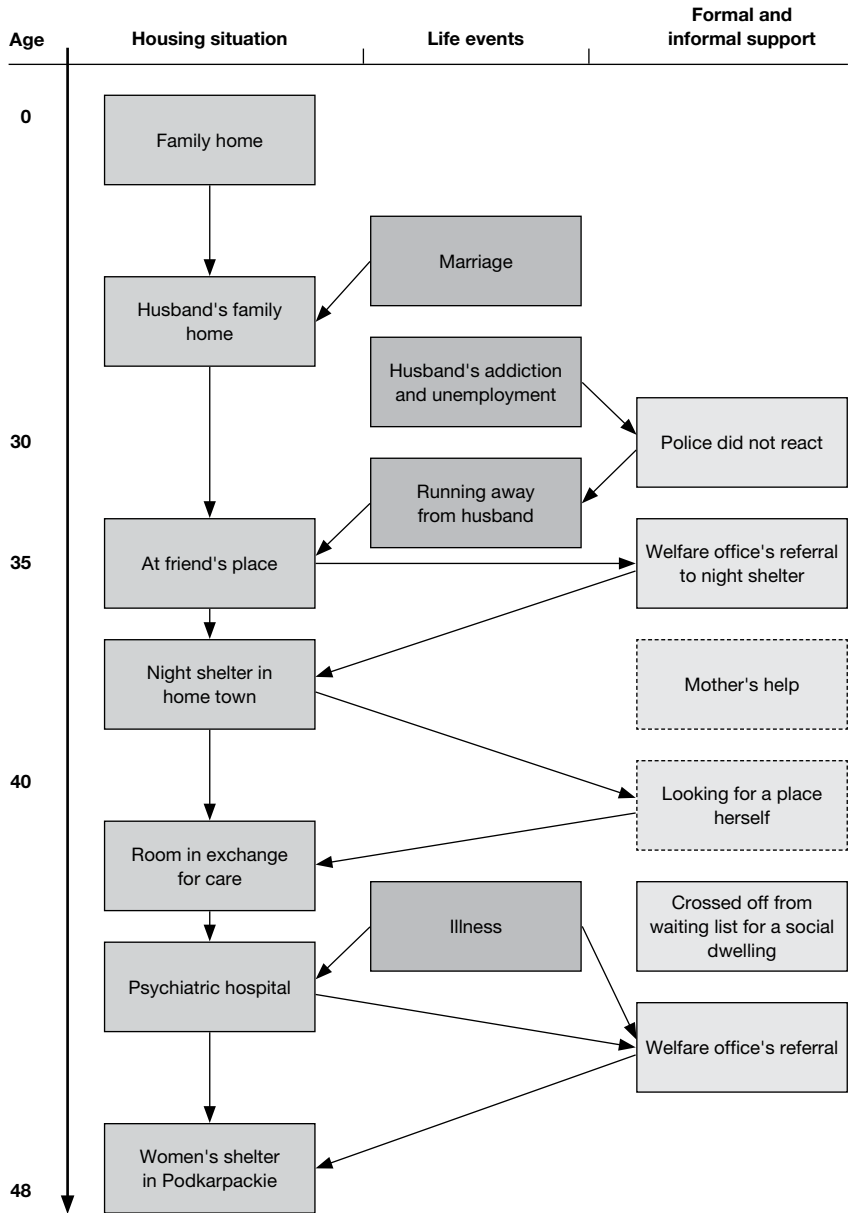
## *Eugenia*

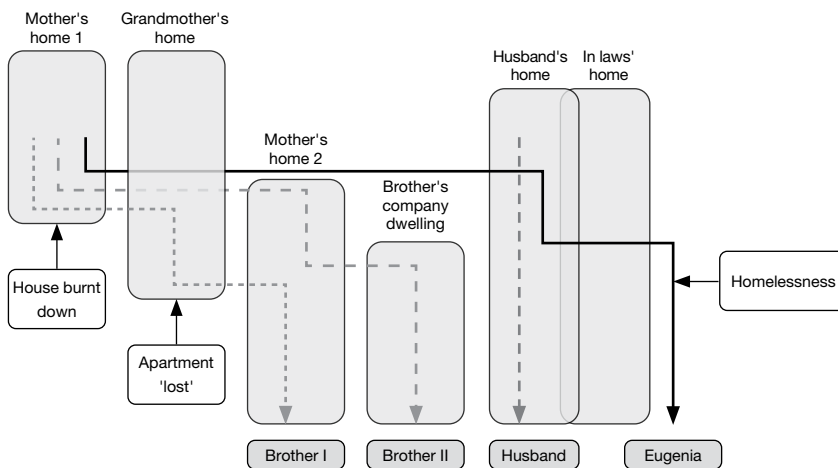
Eugenia lives in a shelter for homeless women. She willingly agreed to an interview. Her life story exemplifies the too often neglected dimension of inequality in families of origin. Eugenia was brought up in a family with two brothers. As shown in Figure 2, after marriage Eugenia left her family home and moved to her husband's home, which was located next to her parents-in-law's house farmyard. Her brothers were living with their families in their mother's home. When Eugenia's mother's house burnt down, one of them moved in with their grandmother and the other went on to live in her mother's new place. When her grandmother's apartment "was lost" after her death (it had probably been a council flat), luckily the other brother got a dwelling from his employer and moved out from her mother's apartment. Then the brother from her grandmother's place could take over her mother's apartment. After running away from her husband's violence and leaving his house, Eugenia had no return to her parental family's housing resources as one of her brothers lived at their mother's flat, the only family housing resource that was left, after grandmother's death.

During divorce Eugenia did not receive legal help, therefore she did not know that she could have claimed a part of her husband's home. After separation, Eugenia's ex-husband literally locked the door and did not let Eugenia take her belongings from there. She had to leave the house and she became homeless. She spent a night at her friend's and later she was referred by the welfare centre to the night shelter. In the meantime, she looked for another place to live as she experienced lots of stress at the shelter. Eugenia started experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia and spent about six months at a psychiatric hospital. She tried to manage on her own living with an older lady in exchange for care, but her illness made it impossible to go on like this.

Subsequently, she was referred to a women's shelter in Podkarpackie (ca. 500 km from Eugenia's home town). She feels safe here. She is on medication, and her health has improved. The illness was a direct trigger for leaving the night shelter. It was, however, Eugenia's doctor, who refused to release her from the hospital back to the night shelter. As Luhrmann (2012) points out, schizophrenia clinicians recognise that having a decent place to live is sometimes more important than medication. Eugenia talks about her experience of losing home as harm, however, she does not direct any complaints towards any particular actors (people, institutions, etc.). She seems to be reconciled with her present situation and its reasons. Leaving home after divorce seems obvious to her. Eugenia said of a fellow shelter inhabitant: "She's also divorced. She had nowhere to go, she's here". Shelter appears to her as an obvious consequence of divorce. At the same time, her brothers have their housing needs met: the first one lives in a company flat and another one at their mother's house.

**Figure 1. Eugenia's Individual Housing Pathway**



**Figure 2. Eugenia's Family Housing Pathway**

Eugenia's IHP is influenced by poverty, lack of family housing resources, family violence, subordinate position of a woman in a patriarchal family, lack of institutional support, and mental problems. Surprisingly, in the end, her illness enabled Eugenia to find a place where she feels safe and well taken care of.

### *Emilia*

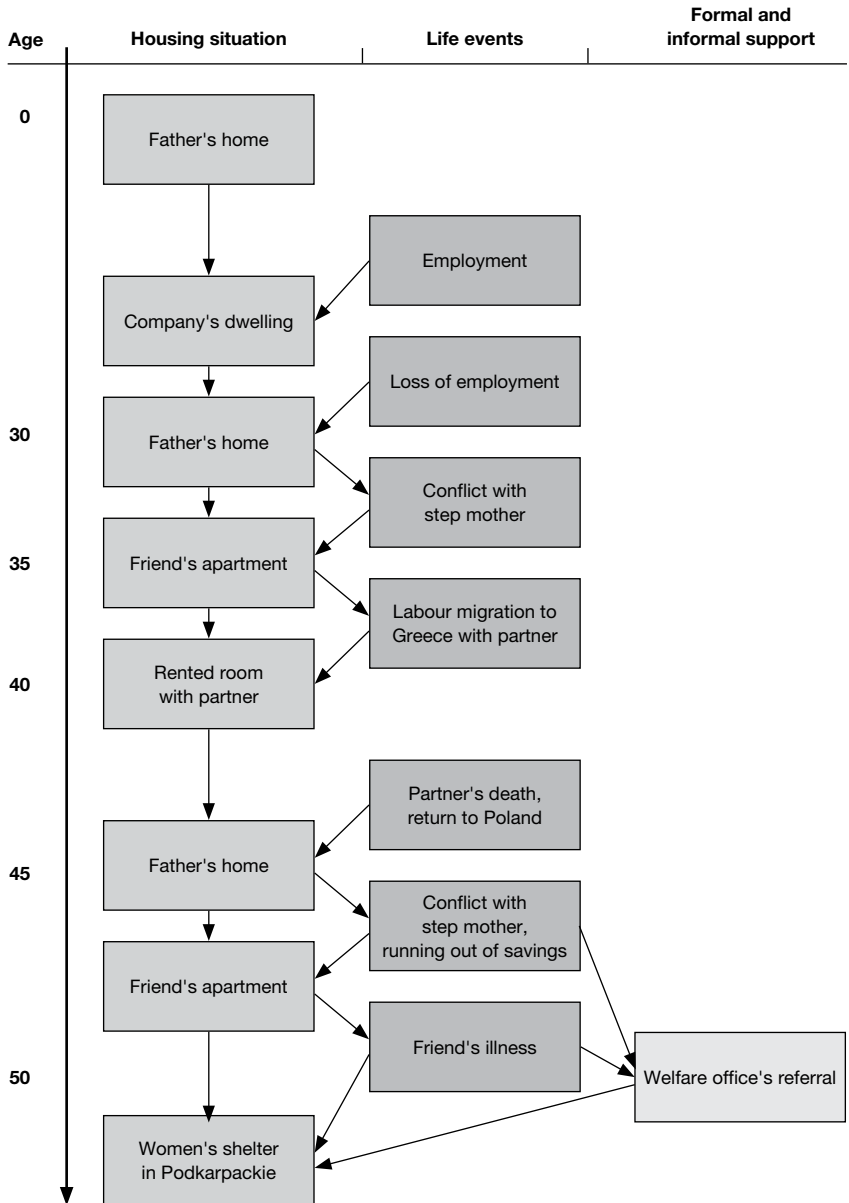
Being in her sixties, Emilia recalls her childhood and youth as good times until her mother's death. Emilia's mother's death created a free place for another woman in the family. Her father married again quickly and Emilia was thrown out of home because of conflict with her stepmother. Emilia, being her late mother's child, lost her place in the house. She obtained a dwelling from the factory, where she was working. In the mid-1990s when factories were shutting down, she briefly lived at a friend's house and then emigrated with her boyfriend to Greece. After 11 years there, her partner died and she decided to return to Poland. As a single person, Emilia was unable to afford accommodation on her own.

Her father let her live with him and his new wife only as long as she had the money she brought from abroad. Then she got kicked out again. Figure 4 presents the stability of housing conditions of her father and his wife compared with the complications of Emilia's pathway. After a short period of couch surfing at her friend's home, she needed to leave as her friend was ill and it was not possible to live with her anymore. Emilia's sister-in-law found out about the shelter and Emilia moved there. After being admitted to the shelter, Emilia had a stroke, which negatively



affected her health and lowered the level of her physical ability. Emilia has never acquired her own housing or secured a tenancy. She lived in her father's home, in a company dwelling, at a friend's and in a rented room with her partner abroad.

**Figure 3. Emilia's Individual Housing Pathway**



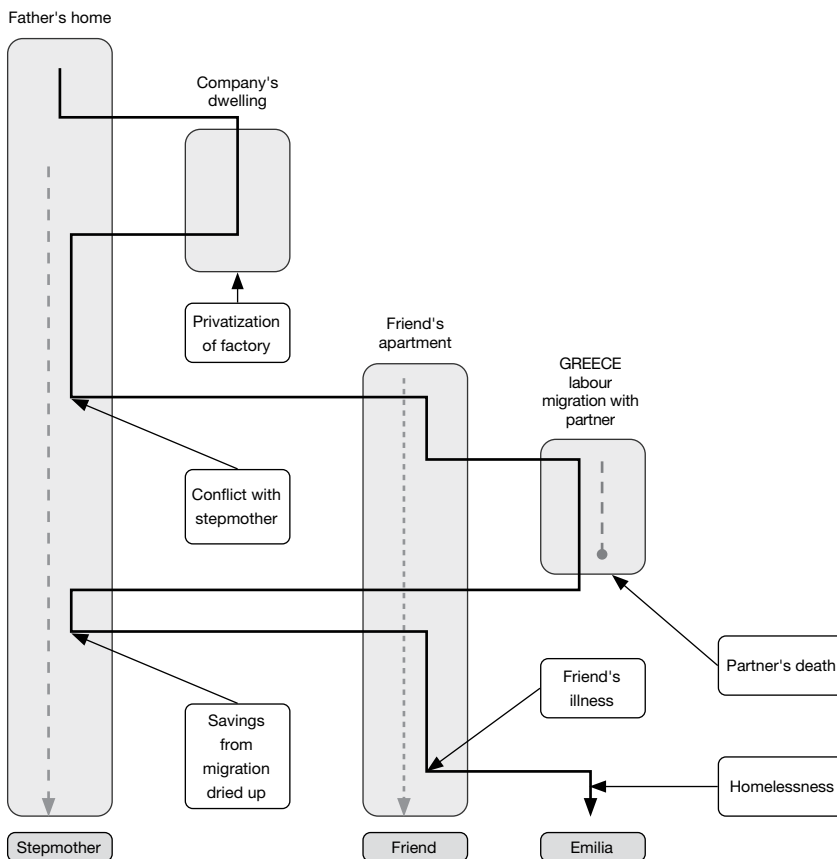
**Figure 4. Emilia's Family Housing Pathway**

Figure 4 shows that Emilia has never managed to gain autonomy and a secure housing situation. She was subjected to forces beyond her control, some she could not have anticipated (e.g. her mother's death or political transformation resulting in privatisation of state factories).

### **Conclusion: the Gender Dimension of Family Housing Pathways**

It has been shown elsewhere that some women in homelessness have never had permanent, stable and independent living arrangements. Their pathways into homelessness were "a switch from relying on their personal support systems to relying on the welfare system" (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995). Residential instability has been the main feature also of most of our respondents' housing pathways. It seems that this instability was partly caused by a gendered way of managing housing

resources between related households. It should further be explored whether women in fact moved more often into their husband's place than vice versa, and whether brothers had precedence over sisters to live in the parental home.

In the cases that we studied, the structural factors behind our respondents' pathways made it impossible for them to accumulate housing or financial resources. Also, our interviewees come from communities with a traditional social structure, where traditionally a married woman leaves her family home and moves into her husband's (family) home. If these patterns are still relevant today, they could present a greater risk of homelessness for women than for men. For instance, brothers with their wives and children take the place emptied by sisters. In that case, when women would leave their husbands' place (because of divorce, family violence, deterioration of housing, etc.), they would not be able to go back to their parental home. Our interviewees usually have been employed as low-skilled and low-paid workers. Most of them have only primary education, which made it impossible to improve their professional situation. Another gendered part of our informants' pathways was that the intervention of the formal support system came usually very late to support women experiencing domestic violence. There was little or no institutional support that could prevent or ease the consequences of being subjected to violence at home: psychiatric care, a place in a nursing home or a refuge for survivors of domestic violence for a woman at a later age (with no dependent children). In terms of accommodation, the system did not offer our interviewees anything apart from a homeless shelter. In the case of these women, when they stopped depending on their partners (fathers, sons), they seem to have transgressed the social norm and fell outside the role of a dutiful wife, mother or grandmother. They were excluded from family resources, but also not acknowledged in policy responses.

In traditional communities, family issues (family violence being one of them) are often deemed private and should not be revealed to outsiders. As the welfare system is obliged to react especially when a child's safety is neglected or endangered, single women or women whose children are grown up, are in a particularly difficult situation as they no longer perform the social role of a mother. As we argued elsewhere (Mostowska and Dębska, 2020), older childless women, and those with adult children, who lose their homes because of family violence are not provided with support for domestic violence survivors (e.g. access to a lawyer, psychological help), but are referred to "homeless" shelters (see also Halicka *et al.*, 2018).

One of the limitations of our study, as mentioned before, is that we have only interviewed women. As we demonstrated, the social and historical background of Podkarpackie province makes it conceivable that in those communities women are especially disadvantaged when it comes to access to family housing resources.

Nevertheless, similar interviews would have to be conducted with men, whose homelessness may also be a result of exclusion from their families. Unfortunately, no existing data can support either hypothesis at this point. Homelessness counts in Poland consistently show that women comprise 10-20% of the population. It is not possible to disentangle whether that is a cause of women's better protection against homelessness (by the state or families) or rather a limited access to services and hence a more "hidden" nature of women's homelessness (e.g. living in abusive relationships). The common variable in these studies, the "cause" of homelessness (sometimes reported by services rather than the person in question), recurrently show that "family conflict" is on the top of the list (25-30% in various studies). If reports break that variable by gender it's roughly the same for both men and women (MPiPS, 2017; Dębski, 2014). "Family conflict", however, is such a broad category that it demands more research to understand the role of family relations in the causation of homelessness.

### **Further Possibilities for the Family Housing Pathways Concept and its Limitations**

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The concept of FHP made it possible for us to better understand the management of scarce housing resources in families of our respondents. It helped to illustrate an answer to the question of why they were always living at someone else's home, and why they could not use other houses that were used by family and friends. Given the exploratory nature of this study and an initial stage of the FHPs concept development, our analysis was limited so far to a few cases. This approach could further be developed to create FHPs typologies, to comprehensively explore the impact of relationships within and between the households and thus to formulate more informed conclusions regarding the gender dimension of homelessness.

The concept of FHP has also its limitations. In our case a graphical representation of FHPs is centred around one individual, otherwise, the figure would appear very hard to read. Since the concept of FHP has been developed on the basis of empirical data collected during fieldwork, we could not predict what sort of data would be crucial for the analysis. Some of our interview material was incomplete and could not be used for drawing up a FHP.

The FHP concept makes it possible to graph also other aspects of temporal/spatial transitions of people and resources. FHPs concept could be used in a number of ways to illustrate various housing phenomena. Further research could lead to defining the variety of types of FHP. The concept of FHP could be extended, and used for other aspects of management of family (housing) resources. It could

contain tenure, location, size or quality of the dwellings; location (Robinson *et al.*, 2007) or distance between dwellings; composition of households and their changes, the nature of relations between family members along the pathway and many more.

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# Universal Rights but Not for Everyone: The Right to Emergency Accommodation in France and EU Equality Law

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➤ **Abstract\_** *In the context of the refugee crisis that started in 2014 in Europe, many have denounced restrictions imposed on migrants' fundamental rights. This article explores the striking example of the right to emergency accommodation in France, and puts these developments into question in the framework of European equality law, asking whether and how they may contradict the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of race and ethnic origin under EU law. The apparent incapacity of the current EU equality framework to effectively question discriminatory aspects of this recent phenomenon is dangerous, and calls for an urgent common reflection. In light of critical legal studies, it poses a threat to the consistency and effectiveness of the anti-discrimination legal framework in Europe, on the one hand, and of the very nature of fundamental rights, on the other hand. What is at stake is the tackling by the law of phenomena that may be seen as pertaining to institutional and structural racism, at national and European levels.*

## Introduction

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Much ink has been spilled on the consequences of the refugee crisis that started in 2014 in terms of people's rights. These consequences are now also denounced as a housing policy issue in an increasing number of European countries,<sup>1</sup> and the EU Commission's Social Policy Network has recently published a report on the fight against homelessness, demonstrating attention to this issue and openly recognising the specific obstacles faced by the migrant homeless (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

Using the right to emergency accommodation in France as a case study, from the perspective of the consequences of its denial for homeless migrant women, men and children on the ground, this article aims to make the scope of the problem more visible in relation to EU anti-discrimination law. Focusing on justiciability rather than policy guidelines, it tackles the gap between European and EU law, describing how the absence of a clear and consistent European legal framework aiming to tackle migrant<sup>2</sup> homelessness translates in the recent case law, at regional and national levels.

The article begins by recalling the international and European human rights legal framework relating to housing rights, in order to show how the right to accommodation stems out of it. Part III goes on with the translation of this right into French law in the aftermath of the European migrant crisis. The use of the notion of vulnerability by French courts and its control by the European Court of Human Rights, taken together, lead to contradict the very notion of universality that an internationally recognised human right is supposed to entail. Part VI departs from this deficient European framework in order to examine how EU law may cover such situations, making the point that these legal developments hurt the EU equality law framework, and in turn the perceived reliability of EU law as a social tool more generally. In the context of a deficient European human rights framework, EU law has no solution to offer in terms of justiciability, despite the broad scope of its race equality Directive. This is considered a crucial problem, EU institutions being accountable for the provision of a consistent legal system. Therefore, Part V calls for a common reflection on the institutional and conceptual tools available in order to find solutions to this problem, basing on multi-level governance and on the necessity of a more critical reading from contemporary academic scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> Most recently, see British NGOs Refugee Action and NACCOM, *Missing the Safety Net* (September 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Both documented and undocumented migrants are concerned. I interchangeably use the notion of migrants or foreigner, as covering economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees indistinctly, in an attempt to start from the perspective of the common needs of all persons covered by these categories as observed on the ground.

## **International and European Human Right Protection of the Right to Accommodation**

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### *The international protection of housing rights*

Although the efficiency and binding legal effects of international human rights instruments of protection of housing rights remain debated, their merits are clear (Kenna, 2010; Kenna, 2014). Notably on the basis of Article 25(1) of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, their development have marked a historical legal shift from charity-based approaches towards the idea that poverty is not necessarily an individual failure, but rather a structural economic and social problem, requiring to consider collective responsibility as a source of potential solution. They point out the unlimited personal scope of the right to housing of all natural persons, and underline its meaning more than the right to a mere shelter (“secure home”), expressly relating housing to the notion of human dignity (Boccardoro and De Schutter, 2005). Moreover, they proclaim the right to housing as being more than a right to shelter: it consists of a negative dimension, protecting against evictions and forcing displacements, and a positive dimension, an access to housing – or at least to a shelter – for all, hence the relevance of the plural “housing rights”.

It is also clear that the UN legal order has made this right a duty, at a minimum for states authorities that have ratified the Covenant (UNHCR 1994a; UNHCR 1994b). Most UN international instruments referring to the right to housing include complaint mechanisms. UN mechanisms have also created well-informed administrative bodies in charge of reporting compliance with housing rights standards to the United Nations. As a result, housing rights norms have received more attention and scrutiny since the late 1980s and tend to be increasingly monitored at regional level: by the African Union, the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe and the European Union (notably the European Commission’s Social Inclusion Programme).

### *The European right to emergency accommodation*

In line with these international developments, housing rights are also protected as human rights by the Council of Europe, through the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>3</sup> and the Revised Social Charter.<sup>4</sup> This has given rise to the protection of the right to emergency accommodation.

### **European Social Charter protection of the universal right to shelter<sup>5</sup>**

Article 31 Part 1 of the Revised European Social Charter (RESC), into force since 1996,<sup>6</sup> expressly states that “Every person has the right to housing.”<sup>7</sup> Article 31 Part 2 of the Charter provides more details on the related obligations of the states: “promote access to housing of an adequate standard”, and take measures designed to “prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination”, as well as to “make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources.”<sup>8</sup> The 48 complaints brought before the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) responsible for the Charter’s enforcement allowed the Committee to clarify the implications of the right to housing under the Charter in terms of states obligations, sometimes explicitly referring to General Comments 4 and 7 of the UN CESCR.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This treaty applies to residents of all Council of Europe countries at present (Council of Europe website <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/005/signatures> -last accessed on 10.05.2020).

<sup>4</sup> The revised treaty applies to residents of the member countries to the Council of Europe which have ratified the Revised Charter, that is, all Council of Europe countries except Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Monaco, Poland, San Marino, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Council of Europe website, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/163/signatures> – last accessed on 10.05.2020).

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I interchangeably use the words ‘shelter’ and ‘accommodation’.

<sup>6</sup> Although several articles of the initial 1966 European Social Charter (ETS 035) could be considered as relating to housing, either as a component of other rights or as a component of the protection granted to specific vulnerable groups – most remarkably, the right to social and medical assistance for “anyone without adequate resources”. The overlapping Articles have helped to establish the right to housing for those contracting states that have not ratified Article 31 of the 1996 Revised European Social Charter (ETS 163). In the EU, those states are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia (except para 1), Malta, Romania, Slovakia. On the ECSR case law on housing rights, see Mikkola, 2008, and Kenna, 2011, paras 8-95; for a detailed analysis of the collective complaints system in the context of housing rights, see Kenna and Jordan, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Article E Part V of the Charter prohibits discrimination in any of the rights protected by the Charter and has also played an important role in the protection of housing rights of migrants and travellers; for example, see decisions on collective complaint 39/2006 *FEANTSA v France European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA v France)*, 5/12/2007, 159-162 and 33/2006 *International Movement ATD Fourth World v France*, 5/12/2007, 149-170.

<sup>8</sup> See decisions on complaint 33/2006 (above) at 94-99 and 128-133, and on complaint no 39/2006 (above) at 124-129 and 143-147; see also the Committee’s 2003 Conclusions on Sweden.

<sup>9</sup> For example, decision on merits on complaint no 39/2006 (n9).

The Committee made it clear that although not sufficient, the protection of housing rights by national legal orders within a reasonable time<sup>10</sup> was a necessary condition of compliance with Article 31 as an obligation of means, through immediate action by the state in a “practical and effective” form (as opposed to a merely legal, unimplemented form), at local and national levels,<sup>11</sup> which requires effective data collection.<sup>12</sup> Relating to the relationship between the elimination of homelessness (Article 31 Part 1 (2) RESC) and access to adequate housing for migrant people (Part 1 (1)), two decisions on 10 November 2014<sup>13</sup> recall that the right to accommodation is closely linked to the right to life, and crucial to the respect of human dignity, although paradoxically, they also admit a hierarchy in the content of this right, depending on a migrant’s legal status. As a result, temporary accommodation cannot be regarded as a viable solution for documented migrants or migrants working legally on a state’s territory: they must be provided with a housing solution within a reasonable time. As for undocumented migrants, even when they are due to leave the national territory, they have to be provided with an accommodation solution. While differentiating between the scope of undocumented and documented migrants’ housing rights, the Council underlines that the deprivation of such an essential emergency assistance measure as an accommodation solution cannot be part of the dissuasive tools of a country’s migration policy. Accommodation appears as a minimum, fully universal right that obliges States without any other classification than belonging to the human community.

### **An ambiguous protection of housing rights by the European Court of Human Rights**

Although initially a liberal instrument based on the concept of negative rights and property rights, the ECHR has been influenced by the welfare state model: the European Court on Human Rights (ECtHR) has explicitly recognised positive obligations of the states deriving from ECHR provisions (Starmer, 2001). The Court has constantly held that the ECHR does not guarantee a right to housing to all admissible claimants. However, since the 1990s, it has progressively developed a case law that protects housing rights on the basis of the right to respect of one’s home

<sup>10</sup> 53/2008 *FEANTSA v Slovenia*, 8/9/2009; *FEANTSA v France* (n9) at 55-58; see also *ATD Fourth World v France* (n9) at 62.

<sup>11</sup> 27/2004 *ERRC v Italy*, 7/12/2005 at 26, *FEANTSA v France* (n9) at 79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* at 61-64. No comprehensive data on homelessness at national level have been collected in France since 2012.

<sup>13</sup> 86/2012 *FEANTSA v Netherlands*, 2/7/2014 and 90/2013 *Conference of European Churches v Netherlands*, 1/7/2014.

(Kenna, 2008)<sup>14</sup> and family life<sup>15</sup> under Article 8 ECHR, where sufficient and continuous links between the claimant and a particular place can be established. The notion of home has in turn enabled the Court to extend the protection of property (under Article 1 of the First Protocol to the ECHR) to the protection of occupiers as well as home-owners. In 2012, in *Yordanova v Bulgaria*,<sup>16</sup> it held for the first time that «an obligation to secure shelter to particularly vulnerable individuals may flow from Article 8 of the Convention in exceptional cases».<sup>17</sup> However, following cases relating to a right to mere shelter have also been considered under Article 3 ECHR, which prohibits inhuman and degrading treatment. By not providing persons with particular emergency needs with adequate housing, the State party to the Convention can be held responsible under this provision. Until recently, this Article had been violated in relation to housing rights in cases of violent displacement of Roma people.<sup>18</sup> But over the last few years, the European Court of Human Rights has departed from *Yordanova* and developed what can be seen as a right to accommodation for vulnerable persons, on the basis of Article 3. The Court now requires that States guarantee minimum reception conditions to an asylum-seeker family before sending them back to Italy under the Dublin procedure.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, being a child or in need of medical care prevails on a person's status of irregular migrant.<sup>20</sup>

This is how the ECtHR case law on the reception of migrants under Article 3 ECHR has recently provided the basis for a right to shelter for vulnerable people. Although this case law provides minimum protection against gross violations of the right to a shelter, it does not take all homeless persons as vulnerable *per se*. This implicitly denies the value of the right to a shelter as a universal human right that all persons should enjoy, as human beings. The growing importance of housing rights in global and regional human rights law has also had an impact on national orders.

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<sup>14</sup> At 193, 208, referring to ECtHR, *Airey v Ireland* (1979-1980) 2 EHRR 305, § 26.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Article 8 protects not only the home, but also family rights: in *Wallowa and Walla v Czech Republic* (complaint no 23848/04, 26/10/2006) para 75, the ECtHR held that homeless parents must benefit from all possible measures aiming to reunifying them with their children as long as no mistreatment was observed: children shall not be forcibly taken in care unless mistreatment has occurred.

<sup>16</sup> *Yordanova and others v Bulgaria*, no 25446/06 (ECtHR 24/04/2012).

<sup>17</sup> Other articles have also indirectly contributed to the elaboration of housing rights by the Court: Article 8 can notably be violated in combination with articles 3, 6, 13 and 14 ECHR; Article 8 remains at the core of ECHR housing rights protection before the Court of Strasbourg.

<sup>18</sup> *Moldova and others v Romania*, no 41138/98 and no 64320/01 (ECtHR, 12/07/2005).

<sup>19</sup> *Tarakhel v Switzerland*, no 29217/12 (ECtHR, 4/11/2014) at 122.

<sup>20</sup> *VM v Belgium*, (ECtHR, 7/7/2015) at 138; but some particular types of centres "preparing migrants to their return" are viewed as an admissible reception solution in *Hunde v Netherlands*, no 17931/16 (ECtHR, 5/7/2016).



## Foreigners' Fundamental Right to a Shelter in France

In this context of international protection of housing rights as human rights at UN and at European levels, and more specifically of the right to shelter as a minimum, France has been restricting its supposedly open understanding of migrants' housing rights, both legally and through state practices.

National laws initially provided a particularly high threshold of protection, guaranteeing to all persons both protection against homelessness, and the right to decent housing conditions. However, recent years have simultaneously witnessed a growing number of homeless migrants, and the progressive restriction of their housing rights (Médecins du Monde and Primo Levy Centre, 2016).

### *French jurisprudential restriction of foreigners' right to housing*

French social law provisions guarantee a universal, opposable right to shelter since 2007, but this written universal right has progressively been restricted by the courts.

### **French fundamental right to accommodation**

Although the right to housing is not expressly protected by the French Constitution, the possibility to access to decent housing conditions has been considered an "objective of constitutional value" by French Constitutional Court in 1995.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the right to housing and the definition of decent housing conditions are parts of several national acts, notably since the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Like Scotland<sup>23</sup>, France has become renowned among European rights advocates for the 2007 adoption of its "Act for a justiciable right to housing" ("DALO" law). This Act gives birth to a justiciable right to both social housing and emergency accommodation, opening a door to state accountability before national courts. Under its provisions, after a certain period of time, a person who applied in vain for temporary accommodation or social housing and has been recognised as being in one of the particular emergency situations defined in the Act can claim against the state that she has a right to be offered a solution. In such cases, the judge will fix a daily (right to accommodation) or monthly (right to housing) fine to be paid by local State authorities until a solution has been offered.

More generally, since 2009, Article L.345-2-2 of French Code on Social Action and Families (CSAF) recognises the right to access accommodation to all persons in distress, unconditionally. Codifying the French notion of access to accommodation, this provision states that emergency accommodation must provide a dwelling,

<sup>21</sup> Constitutional Council, decision no 94-359 DC, ECLI: FR: CC: 1995: 94.359.DC (19/1/1995).

<sup>22</sup> Art 1 of French Act no 90-449 of 31/5/1990 "aiming to the implementation of the right to housing": "The right to housing constitutes a duty of solidarity of the nation".

<sup>23</sup> Housing (Scotland) Act (1987) as amended by the Homelessness (Scotland) Act (2003).

meals, and hygiene as well as a first medical and social evaluation, and that the person is "(...) to be orientated towards any professional or other structure capable of providing the help that [her] current state requires", referring to several types of structures providing specific additional social services. Hence, in line with UN provisions and the RESC, the right enshrined in French law is clearly more than an access to a mere temporary shelter. Article L.345-2-3 CSAF further enshrines a so-called "continuity principle", meaning that once provided with a shelter, a person or family must receive social counselling and can be orientated towards a more stable accommodation centre, a medical care centre or a viable housing solution, but not be sent back to streets. The right to emergency accommodation seems granted as the implementation of an unconditional, universal right flowing from UN human rights instruments. It should follow that the administrative status of documented (mainly as asylum-seeker or refugee) or undocumented migrant (before the asylum claim is lodged and after it has been rejected) is indifferent to the implementation of one's right to accommodation.

In short, French provisions provide the basis for a solid protection of the right to accommodation as a universal fundamental right. However, a growing divide between these provisions and recent factual and jurisprudential developments has been denounced over the last few years.

### **Jurisprudential restriction of the notion of vulnerability**

Before the migrant crisis in Europe, French judges progressively narrowed their conception of the scope of the right to emergency accommodation, restricting the definition and scope of the notions of distress or vulnerability. This has been done in contradiction with the notion of an unconditional right to accommodation enshrined in the CSAF.

In 2010, one year after recognising minimum reception conditions for asylum-seekers as a fundamental right following EU law implementation,<sup>24</sup> French "State Council", the supreme jurisdiction in charge of reviewing decisions taken by public authorities, restricted the scope of asylum-seekers' right to a shelter, leaving isolated young men as well as families with young children, sometimes sick, living on the streets (Jurislogement, 2018). In the majority of its rejection decisions, the Council considers that the state fulfilled its obligation when it demonstrated efforts to grow its emergency accommodation capacity and when the saturation of the existing accommodation structures (ordinary ones as well as those dedicated to asylum-seekers and refugees) required the State to book hotel rooms for homeless people. The existence of an effective plan designed by state authorities at local level to viably eliminate homelessness is not even put into question in the Council's

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<sup>24</sup> French State Council, no 330536, no330537, ECLI: FR: CEORD: 2009: 330536.20090806; and no 331950. ECLI: FR: CEORD: 2009: 331950.20090917.

reasoning. Guaranteeing the right to accommodation is made an obligation of means for the State, associated with a low standard of scrutiny, while it was codified in French law as an obligation of results.

In 2012, the Council ambiguously recognised a justiciable state obligation to “implement the right to emergency accommodation recognised by the law to any homeless person in a situation of medical, psychological and social need”, while simultaneously opening a door to a specific emergency judicial procedure for claiming this right before a judge.<sup>25</sup> However, by indicating that a situation of need had to be “medical, psychological and social”, the Council also opened a door to a standard of scrutiny based on the case-by-case analysis of claimants’ competing vulnerability situations.

French tribunals have followed this line and appreciate on a case-by-case basis whether a homeless claimant is in “distress”, or not. In combination with this movement, a person’s “distress” now depends on the supposed legitimacy of her presence in France (Derdek and Uhry, 2016). Two cases in 2013 and 2014 have exacerbated the phenomenon of a judge assessing competing vulnerabilities on a case-by-case basis: the State Council held that people whose asylum claim has been definitely rejected and foreigners under an obligation to leave the French territory must demonstrate extremely “exceptional circumstances” in order to be entitled to temporary accommodation – for example, suffering from severe depression and receiving a treatment for cancer was considered as serious enough in order to be granted the right not to remain homeless.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the administrative status of a migrant claimant now explicitly determines the scope of her right to accommodation. Taking a political stance on this legal matter, French judges blur the boundaries between the examination of a claim for accommodation and the examination of the legality of stay of a foreigner, despite the two procedures being fully distinct from a rigorous legal perspective. Although they do not fully deny the right to accommodation,<sup>27</sup> the interference of a claimant’s administrative situation with her fundamental right to accommodation contradicts its protection as a universal right. One’s right to a shelter, guaranteed by international

<sup>25</sup> French State Council, no 356456, ECLI: FR: CEORD: 2012: 356456.20120210.

<sup>26</sup> French State Council, no 372324, ECLI: FR: CEORD: 2013: 372324.20130924 and no 377658. ECLI: FR: CEORD: 2014: 377658.20140417, cited in Jurislogement (n29).

<sup>27</sup> *E.g.* Lille Administrative Tribunal, no 1709774, 7/3/2019, and no 1802830, prohibiting the illegal eviction of a camp, without any possible shelter being offered to its inhabitants. In Paris Administrative Tribunal, no 1704945/3-3, 13/4/2018, the publication of a local vademecum on emergency accommodation centres in Paris by local State authorities was cancelled, for planning the systematic interruption of foreigners’ care in the broad sense where the latter would not have accomplished “all the necessary steps to the implementation of their right to stay”, on the basis of the principle of unconditional accommodation.

and national provisions on the basis of human dignity, now depends on the evolution of immigration law and policy, and on one's migratory status. In 2012, 53% of homeless people in France were foreigners (INSEE, 2013). On 31 May, Paris Mayor stated on Twitter that between 700 and 1 200 'refugees' were sleeping in the streets in the North of Paris, not to mention camps around Calais in Northern France. In the current context of migrant flows to and through France, a significant part of homeless people are vulnerable and homeless because of the very difficulties experienced in relation to their administrative status. As a result, the right to accommodation is made partially ineffective as a tool to eradicate homelessness in practice. Migrants who do not fall under the two categories of refugees or asylum-seekers, either because they have not been informed on how to claim for asylum yet, or because their asylum claim has just been rejected, are left without any dedicated solution, including isolated minors. In addition, despite their status of "regular migrants", asylum-seekers and refugees themselves cannot find a housing solution, due to the saturation of the emergency accommodation system, combined with the lacking capacity of dedicated state accommodation programmes.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Violations of migrants' housing rights in France***

Since the 2010s,<sup>29</sup> living conditions of migrants recently arrived in the country have been subject to a growing number of alarms, be it in Paris, in and around Calais as well as near the Italian border.<sup>30</sup> These alarms came not only from journalists and NGOs working on the ground, but also from the French Ombudsman ("*Rights Defender*" in French) and the European Court of Human Rights. It remains to be seen whether these alarms are vigorous enough for French Courts to hear them.

### **French Ombudsman's reports and decisions**

According to some observers, the judicial weakening of binding state obligations to guarantee migrants' right to accommodation became one of French migration policy's dissuasive tools. In April and May 2018, again, the French Ombudsman denounced the squalid living conditions of migrants including asylum-seekers in camps in Paris and in northern France, as well as the harassment of migrants and aid workers by police forces. Authorities cleared the camps in late May (Paris) and early September (Northern France) respectively, without offering a viable solution to all or planning viable solutions in order to face predictable new flows (French

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<sup>28</sup> For a simple overview of the existing enmeshment of programmes of accommodation facilities dedicated to homeless migrants depending on their administrative situation, see Cimade, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> This has now lasted for more than 7 years: see French Ombudsman decision on police harassment in migrants' camps near Calais, no MDS-2011-113, 13/11/2012, accessible at [http://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/jur\\_ddd\\_2012-11-13\\_mds\\_2011-113.pdf](http://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/jur_ddd_2012-11-13_mds_2011-113.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> 46000 undocumented migrants were stopped by French police while trying to enter France from Italy in 2017 (French Borders Police website, 12/2017).

Ombudsman, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2018). As a result, smaller camps have been constituted in northern France, with weekly dismantlement operations by the police becoming common. In this context, housing rights of undocumented migrants have been mostly protected by the judge— if at all – negatively, through the protection against illegal evictions until a viable solution is offered.<sup>31</sup> In 2016, the Ombudsman denounced numerous human rights violations relating to homeless migrants' camps (French Ombudsman, 2016a) and recalled the necessity for camps' dismantlement to be conditioned to the simultaneous implementation of viable solutions that would not violate fundamental rights. Interestingly, it indicated that positive law allows for the differential treatment of all persons falling into the category of "foreigner" in the legal domain of entry, residence and deportation of aliens. It also recalls that nevertheless, this fact does not give a right to the state to discriminate against foreigners in the implementation of fundamental rights. On the contrary, any differential treatment in the implementation of rights relating to one's everyday life, such as social protection, children's rights, health, or housing, is prohibited. Hence, the Ombudsman noted that, not only illegal state practices, but also some legal provisions themselves, violate people's fundamental rights by differentiating between situations through criteria that impose *de facto* limits to foreigners' access to such rights. *Differentiation* is allowed, but not *discrimination* in the implementation of migrants' fundamental rights.

### **ECHR condemnations**

This context of numerous fundamental rights violations has given rise to several claims before international organs in relation to migrants' housing rights,<sup>32</sup> including the European Court of Human Rights. The Court has recently condemned France for unaccompanied foreign minors' housing rights violations under Article 3 ECHR. However, instead of protecting the right to a shelter as a minimum, universal human right, these decisions reinforce the conception that a vulnerability threshold has to be reached in order to grant an enforceable right to accommodation.<sup>33</sup> In May 2018, the Court ruled on a case concerning a family composed of a mother and her three young children, living on the streets while waiting for the appointment that was necessary to lodge their asylum claim. Given that two of the three children attend kindergarten and that NGOs were otherwise providing help, and that they had been offered one night accommodation by a dwelling centre, the family was not considered

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<sup>31</sup> Lyon Administrative Tribunal, no 1806928, 4/10/2018 (commented online by French housing lawyers group Jurislogement <http://www.jurislogement.org/default-durgence-a-expulser-une-personne-deboutee-de-sa-demande-dasile/>).

<sup>32</sup> For a decision of the European Committee of Social Rights directly relating to migrants' rights to protection against evictions, see complaint no 67/2011, *Médecins du Monde v France*, 11/9/2012.

<sup>33</sup> The status of asylum-seeker seemed to be associated with sufficient vulnerability for the threshold of Article 3 since ECtHR, *MSS v Belgium and Greece*, no 30696/09 (ECtHR, 21/1/2011).

in a situation of sufficient material deprivation to fall under the scope of Article 3 ECHR.<sup>34</sup> Months later, the Court condemns France under the same provision, for failing to provide child care to an eleven-year-old unaccompanied foreign minor who had asked for care and had been living in camps near Calais for months, “in an environment totally unsuitable to his child condition, be it in terms of security, housing, hygiene or access to food and medical care, and in an unacceptable, precarious situation.” Local care services failed to implement a ruling by French children’s judge ordering that the child be placed in care. These circumstances are considered by the Court as a violation of State obligations reaching the threshold of Article 3.<sup>35</sup>

Through the light that such cases cast on dramatic situations, they contribute to show how frequent mistreatments of migrants undermine the universality of the fundamental right to accommodation as a minimum standard. In addition, the judicial notion of vulnerability is used by French and ECtHR judges as a threshold in order to assess whether or not to guarantee the right to accommodation to a claimant, while the very fact of living on streets and asking for help can as such be considered a violation of the principle of human dignity that should not require any further proof of a person’s vulnerability. By abstaining to apply a different threshold or to open the vulnerability threshold, in order to protect the right to accommodation under Article 3 more adequately, French jurisdictions and the ECtHR reject the idea of a universal human right to shelter.

## **In EU law: (II) Legitimate Discrimination on the Ground of Race and Ethnic Origin?**

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The right to accommodation has been partially denied, practically and judicially, for foreign migrants as a category of persons. As a result, people who have often faced other human rights violations in their native country and on the road into exile remain homeless, that is, unable to claim for any of their rights without the help of human rights activists on the ground.<sup>36</sup> Since this phenomenon concerns migrant people who fall under the category of Third Country Nationals under European Union law, the following developments aim to bridge the gap between EU law and ECHR law in this regard, and to examine migrants’ housing rights violations in France in relation to the consistency of EU equality law – as a human rights protection tool.

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<sup>34</sup> *N.T.P. v France*, no 68862/13 (ECtHR, 24/5/2018).

<sup>35</sup> *Khan v France*, no 12267/16 (ECtHR, 28/2/2019).

<sup>36</sup> This article only explores the situation on the French metropolitan territory, although French territories overseas are also much concerned, each at a different scope depending on its own migrant flows and reception conditions.

Despite its primarily economic purposes, the EU has progressively protected fundamental rights, and this movement has partially extended to housing rights,<sup>37</sup> notably through articles 7<sup>38</sup> and 34 of the EU Charter (Kenna, 2013 on the latter provision), EU asylum law,<sup>39</sup> and equality law on the basis of Article 19 TFEU and Article 21(1) EU Charter on Fundamental Right, the material scope of Directives on gender and race discrimination extending to housing assistance and services.

### ***Third Country Nationals' equal rights to housing?***

The so-called 'Race Directive'<sup>40</sup> aims at "putting into effect in the Member States the principle of equal treatment" (Article 1). It has a broad personal and material scope, applying to all persons, private and public, in employment, but also education, social protection, and access to goods and services – the latter category including housing. In the absence of an explicit EU competence relating to housing, it is covered by EU equality provisions either as a good, or as an element of social policy.

In terms of conceptual tools, Article 2 states that '(b) indirect discrimination shall be taken to occur where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage compared with other persons', 'unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary'. On the contrary, direct discrimination cannot be justified:<sup>41</sup> '(a) direct discrimination shall be taken to occur where one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on grounds of racial or ethnic origin'. This means that the EU conception of discrimination goes beyond blindness to perceived race or ethnic origin, and recognises the possibility of apparently neutral provisions or practices to bear a structural or systematic negative impact on discriminated categories of persons.

<sup>37</sup> See the first reference to the inviolability of the home by the European Court of Justice in joined cases C-46/87 and C-227/88, *Hoechst AG*, ECLI: EU: C: 1989: 337.

<sup>38</sup> Explanatory notes to the Charter (document 2007/C 303/02) are clear that Art 7 is similarly worded than Art 8 ECHR and hence, is to be interpreted in relation to the latter.

<sup>39</sup> Art 2, 8, 13(2), Dir 2003/9/EC initially stated that Member States shall provide asylum seekers with minimum reception conditions covering "fundamental needs", including housing in nature or in kind, even in cases of temporary and exceptional saturation of existing services; Art 2, 18, 22 Dir 2013/33/EU still refer to housing and accommodation conditions of asylum seekers. See European Court of Justice, cases C-179/11 *Cimade & Gistidu*, ECLI: EU: C: 2012: 594 §56, and C-79/13 *Saciri*, ECLI: EU: C: 2014: 103 §35; for a critical perspective on the EU asylum system, see e.g. Fekete, 2016 and Carr, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Council Directive 43/2000/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin [2000] OJ L180/22.

<sup>41</sup> Positive action and discrimination are two related but distinct concepts, positive action being regulated by Indent 17 and Art 5 of the Directive.

The Race Directive explicitly bases on international human rights protection, hence its broad personal scope. Indent 3 expressly recalls that 'The right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination for all persons constitutes a universal right recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination and the United Nations Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, to which all Member States are signatories.' The idea of distinct human races is clearly rejected, with explicit references to the universality of fundamental rights and to the objective of combatting 'racism' and 'xenophobia', in indents 5, 6, 7, 10, and 11. Article 3(1) of the Directive underlines its unlimited personal scope: 'this Directive shall apply to all persons, as regards both the public and private sectors, including public bodies'.

But the material scope of the Directive is limited: not only does it apply only 'Within the limits of the powers conferred upon the Community'. Article 3(2) of the Directive also excludes nationality from the notion of discrimination on the ground of race and ethnic origin. Nationality discrimination is prohibited under Article 18 TFEU, but Member states can openly discriminate on the ground of nationality for the purpose of immigration regulation and border control. However, from the perspective of the objective to combat racism, the exclusion of nationality from the material scope of the human rights-based prohibition of discriminations on the ground of race and ethnic origin reveals a problematic contradiction. The same contradiction is clear from Indent 13 of the Directive, confusingly stating that the 'prohibition of discrimination should also apply to nationals of third countries, but does not cover differences of treatment based on nationality and is without prejudice to provisions governing the entry and residence of third-country nationals and their access to employment and to occupation.' Nationality discrimination is allowed for Third Country Nationals (TCNs), as opposed to EU citizens (Benedi Lahuerta, 2009, 2016, 2018).

The category of TCNs is hence likely to be legally impacted by discriminatory practices relating to immigration regulation, despite the Equality Directive's apparently unlimited personal scope. State nationals within one country can come from very different ethnic backgrounds, but presumably, Third Country Nationals are likely to be perceived as coming from a distinct ethnic background. However, the European Court of Justice has not chosen to confront the debate on the articulation



of race and nationality in the effective implementation of the equality principle.<sup>42</sup> This might be one of the reasons why this discrimination ground remains considered as materially under the competence of the ECtHR and only 12 preliminary ruling procedures (Article 267 TFEU) have been handled by the European Court of Justice under the Race Directive so far. As regards French violations of Third Country Nationals' housing rights, while its provisions guarantee equal access to housing, EU law, despite its proclaimed support of human rights, can almost only play a role in the limited area of the Directive 2013/33/EU on the reception conditions of asylum-seekers.<sup>43</sup> This differentiation between race and nationality in EU equality law hence poses a threat to its consistency. The adoption of a legal instrument whose material scope contradicts its very own objectives and, therefore, its proclaimed human rights basis, raises major questions in terms of credibility of the EU project, on the one hand, and of human rights regional protection tools, on the other hand. It is even more problematic with regard to effective human rights implementation following a refugee crisis (Greenhill, 2016; Procaccini, 2009). Because of the exclusion of nationality from the scope of EU equality law, it is made lawful for a Member State to make undocumented Third Country Nationals homeless, and EU provisions do not make it possible to question this phenomenon as a possible case of systemic racism.

### ***Migrants' housing rights violations as a case of discrimination***

Third Country Nationals, as a category, have seen a decrease of effectiveness of the minimum declination of their right to housing, the right to a shelter. In France, they are directly impacted by national law and practices that make them lose their right to emergency accommodation otherwise guaranteed as a universal right. Through the lens of discrimination law analysis, the first question raised by this situation is whether they can be identified as a category of illegitimately discriminated persons, in relation to housing rights violations.

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<sup>42</sup> In case C-54/07 *Firma Feryn*, ECLI: EU: C: 2008: 397, the ECJ established that a comparator is not required to denounce a discrimination, where public statements on "migrants", hence both implicitly referring to nationality and to race, dissuade application from ethnic minorities, preventing comparison with other groups. Concerning the access to housing and accommodation, this means that a public or private housing provider cannot openly discriminate on the ground a person's perceived status of "immigrant". But the case is solved without the Court grasping this opportunity to articulate race and nationality as discrimination grounds. See also case C-668/15 *Ismar Huskic*, EU: C: 2017: 278, excluding differential treatment on the ground of the country of birth from the notion of race.

<sup>43</sup> For a notable example of an ECJ ruling in relation to the right to accommodation, see *Haqbin v FEDASIL* (C-233/18) ECLI: EU: C: 2019: 956, 19 November 2019.

As seen above, when criticising violations of foreigners' fundamental rights in his 2016 report, the French Ombudsman interestingly distinguishes between two areas of relevant legal provisions and practices. On the one hand, the differential treatment of foreigners is authorised by immigration law and policy. Materially, this differential treatment openly targeting Third Country Nationals, with dramatic to deadly consequences, would amount to direct discrimination. But since the category of "foreigner" is based on nationality, discriminatory treatment is allowed under French law. On the other hand, in an attempt to reconcile human rights protection with immigration policy derogations, the French Ombudsman points out that the legal possibility to treat a category of people differently, namely foreigners, in regard of immigration law, does not extend to the implementation of their fundamental rights. Any "differential treatment in the implementation of all rights relating to foreigners' everyday life" is prohibited: social protection, children's rights, health, or housing (French Ombudsman, 2016a). Not only illegal state practices in France violate this prohibition by rejecting or preventing adult and minor homeless migrants' claims for accommodation (among other essential needs, for example access to water and food, waste management, protection against frequent camps evictions by the police, access to medical care, access to school for minors, etc.), but also, some legal provisions differentiate between situations though criteria that impose limits to Third Country Nationals' access to their fundamental rights. These statements mark an attempt to limit the exclusion of legal areas from the scope of the equality principle. In short, as suggested by the French Ombudsman's 2016 report as well as numerous human rights activist organisations, illegal differential treatment on the basis of nationality, that is, direct discrimination in the implementation of their basic human rights, results from French current immigration law provisions, policy and practices. But the current state of EU equality law does not allow for the effective protection of Third Country Nationals from these discriminations.

### **Critical Race Legal Studies – Making Sense of the Principle of Equality in the EU**

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The European system of human rights protection can be seen as providing much better standards than the international human rights system, the difficulties in the protection of their effectiveness coming mainly from the division of human rights jurisprudence between the ECHR and the EU courts (Tomuschat, 2016, Thym, 2016). However, in the current context of stagnation of EU race equality law, the European level seems incapable of providing an effective human rights framework relating to the violation of migrants' right to a shelter. The current context of rising far right resistance to non-discrimination and international human rights more generally requires examining whether an analysis of EU

equality provisions in light of critical race studies could bring an added value, in the search for the solutions and approaches that would provide a more consistent and effective EU equality framework.

### ***Human rights governance between the EU and the national level***

Alarms have been sounded and solutions conceptualised in order to tackle the lack of effectiveness of the principle of equality as regards Third Country National. The problem denounced above is one of consistency. However, it can also be partially addressed in terms of institutional powers and governance. EU equality law has given rise to national equality bodies in all EU Member States, facing various challenges in their respective state. As shown above, the French Ombudsman has been a pivotal actor in the institutional monitoring of state violations of foreigners' human rights, in connection with the principle of equality. In the emerging global governance system, reinforcing them as a powerful European network of local human rights authorities would contribute to improve the protection of the principle of equality, without the EU directly interfering in Member States legal powers (Kádár, 2018). This would imply strong, harmonised human rights standards of scrutiny and clear, concrete missions in relation to the EU Social Pillar (Benedi Lahuerta and Zbyszewska, 2018), as well as a coherent articulation of ECHR and EU tools of human rights protection.

The good administration principle, enshrined in Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, could also contribute to the improvement of the effectiveness of the principle of equality. To clarify the content of this still undefined principle in relation to French asylum and immigration law, as an effective guarantee of equal access to state services for all persons, would clearly contribute to tackle difficulties faced by homeless migrants in their human rights claims, including in their attempt to access emergency accommodation (Bousta, 2017). This could also be part of the reinforcement of the missions of EU equality bodies.

Another way to better tackle difficulties resulting from the inconsistent EU race equality framework would be to question mainstream research methods. Most denunciations of the defective implementation of the equality principle by academia seem to fail to address the issue in terms of EU accountability to its people, for not providing the complete and effective human rights framework that it otherwise pretends to promote. This is where critical race studies can prove of unequalled value in order to properly identify the limits of the current race equality framework in relation to housing rights.

### ***The added value of critical race studies***

While the very possibility of any social change to occur through the European Union's equality law framework is being increasingly questioned (Xenidis, 2019), critical race legal studies prove necessary to offer solid foundations to the effective implementation of the principle of equality.

### **Towards a more impact-oriented analysis**

To question the effectiveness of the Race Directive amounts to raise the question of the most adequate institutional level to fight against race discrimination. Critical race theory promotes a race-conscious approach to the law, rooted in the opposition to 'at least three entrenched, mainstream beliefs about racial injustice': that blindness to race will eliminate racism, that racism is not a matter of system but of individual behaviours, and that racism can be fought against distinctly from other forms of injustice (between social classes, or other, often intersectional discrimination grounds – Valdes *et al.*, 2002, pp.1-2). These three points provide a flexible but clearly articulated theoretical framework, making it possible to analyse what is observed on the ground as systemic failures, rather than a succession of individual dysfunctions. Through critical legal studies (Ward, 1996), and more specifically critical race legal studies (Möschel, 2007, 2014, 2016, 2018), the question of how exclusion and inclusion within the EU is intimately bound up with nationality and citizenship is gaining increasing attention. By focusing on the impact of unequal human rights implementation on discriminated populations, critical race theory allows researchers and activists to identify and tackle the gaps in the implementation of the principle of equality in relation to racism in Europe in terms of effectiveness. In addition, by enabling scholars to consider racist phenomena themselves as an evolving phenomenon (Gomez, 2012), critical race studies also facilitate the conceptualisation of legal anti-discrimination tools as evolving processes, without their changing nature in EU law necessarily appearing as a failure. This perspective is necessary in the moving context of European integration and its anti-discrimination law framework.

### **Accountability of EU institutions**

The Race Directive authorises positive action instead of referring to race-blindness as a solution against discrimination. The notion of indirect discrimination defined in the Directive also makes it possible to address systemic dimensions of race discrimination (Mercat-Bruns, 2018). However, without denying the merits of the advanced human rights system built at European level, a closer look at homeless Third Country Nationals' dire living conditions on the ground, demonstrates more than one failure in the equal implementation of their basic human rights. Not only can these failures be denounced politically, as a dissuasive migration policy strategy by the state, that contradicts the very notion of human rights. But in addition, through the distinction between race and nationality and the concept of

EU citizenship, EU equality law established a 'hierarchy of persons', clearly providing for more solid equality guarantees for EU citizens than for Third Country Nationals (Lahuerta, 2009).

As shown in this paper in relation to the right to accommodation, European immigration law and policy at national and EU level now has a very concrete impact on disadvantaged Third Country Nationals: human rights violations resulting in squalid living conditions for many, followed by death for some.<sup>44</sup> In light of critical race studies, this result can be considered in terms of structural racism, as partially flowing from the EU equality framework and its inherent blindness to the inconsistency of prohibiting race discrimination, while distinguishing between nationality and race. This is why this approach is needed: in order to empower the people of the EU with appropriate tools of analysis of the dramatic phenomena they are currently witnessing, in terms of accountability of EU institutions for providing a defective human rights framework. Hence, this paper, coming from a law practitioner, calls public policy and law researchers to consider the flaws described, and to further explore how this critical legal perspective can lead towards better housing policies and the implementation of the right to housing for *all* human beings.

## Conclusion

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Exploring the links between the violation of migrants' right to accommodation in France and the EU equality framework has cast light on the necessity to enlarge the spectrum of methodological tools of analysis that European legal scholars usually adopt, for a more complete, critical reading of the implementation of anti-discrimination law in Europe in relation to its concrete consequences in people's lives. Given the threat that the rising far right in Europe poses to the universality of human rights, contemporary European human rights law research cannot dispense with a careful examination of possible solutions to reach a credible and solid equality law framework. In this context, critical race theory appears to offer the necessary tools to identify the impact of the current legal system's inconsistency. Although a few scholars have started to embrace this perspective, the EU's responsibility for promoting an inconsistent legal system, in a context of rising opposition to the human rights framework itself, has to be further conceptualised. Since the implementation of the EU race equality directive was one of the major elements deemed to characterise a more 'social Europe' on the basis of a human rights

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<sup>44</sup> Suicides of minor and adult migrants are regularly reported in France; at the time of writing the first version of this paper, the last one was the recent self-hanging of a young Afghan person, one month after he joined a homeless migrant camp: N. Wilcke, 'Strasbourg: le suicide d'un jeune Afghan relance le débat sur l'accueil des migrants' ('Strasbourg: young Afghan's suicide triggers the debate on the reception of migrants'), (27/5/2019) *20 Minutes*.

rationale, critical race studies can be of invaluable help to explore the question of the accountability of European institutions for contributing to build a possibly inconsistent legal environment.

These elements are key to the near future of EU law, given the tight link between international migration flows, the heavy difficulties for a homeless person to access any of her rights, and the necessary universality inherent to fundamental rights and freedoms.

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# How is Social Capital Conceptualised in the Context of Homelessness? A Conceptual Review using a Systematic Search<sup>1</sup>

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➤ **Abstract** *Homelessness – comprising a spectrum of precarious living situations – is an increasing trajectory worldwide. Little attention has been given to the social relationships of people affected by homelessness. However, adopting a relational lens may provide greater understanding of people’s experiences, the relationships they form and ways to redress the impact of homelessness. Social capital – the existence of, access to and resources afforded by relationships – provides a useful perspective to interrogate this further. The literature on social capital and homelessness remains disparate, with little consensus regarding how social capital is understood in this context and limited robust demonstration of its utility. This review uses a systematic search to identify how social capital has been conceptualised in homelessness research, and synthesises these conceptualisations into a framework using narrative synthesis. Nineteen texts (17 peer-reviewed articles and two doctoral theses) were included. The proposed framework suggests three dimensions: social relationships, services and*

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*support. Conceptualising social capital as support by focusing on the resources afforded by relationships provides greatest insight into people's experiences and may guide improvement of services. Future research should interrogate these various sources of support and identify if they translate into meaningful help – such as housing or exiting homelessness.*

➤ **Keywords** *\_homelessness, social capital, social relationships, conceptual review, systematic search*

## Introduction

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Homelessness – where individuals contend with a range of precarious living arrangements – is a profound and worsening problem, with rates increasing across the globe, including within the EU, Australia and many nations in the UN defined 'developing world' (Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA, 2018; Speak, 2019; Parsell, 2020). Within the European Union, there are an estimated 410 000 people experiencing homelessness (roofless and houseless) on any given night (Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA, 2015). Homelessness has complex and multifaceted roots which include poverty, inequality, and housing policy (such as the availability of stable and affordable housing and secure tenancy agreements) (Bramley *et al.*, 2015; Downie *et al.*, 2018; Clarke *et al.*, 2020; Pleace, 2019). Stakeholders in national and local governments, housing and justice systems, and charities are making efforts to address homelessness, with varying degrees of success. This includes the introduction of Housing First (Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA, 2018), the Homelessness Reduction Act from local authorities in England (UK Parliament, 2017), legal approaches such as removing priority needs tests and facilitating greater tenancy security (Pleace, 2019), and welfare reform (Downie *et al.*, 2018).

Little attention has been given to the nature and role of relationships in the context of homelessness. However, adopting a relational lens may be helpful in at least five ways. First, it may help to understand pathways into homelessness (Barker, 2012). Historically, homelessness has been viewed by some as the weaning of and detachment from social institutions and informal social networks (Bogue, 1963; Spradley, 1970; Bahr, 1973; Rossi *et al.*, 1986). Without having access to relationships when faced with unforeseen or negative circumstances, individuals may find themselves in a precarious situation without the necessary resources and/or

support available (Wiseman, 1970). In fact, social networks, may serve as a buffer against the acute end of homelessness, for example, through providing temporary housing solutions (Tănăsescu and Smart, 2010).

Second, a relational lens may provide greater understanding of the benefits derived from certain bonds. For example, through exploring the relationships of street children and subcultures in Moscow, it is possible to identify what is afforded by these relationships; namely access to social mobility and the labour market (Stephenson, 2001). Additionally, homeless mothers often seek out social relationships in the hope of acquiring material resources that are otherwise unavailable, for example food vouchers and diapers (Juando-Prats, 2017). Disentangling the support embedded in relationships may help to provide a greater understanding of why certain relationships are formed and maintained. This point speaks to the importance of not simplifying and polarising the interpersonal relationships of people affected by homelessness. Yet, at the same time, it remains important not to romanticise and idealise exploitative relationships and precarious situations.

Third, adopting a relational lens may help to promote a more strength-based narrative around homelessness. There remain assumptions both across research and practice, that people affected by homelessness are socially isolated with low social functioning (Solarz and Bogat, 1990; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2000; Duchesne and Rothwell, 2016). More widely, there continue to be ongoing stigmatising (Groundswell, 2020) and problematic narratives around homelessness (Parsell and Watts, 2017). In focusing on the networks and support systems available to individuals affected by homelessness, such assumptions can be challenged. In turn this may also highlight the important role of individuals and communities, whom perform a vast proportion of informal care and emotional labour; simultaneously throwing into question the role and effectiveness of the state or third sector organisations. Additionally, focusing attention on social relationships is vital and an important aspect of all human existence, yet often overlooked during the process of othering and dehumanising marginalised groups (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Argyle, 2001; Stevenson and Neale, 2012).

Fourth, adopting a relational lens may also help to improve service provisions. There is evidence that even within formal services, it is often the interpersonal relationships between clients and staff that serve as successful sources of support (Neale and Stevenson, 2014; Stevenson, 2014). Thus, shifting attention to the importance of stable and sound relationships, on which trust and support can be built, may improve the efficacy of services. Social relationships can also have an influence on engagement with services. For homeless youth, receiving instrumental resources (such as money, food or a place to stay) from street peers was associated with decreased likelihood of engaging in employment services, yet receiving emotional

resources from street peers (having someone to count on) increased the likelihood of engaging in employment services (Barman-Adhikari and Rice, 2014). As such, focusing on interpersonal relationships may serve as a useful framework when thinking about how to provide effective and tailored services and capturing the nuances of doing so – recognising the differential effect of certain forms of support.

Fifth, using a relational lens may help to guide and improve interventions to end homelessness. For example, insight can be gained through focusing on network diversity, when disentangling how certain relationships may leverage an individual or hinder their social mobility (Burt, 1987; Briggs, 1998). For instance, among low-income mothers, having heterogeneous networks that provide advice and encouragement to get ahead, create opportunities for social mobility; through accessing more diverse resources and information that may otherwise not be available to them. Whereas having homogenous networks – such as individuals of the same socioeconomic status – can be limiting, and reproduce social inequalities (Menjívar, 2000; Domínguez and Watkins, 2003). Another example of guiding and improving interventions, applies to re-housing programmes. For single homeless people who are rehoused, having family contacts and receiving support from relatives and friends are positively associated with housing satisfaction and feeling settled (Warnes *et al.*, 2013). Being mindful of the importance of social relationships and the benefits they may offer appears to be a useful angle when thinking about interventions to end homelessness.

This focus on social relationships should not and does not diminish the aforementioned structural and political issues that cause, perpetuate and sustain homelessness. However, there is arguably scope to further explore the social worlds of those affected by homelessness. One route into exploring social relationships and resources is through social capital. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p.119) social capital is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” Social capital has attracted interest across disciplines including sociology (Portes, 1998), epidemiology (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004; Kirkbride *et al.*, 2008), global development (Krishna and Shrader, 2002) and public health (Muntaner *et al.*, 2001; Harpham *et al.*, 2002; De Silva *et al.*, 2005). It appears to be an insightful lens into understanding social interactions, placing emphasis on what is afforded by relationships from different individuals and its associated health outcomes.

Increasingly, efforts have been made to apply social capital to the context of homelessness (Barman-Adhikari and Rice, 2014; Neale and Stevenson, 2014; Neale and Stevenson, 2015). However, it should be noted that this body of literature is varied and disparate. As with many concepts (Ayed *et al.*, 2019) there is little consensus

regarding what exactly is being referred to when referencing social capital. This creates chasms in the literature, with little space for accumulation of knowledge, as social capital is being understood in vastly different ways. Further, questions remain as to whether social capital as a concept can be applied to homelessness. This is because most social capital literature is grounded in the seminal works of a few authors, which were rooted in very different historical and social contexts (Muntaner *et al.*, 2001). A similar concern lies with existing measures of social capital which were developed in different contexts to that of homelessness (Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002; De Silva *et al.*, 2007). The existing literature overwhelmingly explores youth experiences of homelessness, with a dearth of information pertaining to adults. Last, much of the existing literature lacks critique of the limitations in adopting social capital as a lens to explore experiences of homelessness. Without clarity about what social capital means, how it may be assessed, and to whom it may be applied, it becomes difficult to see how this concept can contribute to the knowledge base and help us to understand the experiences of people affected by homelessness.

To address these concerns, this review has three aims. First, to identify how social capital has been conceptualised in adult homeless research. Second, to synthesise these various conceptualisations of social capital and provide a framework. Third, to discuss and critique the generated framework.

## Methods

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A systematic search was used in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Liberati *et al.*, 2009). The review was registered on PROSPERO: CRD42019126152.

### *Eligibility criteria*

Texts were deemed eligible if they met the following criteria:

- a) Written in English.
- b) Studies must include primary data.
- c) Peer-reviewed – extending to doctoral theses, as they are reviewed by expert examiners.
- d) The sample are 18 years old or above – this is because the majority of nations have 18 as the age of majority, many services (e.g. accommodation) have age restrictions, and the social capital of adults is likely different from that of children/youth.

- e) Refers to social capital either in the title and/or the abstract – when finalising the search strategy, a preliminary scoping search ( $n=50$ ) revealed that the vast majority of studies exploring social capital in the full text, will make reference to ‘social capital’ in the title and/or abstract.
- f) Satisfy the Framework of Global Homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2015)<sup>2</sup>.

Texts were excluded as per the following guidelines:

- Blogs, opinions pieces and social media posts
- Systematic reviews due to lack of primary data – reference lists for reviews were screened for potentially eligible texts.
- Forms of homelessness not included in the Framework of Global Homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2015).

## ***Procedure***

### **Literature search**

Searches were conducted in February 2019 using the NICE Eyes on Evidence database covering: AMED (1998 to present) BNI (1992 to present), CINAHL (1981 to present), Embase (1974 to present), Medline (1946 to present), and PsychINFO (1806 to present). SCOPUS was also searched, along with TRIP, a grey literature database. Titles, abstracts and subject headings were searched using the following strategy<sup>3</sup>:

“social capital” AND “homeless\*” OR “roofless\*” OR “rough sleep\*” OR “street\*”  
 “pavement dwell\*” OR “shelter\*” OR “hostel\*” OR “temporary accomm\*” “refuge\*”  
 “women\* refuge\*”

MeSH terms were used where permitted, these non-exhaustively included “social environment” “homeless persons” and “emergency shelter”. The search strategy was updated February 2020.<sup>4</sup>

National and international governmental and charity websites were also searched. These included: St Mungo’s, Crisis, Shelter, Centrepoint, Homeless Link, Centre for Homelessness Impact, Healthy London Partnership, Department of Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care, Homeless Action Scotland, ScotPHN, FEANTSA, European Observatory on Homelessness, Mental Health Commission of Canada, and the Institute of Global Homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> This is a relatively narrow definition of homelessness, only capturing those who are literally homeless or in designated shelters for those experiencing homelessness. In-depth justification of the Framework of Global Homelessness can be found in the original text as cited.

<sup>3</sup> The full search strategy is provided in the supplementary material.

<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 reflects the updated search strategy.



Hand searches were conducted on the following journals: European Journal of Homelessness and the Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness.

References were exported to Mendeley Desktop (V1.19.4) and duplicates were removed. All titles and abstracts were screened by the first author (NA), with 25% screened by a co-author (SA). There was 99.11% agreement and Cohen's  $k = 0.78$  for titles/abstracts. Disagreements were discussed in detail between NA and SA, and where necessary with the wider review team. Following this, full-texts were examined by NA, with 20% reviewed by SA. There was 87.5% agreement and Cohen's  $\kappa = 0.75$  for full-texts.

For texts that were not accessible, authors were contacted to request the relevant text, and the British Library catalogue was searched.

### **Modification of eligibility criteria**

Whilst the eligibility criteria were based upon scoping searches, a proportion of texts during the systematic search threw into question the rigidity of the eligibility criteria. For example, one text had only three participants under the age of 18 (Oliver and Cheff, 2014). Additionally, due to the frequent omission of sociodemographic information and homelessness status, and the lack of responses from authors for requested information, a significant proportion of studies were excluded due to insufficient information. It was increasingly felt by the research team that potentially insightful information was being excluded partly due to the frequent omission of data but also the rigidity of the eligibility criteria. Given the conceptual nature of this review, it was felt that relaxing the criteria would not have a marked impact on the results.

After discussion with the research team, we decided to address these limitations pragmatically by relaxing two components of the eligibility criteria. The age criterion was changed so that: 50% or more of the sample are over 18 OR the average age of the sample was 18 or above. The criterion regarding homelessness was changed so that: 50% or more of the sample meet the specific typology of homelessness outlined in the eligibility criteria. This led to the number of included texts increasing from ( $n=15$ ), to ( $n=19$ ) (McCarthy *et al.*, 2002; Miller, 2011; Oliver and Cheff, 2014; Shantz, 2014).

### **Data extraction**

Data was extracted from included studies into Microsoft Excel pertaining to the following information: author (s) name, author(s) contact details, title, year of publication, publication type (e.g. book chapter, journal article, thesis etc.), country of study, funding source, conflict of interest, aims/objectives, study design, sampling technique, sample size, sample age, gender, ethnicity, homeless status (as described by study), analysis, explicitly reported definition(s) of social capital, reference to other social capital research, author(s) conceptualisation of social capital adopted for the

study, measure(s) of social capital, item details of measure, scores of social capital if a measure, qualitative excerpts of social capital, associated outcome variables, summary of findings, strengths and weaknesses, conclusions.

### **Data analysis**

Narrative synthesis was used to identify how social capital is conceptualised across adult homelessness research. Grounded upon the guidelines developed by Popay *et al.* (2006), the narrative synthesis comprised two iterative stages: developing a preliminary synthesis and exploring relationships in the data.

#### **Developing a preliminary synthesis**

With particular focus on the data extracted pertaining to social capital, information was repeatedly read to familiarise ourselves with the data. Tabulations were made in Microsoft Excel regarding recurring conceptualisations of social capital in the included texts. This was done systematically, exploring every text independently; tabulating as exhaustively as possible. Texts were grouped and clustered accordingly. Notes were also made regarding whether the study used a qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach to exploring social capital in the primary data. These preliminary themes and groupings were discussed with the review team.

#### **Exploring relationships in the data**

Themes were revisited and commonalities were identified across texts. This helped to reduce the volume of themes and identify the more common and salient themes. The relationships and overlaps between these key themes were explored both across texts and within texts. Attention was given to the heterogeneity of included texts, identifying the context in which social capital was being conceptualised.

Ideas webbing was undertaken (Clinkenbeard, 1991) to better comprehend the connections between included texts and their conceptualisations of social capital. The ideas webbing was used closely in the development of the proposed framework.

#### **Finalising the framework**

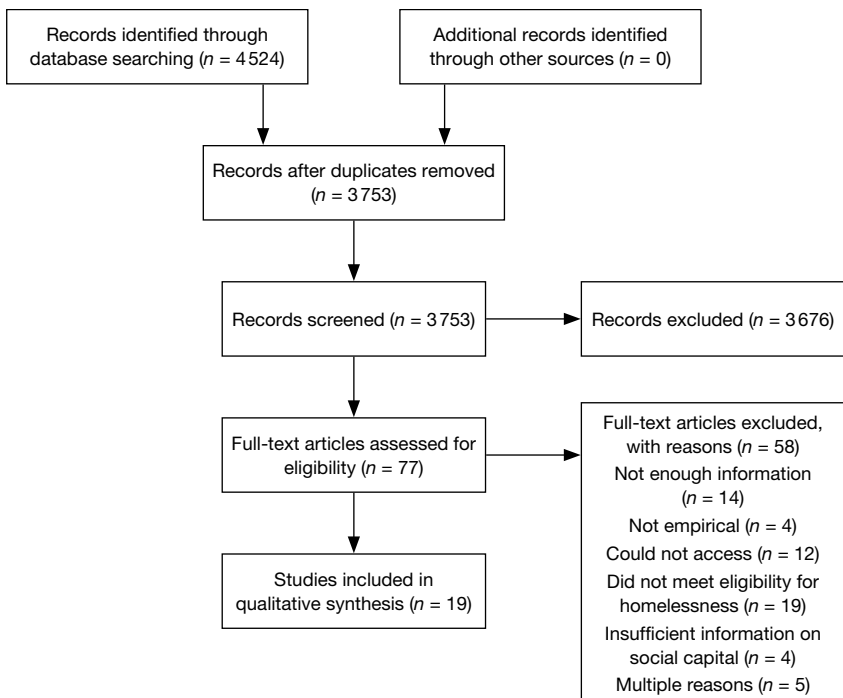
Analysis was inductive, involving frequent referencing back to the original texts and extracted data. This iterative process allowed a framework to be developed that linked closely with information in the original texts. The proposed framework was then discussed in depth with the entire review team, alongside a presentation to the larger multidisciplinary research team. Any feedback was incorporated iteratively into the framework.

## Results

### Screening and selection

The search yielded 4524 texts. This was reduced to 3753 when duplicates were removed. No additional texts were identified using hand searches. Of the 3753 texts identified, 3676 were removed after titles and abstracts were examined. The remaining 77 full-texts were then read and assessed for eligibility. It should be noted that texts frequently omitted reporting sample characteristics. Several texts did not report average or range of age ( $n=9$ ). Where possible, means were calculated based on the information provided. Several texts provided insufficient detail about the type of homelessness experienced by participants ( $n=10$ ). Authors were emailed to obtain the missing information. However, there remain a high number of texts ( $n=19$ ) excluded due to insufficient information or for multiple reasons (of which insufficient information may be a constituting factor). A total of 19 texts were included after having met the eligibility criteria for inclusion.

**Figure 1: PRISMA diagram**



***Study characteristics***

All included texts (Table 1) were journal articles, apart from two doctoral theses (15; 17). In referencing social capital, included texts tended to take one of two approaches: texts attempted to measure/quantify social capital (2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 16) or adopted social capital as a lens to frame and interpret data (1; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 17; 18; 19).

Table 1: Characteristics of included texts.

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
1	Curran et al.	2016	England	Intervention comprising a 12 week football programme adopting ethnographic and observational methods	n = 34	18-45	N/A	Male = 100%	N/A	"The majority of participants were... living in homeless shelters..."
2	Fitzpatrick et al.	2007	U.S	Census and interview (questionnaire format)	n = 161	20-80	N/A	Female = 36% Male = 64%	"Non-white" = 63.4%	"... street and sheltered homeless people" "... residents of, and visitors to, the 35 shelters and soup kitchens... as well as persons without residence sleeping in public places..."
3	Fitzpatrick et al.	2015	U.S	Interview (questionnaire format)	n = 264 (Birmingham, n = 161 and Northwest Arkansas, n = 103)	20-80	N/A	N/A	N/A	"Visible homeless" - those who are counted in the point-in-time census
4	Irwin et al.	2008	U.S	In-depth interviews	n = 155	"above the age of 19"	41.30 (SD= 10.17)	Female = 34% Male = 66%	African American = 67.6% White = 32.4%	Street homeless and shelter users

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
5	Johnstone et al.	2016	Australia	Interviews and questionnaires (two data collection time points)	Time 1, n = 119 Time 2, n = 76	19-59 (time 1)	35.39 (SD = 9.34) (time 1)	Female = 53% Male = 47% (time 1)	N/A	"Participants were individuals residing in one of six temporary or transitional homelessness accommodation services run by The Salvation Army in Australia."
6	Marr	2012	U.S and Japan	Secondary data and in-depth comparative case studies	n = 34 (Los Angeles, n = 17 and Tokyo, n = 17)	All participants were over 18 years old. 24% of Los Angeles sample ≤ 51 and 59% in Tokyo ≤ 50	N/A	Female = 47%, male = 53% (Los Angeles) Male = 100% (Tokyo)	Black = 53%, White = 12%, White, Latino = 18%, Asian = 18% (Los Angeles) Japanese = 88%, Korean = 12% (Tokyo)	All participants were in transitional housing programme for those experiencing homelessness. "To enter transitional housing, these single individuals must have lost their housing and sought relief from a public or nonprofit relief agency."
7	McCarthy et al.	2002	Canada	Questionnaire and interview (three data collection waves)	n = 369	≤ 16 - 24	19.88 (SD = 2.44)	Ratio female 1 : male 3	N/A	Insecure shelter (couch surfing combined with shelter stay and rough sleeping)

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
8	Miller	2011	U.S	Focus groups, questionnaires and secondary data from nationwide homeless management information system	n = 51 (12 focus groups averaging 4-5 participants)	At least 50% ≥ 18 and most fell between 22-40 years <sup>1</sup>	N/A	Female = 100%	N/A	Agency-based shelter users
9	Mostowska	2013	Norway	Participant observation and interviews	n = 40	23-62	N/A	Male = 100%	All participants were Polish but not further details provided	Rough sleepers
10	Neale and Stevenson	2014	England	Semi-structured interviews (two data collection time points)	n = 30	23-62	43.00	Female = 17% Male = 83%	White British = 43.4%, White European = 23.3%, Mixed race = 20%, Black British = 10%, Black Caribbean = 3%	Homeless hostel residents
11	Neale and Brown	2016	England	Semi-structured interviews (two data collection time points)	Time 1, n = 30 Follow-up, n = 22	21-54 (time 1)	38.00	Female = 30% male = 70% (time 1) Female = 27% male = 73% (follow-up)	White British = 86.6%, Black West Indian = 6.6%, Mixed race = 3.3%, White Irish traveller = 3.3%	Homeless hostel residents

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
12	Neale and Stevenson	2015	England	Semi-structured interviews (two data collection time points)	n = 30	21 -54	38,00	Female = 30% Male = 70%	N/A	Homeless hostel residents
13	Oliver and Cheff	2014	Canada	Life history narratives using in-depth semistructured interviews, triangulated with participant observations and document analysis	n = 8	15-21	18,38	Female = 100%	N/A	Shelter users
14	Settembrino	2017	U.S	Interviews	n = 11	"Twenties" - "middle aged"	N/A	Male = 100%	White = 91% and Black = 9%	Street homeless for 10+ years n = 3, emergency shelter n = 2, temporarily staying at acquaintance's n = 1, sometimes lives with mum but most nights sleeps under a bridge n = 1, living in tents in wooded areas n = 4, sleeps in car n = 2



Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
15	Shantz	2014	Canada	Institutional ethnography with interviews	n = 43 (older marginalised women, n = 27 and professionals working with the women, n = 16)	50-65 (older marginalised women)	N/A	Female = 100%	First Nations, Inuit or Métis = 26%, Black or biracial = 7%, not reported = 67%	67% (n = 18) were in a shelter, 33% (n = 9) had housing in the community, with 19% of this group (n = 5) living in subsidised housing
16	Shinn et al.	2007	U.S	Interviews	n = 140 (homeless sample, n = 79 and housed sample n = 61)	Entire sample = ≥ 55	Homeless group = 63.60 (SD = 7.60) Housed group = 70.50 (SD= 7.40)	Female = 19% Male = 81% (homeless group)	Black = 41%, Latino = 13%, White 33% and Other 14% (homeless group)	Shelter users and rough sleepers. "Some participants go to informal night shelters in churches and return to the drop-in center during the day, others remain on chairs in the drop-in center at night or return intermittently to the street."
17	Smith	2017	U.S	Semi-structured interviews	n = 8	45-63	54.63	Male = 100%	"While the majority was African American, one individual was Caucasian"	Unsheltered - sleeping outdoors, in cars, under bridges, in tent communities, or abandoned buildings

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Country of study	Study design	Sample size	Sample age range (years)	Sample mean age (years)	Sample gender	Sample ethnicity	Homeless status
18	Stevenson	2014	England	Semi-structured interviews	n = 40	21 -54	37.00	Female = 28% Male = 72%	White British = 82.5%, Black British = 5%, Black African = 5%, Black Caribbean = 2.5%, White European = 2.5%, Asian Vietnamese = 2.5%	Homeless hostel residents
19	Stevenson and Neale	2012	England	Semi-structured interviews	n = 40	21 -54	35.97	Female = 28% Male = 72%	White British = 82.5%, Black British = 5%, Black African = 5%, Black Caribbean = 2.5%, White European = 2.5%, Asian Vietnamese = 2.5%	Homeless hostel residents

<sup>1</sup> As confirmed by the author via email

<sup>2</sup> One participant is counted both in street homeless and living in a tent

**Table 2: Narrative synthesis of included texts.**

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Social relationships	Social group membership	Interpersonal relationships	Bonding and bridging	Services	Support	Example theme	Theme exemplified (non-exhaustive and non-saturated)
1	Curran et al.	2016	✓		✓				Interpersonal relationships	"Positive developments in social capital were evidenced within the programme as the participants appeared to develop friendships, trust, support networks and aspects of social bonding both within and outside of the group."
2	Fitzpatrick et al.	2007	✓	✓	✓	✓			Bonding and bridging	"The bonding form, which promotes homogeneity and group exclusivity, is examined using four social affiliation measurements: religious social capital; group participation social capital; trust; and strength of social ties." "The second capital variable assesses bridging social capital—the kind of social capital that promotes heterogeneity and group inclusivity. The variable is operationalized using a four-item scale that asks respondents whether or not they have close friends who are different from them in terms of their race, educational background, if the person owns their own business and whether or not they are seen as a community leader."
3	Fitzpatrick et al.	2015	✓	✓	✓	✓			Group membership	"The principal independent variables of interest are the social capital variables. Religious social capital...Another social capital variable included in this analysis is social trust...A composite group participation measure is used as a proxy for group social capital...Finally, the strength of social ties is assessed using the Strong Tie Support scale."
4	Irwin et al.	2008	✓	✓	✓	✓			Bonding and bridging	"Social capital takes two distinct forms – bonding and bridging... bonding social capital variables included in the model are trust, religious social capital, and group participation. Bridging social capital includes the connections individuals have with persons different from themselves. It indicates group heterogeneity and inclusivity. The variable is operationalized using a four-item scale that asks respondents whether or not they have close friends who are different from them in terms of their race, educational background, if the person owns their own business, and whether or not they are seen as a community leader."

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Social relationships	Social group membership	Interpersonal relationships	Bonding and bridging	Services	Support	Example theme	Theme exemplified (non-exhaustive and non-saturated)
5	Johnstone et al.	2016	✓	✓					Group membership	"We operationalize social capital as the ability of an individual to take on new group memberships and/or their ability to maintain their memberships in important groups throughout a period of transition."
6	Marr	2012	✓		✓			✓	Interpersonal relationships	"Social capital perspective... At the micro-social level, access to social ties or networks plays a role in an individual's fall into homelessness, and in turn that individual's efforts to exit the condition."
7	McCarthy et al.	2002	✓		✓			✓	Support	"Social capital and valued outcomes... Homeless youth recognize that street families help them in many ways, and several described how their friends assisted them in their search for shelter, food, and income."
8	Miller	2011	✓			✓	✓	✓	Services	"Lin's discussion of relationship networks as they relate to embedded resources, accessibility, and mobilization provided specific guidance to my analysis of data and presentation of findings... I examined how agency-based homeless families in Centerville gained access to and mobilized resources and relationships in the region's larger homeless education network."
9	Mostowska	2013	✓		✓	✓		✓	Support	"This bridging capital (learning the language, obtaining certificates for highly skilled work - as an electrician, or setting up their own business) may be built up in the course of migration."
10	Neale and Stevenson	2014	✓		✓		✓	✓	Interpersonal relationships	"... recovery capital comprises four key components. These are... 'social capital' (relationships, including family, friends, and broader social networks)."
11	Neale and Brown	2016	✓		✓			✓	Support	"Recovery capital... assess the resources that an individual can draw upon to initiate and sustain processes of recovery from substance dependence... Social capital (in the form of relationships) comprises one of four key components of recovery capital.."

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Social relationships	Social group membership	Interpersonal relationships	Bonding and bridging	Services	Support	Example theme	Theme exemplified (non-exhaustive and non-saturated)
12	Neale and Stevenson	2015	✓		✓		✓	✓	Services	"However, our participants' reports revealed that caring staff attitudes and a service ethos of explaining rules, regulations and policies to residents were having a positive impact on relationships, suggesting that individual hostels can, to a greater or lesser extent, influence the social capital of their residents."
13	Oliver and Cheff	2014	✓			✓	✓	✓	Interpersonal relationships	"For many of the young homeless women in this study, nuclear families of origin had not provided traditional bonding social capital, but rather relationships characterized by instability, abuse, or neglect."
14	Settembrino	2017	✓		✓			✓	Support	"Social capital refers to one's ability to convert social relationships into needed resources...for example, evacuating to a friend's or family member's home in advance of a hurricane."
15	Shantz	2014	✓		✓			✓	Support	"Friendships with fellow shelter residents or drop-in participants not only fulfill one's need for human interaction, they also provide concrete support, helping the women to learn about homelessness and the resources available."
16	Shinn et al.	2007	✓	✓	✓			✓	Support	"Measures of social capital included a count of six disruptive events in youth... and three adult measures: child housing resource indicated that the respondent had at least one child who would allow the respondent to stay with him or her."
17	Smith	2017	✓		✓			✓	Support	"I used the theory of social capital instead to understand the social networks and social capital of unsheltered men" "Mr. K stated, he finds out information 'on the streets and being around other homeless people. People talk. You would never believe. As far as food, it's like who is feeding tonight? Oh Safehouse. That's how the conversations go.'"

Allocated number	Author(s)	Year of publication	Social relationships	Social group membership	Interpersonal relationships	Bonding and bridging	Services	Support	Example theme	Theme exemplified (non-exhaustive and non-saturated)
18	Stevenson	2014	✓		✓		✓	✓	Services	"For PHUD who live in hostels, a significant amount of social interaction occurs within shelters, with the staff and other residents. Given Hagan and McCarthy's definition, these social interactions are an appropriate forum for building social capital and working towards social inclusion."
19	Stevenson and Neale	2012	✓		✓				Interpersonal relationships	"To this end, the retrieved relationships data were reviewed line by line and mapped to identify emergent themes and concepts which were then linked to the existing literature and broader theories of social exclusion and social capital." "Partners were thus an important supportive resource. Furthermore, they could help individuals manage, control and reduce their drug use."

### ***Social capital framework***

In synthesising the included texts (Table 2), we found that social capital was conceptualised along three dimensions: social relationships, support and services. Below we detail and provide examples for each dimension.

#### **Social relationships**

All of the included texts used social capital to describe some form of social relationship. Although consistent in this sense, the texts varied significantly in who these relationships were between, and the context in which they existed. In disentangling this multifaceted use, three recurring sub-dimensions were identified: 1) social group memberships 2) interpersonal relationships, and 3) bonding and bridging.

#### **Social group membership**

Social capital was often operationalised as the relationships between individuals and groups/organisations (2; 3; 4; 5; 16). An example of this can be seen in the following extract: ‘we operationalize social capital as the ability of an individual to take on new group memberships and/or their ability to maintain their memberships in important groups throughout a period of transition’ (5).

Social group memberships were assessed in a variety of ways including asking individuals to indicate whether they participated in one or more pre-defined groups: veteran’s, political, trade, support, homeless and other (2; 3; 4). Additionally, attendance at a place of worship, community or senior centre, or other club/regular meeting was also qualified as social group membership (16).

In some instances, group memberships were not specified. Instead participants rated their perceived relationships with individuals from multiple groups: ‘After living at Salvation Army homeless accommodation, I have friends who are in lots of different groups’, ‘Before coming to Salvation Army homeless accommodation, I was a member of lots of different social groups’, and ‘Before coming to Salvation Army homeless accommodation, I had friends who are in lots of different groups’ (5).

#### **Interpersonal relationships**

Texts also used the concept of social capital to describe interpersonal relationships (1; 2; 3; 4; 6; 7; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 16; 17; 18; 19). Descriptions included relationships with family members: both “traditional” families such as parents and grandparents (6; 10; 12; 13; 14; 16) and “fictive street families” – the groups of individuals who provide support and look out for one another on the streets (7; 13). Interpersonal relationships also included friendships (11). These were studied across various settings such as friendships formed at sports clubs, on the street, and in hostels/accommodation (1; 7; 10; 11; 12; 13). Some texts honed in to subgroups in residen-

tial accommodation, such as residents who use drugs and alcohol (11) and have intimate partner relationships (19) as well as marginalised older women (15). Staff-resident relationships were also explored (13; 18).

Measurements pertaining to interpersonal relationships include: The Strong Tie Support Scale, which establishes the extent to which an individual has access to a network of friends and companions that they can rely on for support (3). Two studies included measures assessing whether the participant had contact with housed friends or family (6), who would let them stay with them (16). A four-item scale measuring the participant's relationship with persons dissimilar from themselves was also used (2; 4).

### **Bonding and bridging**

Echoing one of the most pervasive theoretical distinctions in social capital research, included texts made reference to bonding and bridging (2; 3; 4; 8; 9; 13). Bonding is understood as the ties among socially similar individuals – otherwise referred to as homogenous ties – and bridging, as the ties among socially dissimilar individuals – heterogeneous ties.

This difference between bonding and bridging translated into quantitative studies that had separate measures of each. For example, bonding was measured by *strength of social ties* (2), the sum of responses pertaining to how often respondents felt bothered by a) not having a close companion b) not having enough friendships and c) not getting to see the people they are close to over the last six months. Bonding also comprised *religious social capital* (2; 3; 4), the sum of six responses identifying an individual's level of religious participation, an example being a) how often do you attend church? Additionally, bonding was measured through *group participation* (2; 3; 4), such as trade and support groups. Last, bonding was measured through *trust* (2; 3; 4), in others generally, other homeless individuals, community leaders and service providers. (2; 3; 4).

Bridging was measured using a four-item scale asking respondents whether they had close friends who were different from them in terms of their a) race, b) education background and if the person c) owns their own business, or d) is seen as a community leader (2; 4).

Included texts were inconsistent in the way they operationalised bonding. For example, bonding referred to individuals who participated in the same groups (2; 3; 4) or individuals who had shared experience of living in the same service (8). However, these relationships were considered as bonding even if the experience was previous and not current (13). This highlights some inconsistencies regarding what criteria is used to infer bonding capital.



## Services

The second dimension relates to studies that conceptualise social capital as pertaining to services (8; 10; 12; 13; 18). Here, services relate to available and accessible facilities. For example, IT facilities provided in hostels may foster social capital through helping people to stay connected with others or providing access to information and resources (10). Whilst some individuals experiencing homelessness were able to access and use technology through family, friends and broader social networks, many faced barriers and were digitally excluded. As such, there is space for hostels and services to address this inequity through providing access to IT facilities, which in turn allows individuals to foster social capital (10). The importance of technology as a conduit to social capital and ways in which services may tailor facilities according to clients was noted in other texts (8; 13). For example, considering the necessity of education services for families experiencing homelessness that have school-aged children (8) is an important factor that not all residential services provide.

The *service* dimension overlaps with the *social relationships* dimension when exploring the importance of staff-client relationships. Supportive staff-client relationships – which promote social inclusion, through support, listening and assistance – appear to serve as a vital basis in which social capital is built upon. (12; 18). For instance, one participant said “I’ve been lucky with the key workers I’ve had, because they’ve listened and helped, I’ve had (staff name) on the phone all day, just working with me... and went out of her way to help.” (18). Having positive relationships with staff also helped individuals access wide-ranging opportunities that otherwise may not be available. For example, staff signposting clients to psychological support: ‘They helped me find counselling and therapy for my kids to help us through all the madness that we’ve been through’ (8). However, staff-client relationships were also fraught with difficulty; in turn diminishing social capital. Here relationships entailed unsupportive and unfair treatment by staff where clients felt unheard, infantilised and failed to receive signposting to relevant services (8; 12; 13; 18). Evidently, staff-client relationships can impact the social capital provided by a service.

This dimension also extends to wider service factors, which may foster or hinder social capital. For example, room or person checks in hostels and fear of eviction due to possession of drugs or relapse, can cause a sense of intrusion and instability which can undermine social capital (18). This tension between service factors and resident satisfaction is demonstrated in the following excerpt (18):

Interviewer: “So he searched you every time you went in?”

Resident: “Yeah, and because of that, that really got me angry, do you know what I mean, I was like I felt, I also went back to the hostel and found him searching the room.”

More widely, many services encountered by people experiencing homelessness are transitory by nature. For example, whilst many stay in hostels far beyond what these services were originally envisaged for, many people move in and out of these temporary services. As such, this ongoing turnover may serve as a barrier to individuals forming relationships, particularly between staff-resident (12). Additionally, there is a lack of continuity of care across health and social services (13) which can undermine the building of long-term, trusting relationships. These factors make it difficult for individuals to access stable sources of social capital.

It is, however, possible for services to adopt policies that promote social capital (8). For example, longer stays in residential services promotes a sense of safety and stability. Having a reliable home base enables mothers experiencing homelessness to make additional resourceful connections and manage “even those bad days” (8). Providing spaces, such as regular peer-support meetings, encourages bonding relationships to be formed, fostering mutual understanding (8).

### **Support**

The third dimension in the framework speaks to the support embedded in and afforded by relationships with others and/or services (6; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 19). “Social capital describes the value and benefits which individuals derive from having, and being part of, social relationships and networks” (19). This dimension helps to disentangle why “... there is more to social capital than the existence of a relationship alone, and not all relationships result in social capital” (12).

Naturally, as this dimension is contingent upon the existence of relationships (either between people or with services) there is much overlap with the other two dimensions, *social relationships* and *services*. However, it can be viewed as qualitatively distinct. The other two dimensions identified the existence of social relationships between people and groups, and the availability and accessibility of services. This dimension builds upon these concepts through honing in on what is occurring in such interactions that provides social capital.

There are significant overlaps in this dimension and the wider literature on social support, with many texts referencing the various subcomponents of social support. Informational support can be seen through individuals signposting each other through word of mouth, to food and basic necessities. This may involve directing an individual experiencing homelessness to outreach teams that distribute food (17).

Practical support can be seen where individuals receive support with learning a language, obtaining certificates for work, or setting up one’s own business (9). Additionally, having a friend/tie who can teach you to become competent with IT devices can be considered practical support (10).

Emotional support can manifest in the forming of attachment bonds to supportive people and a sense of belonging (13). For example, amongst small groups of peers there can be profound amounts of trust, intimacy and support, where peers are regarded as 'street families' or 'fictive kin'. Additionally, in the context of shelters, people who have lived in the same place are able to uniquely understand and offer solidarity: "I do have some friends, they just don't live here [at the shelter]. But they used to live here and that makes a difference. They know what it's like to live here, they know what people go through who live here and they've made it out of here, so I can relate to them better..." (13).

To widen our understanding beyond the three established categories of support (emotional, practical and informational), we look more generally at the benefits and resources afforded by relationships (8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15; 17; 19). "Social capital refers to networks among people that can provide resources or tangible benefits" (15). Social capital – understood as the ability to convert social relationships into need resources may play an essential role in mitigating risk (14). For example, during severe weather, having social capital may enable an individual to remain safe (14). This may manifest as turning to friends and family for temporary refuge during particularly wet or cold weather and 'evacuating to a friend's or family member's home in advance of a hurricane' (14).

Within the context of homeless hostels, relationship among residents can serve as social capital through "reciprocal, practical and emotional support, encompassing protection, companionship and love" (12). Family-like-friends, which were perceived as unconditional and unbreakable ties, appear to provide substantial practical and emotional support (11). Additionally, having a partner whilst residing in a hostel, can serve as an "important supportive resource" providing individuals with a sense of safety, in an otherwise insecure and threatening environment (19); "He's very supportive... I don't think I'd be able to do this [stay away from drugs and alcohol] without him... I think if it weren't for him I'd have been back on it every day now. So he sort of keeps me strong" (12). Having a positive relationship with hostel staff may also serve as a source of social capital by contributing to greater flexibility with hostel rules and extending hostel tenancies (12).

Hostel relationships were explored also in another text, but with a focus on families experiencing homelessness (8). Relationships amongst residents were commonly characterized by sharing social time together, supporting one another and showing compassion (8). Specifically, between mothers and staff, there was ongoing practical and emotional support with some regarding the daily involvement and support as "lifesaving". "She [her agency-based family specialist] is just, there's no words for her. She's just astounding... Their hope gives me hope... This is what I need. I need a strong foundation. If it wasn't for this place, I don't know where I'd

be. They've done wonders for me and my daughter" (8). This study looked beyond what resources are embedded within certain relationships and explored resource accessibility and use, identifying barriers such as the duress of homelessness, ineffective information flow and lack of productive relationships (8).

The existence of support was identified across various groups; from street youth to older marginalised women. For street youth, relationships provided a willingness to protect, search for shelter, looking for food, helping panhandle, giving money (7). For older marginalised women, their communities – including fellow homeless and marginalised people – can and often do provide concrete support and assistance, familial bonds, an overall sense of connection and commonality, or simply a way to pass the day. This is demonstrated in the excerpt relating to two roommates, one of whom offers practical handy skills and the other serving as an informal translator with staff (15). "One of my roommates is – she has a lot of trouble with English. But she's been very nice to me; she's been very helpful with some of the things... So it's mutual; I'm helping her but I can see – she's helping me...Because otherwise I think she'd feel pretty lonely in this place." (15)

## Discussion

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This review aimed to 1) identify how social capital has been conceptualised in homelessness research and 2) synthesise these various conceptualisations of social capital to provide a framework. Overall, texts tend to take one of two approaches: measuring social capital (or a component of social capital) or using social capital as a relational lens to interpret data. In addition to these approaches, the developed framework proposes three dimensions regarding how social capital is conceptualised as: social relationships, services and support.

Social capital can be conceptualised as an umbrella term referring to relationships between individuals. This includes relationships between individuals in groups, interpersonal relationships and among those who may be considered similar to one another (bonding) as well as those dissimilar (bridging).

Social capital can be conceptualised as the formalised services available to individuals, thus providing a more structuralist perspective. This includes the facilities that are available within services and accessibility to individuals. Additionally, this dimension touches upon how services, through policy, can construct environments which encourage or diminish social capital.

Social capital can be conceptualised as the support received or given by individuals. This includes the resources or benefits afforded by certain relationships which create social capital. This dimension is closely related to the literature on social support: often referencing the different subtypes: emotional, practical and informational support.

This framework helps to disentangle various uses of social capital in homelessness research, in turn aiding our understanding of the differences between and overlaps among these. Critically, the framework can be used to structure and orient future conversations regarding social capital, promoting a greater sense of clarity and providing a basis for joint discussion. The framework is comprehensive and flexible, and thus can be built upon iteratively in light of future discussions and accumulation of knowledge.

### ***Critique of the proposed framework***

The third aim of the review was 3) to discuss and critique the proposed framework. This discussion will be had within the context of homelessness research whilst also drawing upon the wider literature relating to criticisms of social capital. Across the various stages of this review, it became evident that there were ongoing difficulties across yielded texts in operationalizing social capital. This is partly echoed in the four texts which were excluded at the full-screening stage due to insufficient detail regarding how social capital was conceptualised in the context of homelessness; despite explicitly using the term 'social capital' (McCarthy and Hagan, 1995; Hwang *et al.*, 2009; Ferguson, 2012; Burns and Sussman, 2019). These texts either did not provide any detail on how social capital was conceptualised or offered insubstantial description. This speaks to concerns over using 'buzz words' without substantiation. This critique has been made regarding how social capital has been used in public health research; "... the term has slipped effortlessly into the public health lexicon as if there was a clear, shared understanding of its meaning and its relevance for improving public health..." (Muntaner *et al.*, 2001). The same can evidently be said for the use of social capital in homelessness research. Concerns over the proliferation of 'buzz words' without substantiation should be contextualised in the wider current research environment (Grove, 2017). With the increase in research precarity, many are reliant upon successful grant applications. This to some extent, places pressure on the development of 'new ideas' or 'buzz words'. Of course, innovation should be welcomed, but it must be clear whether this is indeed innovation or the introduction of nebulous concepts or even perhaps, the rebranding of existing concepts.

Whilst the framework synthesises varying conceptualisations of social capital, there are valid critiques of the proposed dimensions. The dimension pertaining to *social relationships* reflects the issue of whether social capital, when used in the context

of homelessness research but also more generally, “risks trying to explain too much with too little (Woolcock, 1998; Muntaner *et al.*, 2001). As highlighted in the results, texts pertaining to this dimension were notably varied; exploring different social relationships with little consistency. And so, using social capital in such a way does not indicate precisely or accurately what is being studied. By serving as such an umbrella term social capital risks being too broad a concept with little focus.

Having subthemes such as *interpersonal relationships*, *group membership* and *bonding and bridging* helps to provide clarity about the aspect of social capital that is being examined. Yet at the same time, these subthemes may give rise to further concerns. For example, questions remain over the clarity of bonding as a concept. As with the wider literature on social capital, it remains unclear what constitutes a homogenous tie. Often this is understood as relating to individuals in similar situations. So, in the context of homelessness this may constitute peer friendships, with individuals also experiencing homelessness (Oliver and Cheff, 2014). However, in some included texts bonding was measured for example, through trust in others generally, other homeless individuals, community leaders and homeless service providers (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2007; Irwin *et al.*, 2008; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). This latter use throws into question the notion of bonding as many of these groups are not experiencing homelessness, and thus it is unclear on what grounds they are judged as homogenous.

Conceptualising social capital simply as *social relationships* also runs the risk of reproducing existing research. Through simply identifying whom an individual has a relationship with or what groups they participate in, this arguably, replicates the work done by the existing and vast literature on social networks. Such proliferation of social capital – when conceptualised like this – creates superficial distinctions across bodies of literature. Such chasms in discourses are problematic, as in reality, both are studying the same phenomenon. Thus, thought needs to be given to how to integrate such works in order to maximise insight gained.

Whilst the framework proposes three distinct dimensions, with significant overlap, these should not be viewed with equal weight. We would argue that in order to maximise the insight gained from social capital, *support* should be incorporated into any conceptualisation. In doing so, social capital will explore beyond the objective structures of relationships and focus more on disentangling what resources/benefits are afforded by certain relationships. As highlighted across the included texts, informational, practical and emotional support were often imbued in the social relationships of people affected by homelessness. This allowed individuals to navigate their day-to-day lives and access needed services and spaces. Additionally, this dimension supports the notion that social capital cannot simply be *having* relationships but rather having *meaningful* relationships. This nuance will

help to explain why some social relationships provide social capital and others do not. ‘... there is more to social capital than the existence of a relationship alone, and not all relationships result in social capital’ (Neale and Stevenson, 2015). Literature pertaining to this dimension also contributes to a more strength-based narrative around homelessness, highlighting the existing resources embedded in meaningful relationships of those affected by homelessness; contributing to a more holistic picture of their experiences and journeys.

However, significant issues exist with the discussion around support and homelessness. As highlighted in the introduction, adopting a relational lens has the potential to better elucidate pathways into homelessness, improve service provisions and interventions for exiting homelessness. However, it appeared that identifying support, and different forms of it, was the ultimate endpoint of many texts. By this we mean that studies explored social relationships and connections with services, then used this to identify which resources and/or benefits were available to an individual. Few texts explored how this may relate to outcome measures or how resources may be leveraged to assist an individual out of their precarious situation. One of the few texts which briefly explored how social support may leverage an individual, outlines “By social capital we refer to the collective resources... that individuals and groups can rely upon to achieve desired outcomes—such as mitigating the psychological and emotional traumas experienced with homelessness” (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). This extract notes that social capital can help to mitigate psychological and emotional trauma. When considering social capital’s application to homelessness research, it should be identified that no texts explored how support may relate to an individual exiting homelessness. This echoes concerns that as a discourse, homelessness research often overlooks the most fundamental point; ending homelessness (Downie *et al.*, 2018; Parsell, 2020).

### ***Strengths and limitations***

There are several notable strengths of this review. First, to our knowledge, this is the first review that synthesises how social capital has been conceptualised across adult homelessness research. Second, it is comprehensive in scope, having used a systematic search, covering numerous and varied sources; including under-utilised grey literature and charity/governmental sources. Third, the review demonstrates the need for greater clarity in conceptualising social capital. Fourth, the three dimensions proposed in the framework were pertinent across various settings, research designs and methodologies. Fifth, the narrative synthesis benefited from in-depth, iterative discussions with a multidisciplinary team.

However, this review has several limitations. First, whilst we adopted the established Framework of Global Homelessness, there are limitations in doing so. Specifying a cut-off point regarding which typologies of homelessness are eligible for the review and which are not is largely arbitrary. Particularly when considering that many individuals simultaneously straddle different typologies (Barker, 2013). For example, many people rough sleep a few times a week, sofa surf when they can and use hostels when available and accessible. Additionally, when considering homelessness longitudinally, many individuals experience changes in their status. It is important to remember that homelessness is a state, not a trait. As such there is a significant flow whereby many individuals move in and out of this state (Bramley, 2017). This review did not capture the dynamism and fluid nature of peoples living situations and thus is limited in this regard.

Second, through excluding some forms of homelessness such as sofa surfing and temporary accommodation, this review risks being bias towards certain groups. For example, in the UK, there is evidence to suggest that the majority of visible rough sleepers are male (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2019). As such, it is likely that the findings from this review are skewed towards the male experience of homelessness, and does not sufficiently capture the experiences of women (Bretherton, 2017). Additionally, it may be argued that some of the groups excluded (e.g. sofa surfing) have greater social capital, if they were able to secure accommodation through their social relationships. However, relying upon social relationships to access accommodation, has been evidenced to, at times, place strain on relationships (Tănăsescu and Smart, 2010), which in turn may diminish social capital. Thus, through excluding certain groups, we did not capture the variance of social capital across the spectrum of homelessness, nor the way in which social capital may be diminished through changing relationships. Findings from this review should be contextualised noting this limitation.

Third, due to practical reasons, only texts in English were eligible. As such, the proposed framework and dimensions are derived from a subsection of available research. It may well be the case that had additional languages been eligible, different dimensions may have been established. As such, the generalisability of the dimensions/framework beyond research conducted in English may be limited.

Fourth, all included studies were conducted in only six countries, with 74% being conducted either in the U.S. or England. This may partly be a reflection of texts being restricted to those written in English. However, there is a substantial body of literature on homelessness from various countries, written in English, which are not represented in this review. As such, it is worth noting that homelessness research published in English, that specifically focuses on social capital, appears



to be less representative than wider homelessness research published in English. Thus, caution must be had when trying to generalise findings of this review beyond such contexts.

Fifth, as outlined in the review aims, we set out to identify how *social capital* was conceptualised in homelessness research. Nonetheless, it is likely that many relevant texts discuss issues pertaining to social capital without explicitly referring to it as “social capital”. Due to practical limitations, it was not possible to conduct a review on all social relationships and connections, as this vast body of literature is far beyond the remit of this review. Yet, it should be noted that social capital is simply a lens into exploring the wider topic of social relationships. In order to comprehensively understand the role and importance of social relationships among those affected by homelessness we must use insights gained from across different literatures.

## Conclusion

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The proposed framework provides a basis on which future discussions and research regarding social capital in the context of homelessness may be structured. It provides greater clarity and nuance which in turn should facilitate more constructive and meaningful conversations. There have been numerous attempts to apply social capital to the context of homelessness. The most successful notably conceptualise social capital as a form of support. In doing so, these texts explore and identify the resources afforded by relationships and connections with people and/or services. Despite its potential, as it stands, this research has limited translatable and meaningful findings that can be used to guide policy. Therefore, it would be of benefit for future research to explore the relationships between social capital and relevant outcome measures such as housing and exiting homelessness. Without such a focus, this body of research remains theoretical and falls short on the ever-increasing task of redressing homelessness.

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# Risk Factors for Housing Evictions: Evidence from Panel Data

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➤ **Abstract\_** *A large number of individuals are evicted from their homes each year. Yet, virtually all prior studies addressing risk factors for being evicted have been based on individual-level, mostly cross-sectional, data. Using Swedish longitudinal municipal-level data, this study assesses whether the associations between various social and demographic risk factors and evictions found in previous studies hold when accounting for temporal and spatial variations. Panel regression analyses show that increased levels of unemployment, social assistance reciprocity, low education, single households with children, and crime are significantly associated with more evictions over time. Increased levels of single households without children, family disruption, and individuals with foreign background were not found to be significantly related to more evictions. The results of this study advance our understanding about the correlates for being evicted and may thereby inform policy efforts designed to prevent eviction and stem its consequences.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Eviction, panel data, risk factors, Sweden*

## Introduction

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The home is a physical base of relationships, which makes it important for general well-being and health outcomes (O'Mahony, 2006). The US financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the Eurozone crisis of 2010 have been associated with increasing risks of severe housing problems such as evictions and homelessness, not only among vulnerable segments of the population but also among traditionally established groups. In the aftermath of these crises, many individuals struggled with rent arrears or mortgage payments. Instability in the banking sector has moreover intensified the problems (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, it is highly likely that the present coronavirus pandemic with its severe economic consequences will trigger a large increase in evictions worldwide.

Evictions, the focus of the present study, are a governmentally sanctioned intervention with a long history in Western societies, estimated to affect millions of people each year (Stenberg *et al.*, 2011). In this study, evictions are understood as the involuntary removal of people from their homes, and are expected to have a wide range of negative personal and social consequences (Hartman and Robinson, 2003). A number of studies have identified links between evictions and decreased chances of decent and affordable housing, residential mobility, homelessness and unemployment (Van Laere *et al.*, 2009; Desmond, 2012; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017) increased economic hardship (Kahlmeter *et al.*, 2018); parenting stress (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015); family disruption (Berg and Brännström, 2018); depression (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2012); and suicide (Fowler *et al.*, 2015; Rojas and Stenberg, 2016). Yet, while many European countries were hit hard by the crises, and have faced an increasing number of evictions, the consequences in Sweden – where the data from this study stem – were comparatively moderate (von Otter *et al.*, 2017).

While prior studies suggest that evictions are more common among people with few resources such as low income, immigrant background, and low education, as well as people living in single households with children (Stenberg, *et al.*, 1995; Crane and Warnes, 2000; Hartman and Robinson, 2003; Van Laere *et al.*, 2009; von Otter *et al.*, 2017), little is known about these risk factors from a longitudinal perspective. Virtually all prior studies addressing risk factors for being evicted are based on individual-level, mostly cross-sectional, data. The few exceptions that do exist are based on sub-groups like youth and drug abusers (Phinney *et al.*, 2007; Kennedy *et al.*, 2017; Böheim and Taylor, 2000) or are based on very old data (Stenberg, 1991). Although cross-sectional studies have inherent problems related to selectivity, and (per definition) fail to account for variations over time, most scholars usually recognise these problems. Such studies will therefore continue to be a useful source of knowledge.

The overall purpose of this study is to further our understanding of various hypothesised socioeconomic and demographic factors that influence the risk of being evicted. Since a large number of individuals are served with an application for an eviction, but for whom the eviction is never executed (i.e. they are under threat of eviction), it has been hypothesised that many tenants move without being formally evicted because an eviction will reduce their chances of a new lease (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). For that reason, this study also addresses whether the same socioeconomic and demographic factors also influence the risk of being under threat of eviction.

In order to reduce some of the standard problems related to the selection bias of micro-level cross sectional studies, as well as to account for temporal variations, this study takes advantage of data that are characterised by repeated observations on fixed spatial units. Such panel data that combines cross sectional data on  $N$  spatial units and  $T$  time periods to produce a dataset of  $N \times T$  observations are typically recognised as more suitable for identifying and measuring associations, which are simply not detectable in pure cross-sectional or pure time-series data (Baltagi, 2013). Since each observational unit can be used as its own control, such data make it possible to account for time-invariant unobserved variables (Allison, 2009). Another advantage of panel data is that such an approach not only allows us capture the variation that emerges across time or space, but also the simultaneous variation of these two dimensions. Thus, instead of testing a cross-section model for all spatial units at a single point in time or testing a time-series model for one spatial unit using time series data, a panel data model is tested for all spatial units through time (Wooldridge, 2010).

Given these advantages, it should also be noted that to the extent to which a micro-level finding can be replicated with aggregated data, the former gains credibility (Norström, 1995; Norström and Skog, 2001). Rather than replicating prior studies in the sense of estimating associations on different but similar data sets that may be impaired by the same kind of bias (Norström, 1989), an advantage of an aggregate effect estimate is that it is typically expected to express the association of the hypothesised risk factor where selection bias is considerably reduced (Norström, 1988). Thus, a key rationale for the approach adopted in this study is to broaden the empirical basis and thereby ensure that the results from prior micro-level cross sectional studies are not method-bound.

This study asks whether the associations between various risk factors and evictions found in previous micro level cross-sectional studies hold when accounting for temporal and spatial variations. This is achieved by analysing annual municipal-level data for the years 2011-2015, where we anticipate that the more prevalent these risk factors are at the municipal-level, the more evictions we can expect. If higher levels of the hypothesised risk factors across municipali-

ties are not associated with more evictions over time, there are reasons to believe that prior individual-level associations are prone to selection bias (cf. Norström, 1989). Doing so not only contributes to furthering our theoretical understanding about the nature of risk factors for housing evictions; it may also inform policy makers and practitioners in their search of effective means to prevent evictions and thereby avoid its consequences.

## Context

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### *The Swedish housing market*

Historically, the Swedish housing market has had a large proportion of rented dwellings in multi-family housing and a socially broad population of tenants. Private landlords have been forced to adjust rent levels to match those of the non-profit public sector (municipal housing companies), leading to below-market rents in the system as a whole (Kemeny, 1995). The housing market has become more market-oriented in recent years. Since 2011, public housing companies must operate according to business-like principles; rents are set in local negotiations between both private and public landlords and tenant organisations. The rent negotiations are still strongly connected to the utility value of the dwelling, and disagreements may be settled by a Rent Tribunal. Since both private and public housing operate on the same market, there is no room for a social housing sector comparable to other countries.

Presently there is an acute shortage of housing, low mobility, and a suboptimal use of dwellings (Boverkets, 2014). This is largely due to rising incomes among high and middle income earners, low mortgage costs, and a growing population. Acquiring a rental lease or buying property is particularly difficult for marginalised persons and people in a vulnerable situation, especially in the urban regions. The substantial increase of homelessness between 2011 and 2017 (Socialstyrelsen, 2018) and the parallel decrease in evictions registered by the Swedish Enforcement Authority (Kronofogden, 2020) might be a reflection of this situation. Because official statistics only include legal leases and not unofficially rooming, subletting etc., the number of people who are left without stable housing might of course be higher. In the official mapping of homelessness in 2017, almost one-fifth of the respondents also reported eviction as a contributing factor to their lack of housing (Socialstyrelsen, 2018).

It is, however, unclear if these homeless people refer to evictions from housing with a legally regulated lease or from unofficially rented dwellings. According to the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), the latter situation is defined as living in insecure accommodation (Amore *et al.*, 2011). As the official mapping of homelessness in Sweden include “private short-term living arrangements”, it is possible that a large share of people living without legal leases

are categorised as homeless. If so, being forced to move from an insecure accommodation to open homelessness does not affect the total size of homelessness by formal measures. Independent of the movements of homeless people (between insecure housing and open homelessness) there might be a negative correlation between officially registered evictions and homelessness due to the fact that housing shortage locks out vulnerable groups from the regular housing market.

### *The eviction process*

Formal evictions of tenants in Sweden are based on decisions made by Bailiffs in summary proceedings, decisions by regional rent tribunals, or judgements from district courts. Irrespective of type of landlord, there are three basic steps in the eviction process: 1) the notice to quit, 2) the court procedure, and 3) the actual enforcement. This is a process similar to most other countries. Although the legal process is comparably swift in Sweden (Djankov *et al.*, 2003; Kenna *et al.*, 2016), the legal protection of tenants' leases is strong (Bååth, 2014). All leases (with exemption of subletting) are unlimited in time. Leases can only be terminated because of valid causes, typically rent arrears or extreme anti-social behaviour. On the other hand, tenants can prolong their contracts indefinitely and also have the right to terminate a lease at any time with three months' notice. Landlords can only refuse to prolong leases due to valid causes, such as repairs or renovations requiring the property to be vacated. In this instance, landlords are usually required to provide alternative accommodation. Also, if the landlord wants to sell the property, tenants' right to residency is retained and present tenants are "included in the bid". In many other countries, such as England, fixed-term contracts are rather common and landlords do not need a reason for terminating the contract (Kenna *et al.*, 2016).

## **Data and Method**

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In this study the temporal and spatial variations in hypothesised risk factors was explored in order to further our understanding about variations in the number of evictions across municipalities from 2011 to 2015. We used administrative data from all Swedish municipalities ( $n=290$ ). With five annual observations for each municipality, there were 1 450 observations in total. Covering the entire territory of the country, municipalities are the lower level local government entity. Using aggregated administrative data means that informed consent was not an issue.

### ***Dependent variables***

The key dependent variable used in this study was the frequency of enforced evictions and referred to the number of registered residents aged 18 and above who were formally evicted. Judicial eviction processes aimed at organisations, e.g. the local social service offices, were not included. As noted above, a large number of individuals were served with an application for an execution of an eviction but the eviction was never executed. One explanation was that many tenants move without being formally evicted since an eviction reduces their chances of a new lease (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). By such background, a variable reflecting the yearly number of individuals aged 18 and above whom, after a verdict, received a notice of eviction (i.e. they were under threat of eviction), was also included in the analysis. In the current study, this variable has been referred to as the number of applications for evictions. Data on evictions and applications for evictions were retrieved from the Swedish Enforcement Authority's (Kronofogden) website.

### ***Independent variables***

When choosing the independent variables, consideration was taken to variables that are known from previous research to affect eviction, but the choices were also constrained to municipal-level population data that are recorded in the national registers. The latter is the trade-off to working with aggregated administrative data in a longitudinal design. All data were retrieved from the websites of Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån/SCB), the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet/BRÅ), and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen).

### **Unemployment**

A number of studies have observed a link between job loss and evictions (Stenberg, 1991; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; von Otter *et al.*, 2017). In this study, unemployment refers to open unemployment and represents the proportion of individuals in each municipality who were officially registered at any of the local public employment service offices as being immediately available for full-time work. Due to data limitations, the variable is only available as rates.

### **Economic strain/hardship**

Unpaid rent is the main reason for becoming evicted. This can of course be an indication of economic strain or economic hardship. In Sweden, individuals have the possibility to apply for means-tested social assistance from the municipality that they live in when facing economic hardship. Yet, it has been shown that many people who are facing an eviction do not apply for means-tested social assistance (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). The current study consequently used the number of people receiving social assistance in the municipality as an independent variable to capture economic strain/hardship.

### **Educational attainment**

The education variable was set to test the hypothesis that low education has an impact on evictions (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). In the current study, the hypothesis was that increased numbers of individuals with low educational attainment (only compulsory education; maximum nine years of schooling) are associated with more evictions.

### **Crime**

Crime has been linked to evictions both before and after the event (von Otter *et al.*, 2017; Alm, 2018). Desmond and Gershenson (2017) have also reported a positive association between increased neighbourhood-level crime rate and the risk of being evicted in a local US sample. Due to substantial variation in reporting standards, we made use of frequencies of theft and burglary as a measure of crime. At least in the Swedish context, such indicators have been shown to provide a more robust way to depict the level of crime in a longitudinal perspective (BRÅ, 2017).

### **Family disruption**

Another factor that has been associated with evictions and economic hardship is divorces/partnership breakups (Stenberg *et al.*, 1995). As official statistics about partnership breakups only is available for couples with children we are forced to use a variable that reflects the number of legally divorced individuals.

### **Family composition**

Prior research suggests that single households, with or without children, are at a higher risk for being evicted, compared to married/cohabiting individuals, with or without children (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). Studies originating from the US have also found that households with children are more likely to be evicted compared with households without children (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015). While findings also indicate that parenthood causes economic strain on households, it can be assumed that households with children will receive more help from the authorities to avoid children becoming evicted. This is also mirrored in the fact that among households threatened by eviction a much larger share of single households without children are evicted compared to single households with children (von Otter *et al.*, 2017). The variables addressed in this study consisted of the number of single households without children and single households with children, respectively.

### **Ethnic background/minority**

Ethnic background and ethnic minority, here understood as foreign background, is a variable that needs to be considered since previous research has identified ethnic background as a risk factor for becoming part of an eviction process (Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; von Otter *et al.*, 2017). It consisted of the number of individuals that were born abroad and had migrated to Sweden (i.e. first-generation immigrants) and of individuals that were born in Sweden but had parents who had migrated to Sweden (i.e. second-generation immigrants).

### ***Control variables***

Since the number of evictions at the municipal level have been found to be associated with population size (von Otter *et al.*, 2017), it was important to control for this factor. In this study, the population was measured as the number of individuals at the age of 18 and above. As evictions in Sweden mainly take place in rented housing it was also important to account for the structure of the dwelling stock, i.e. the number of rented apartments (Stenberg *et al.*, 2011). Unfortunately, there were no available up-to-date data of the number of rented apartments across municipalities. In order to circumvent this problem, this study utilised a variable that measured the number of multifamily dwellings, where also the main part of rented housing is located. To the extent to which the number of rented apartments is correlated with the number of multifamily dwellings, the latter may be deemed as a sufficient proxy.

### ***Statistical analyses***

Multivariable random effects within-between (REWB) panel data regression models (for details, see Bell and Jones, 2015; Bell *et al.*, 2018, and references therein) were used to estimate the impacts of the time and municipality varying hypothesised risk factors on the time and municipality varying frequency of enforced evictions and the number of applications of evictions.

An important aspect to consider with such an approach concerns confounding effects related to heterogeneity and correlated influences that might induce a spurious association between a municipality's frequency of enforced evictions/applications of evictions. We included year-specific fixed effects to pick up any unobserved macro effects that affect all municipalities in the same way. Although it is typically recognised that fixed-effects models have an advantage over random-effects models when analysing panel data because they control for all unobserved level-2 (here, municipal-level) characteristics (Allison, 2009; Wooldridge, 2010), an inherent shortcoming of such models is their inability to estimate the effect of variables that do not sufficiently vary within municipalities (Schunck, 2013). This is the case for variables such as multifamily dwellings as it takes a long time to build new houses.

To circumvent these problems, the REWB model utilised in this study requests separate tests of whether the difference between within- and between-municipality estimates is equal to zero for individual regressors. If there was no statistical significant difference, the random-effect estimate (which corresponds to the mean of between- and within-estimates) was reported for these regressors. If not, the within- and between-municipality estimates are reported separately (Schunck, 2013). Viewing the nested data structure as a nuisance that needs correction, we also used the more conservative cluster-robust standard errors to account for the within-municipality error correlation (Cameron and Miller, 2010).



All analyses were performed using Stata 15/SE-version. The xthybrid command was used to estimate REWB regression models, and standard errors in our regressions were computed using the cluster-robust option (Schunck and Perales, 2017). To facilitate comparisons between estimated associations, standardised b-coefficients are reported. Since such coefficients have standard deviations as their units, higher absolute values indicate stronger associations.

## Results

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### *Descriptive statistics*

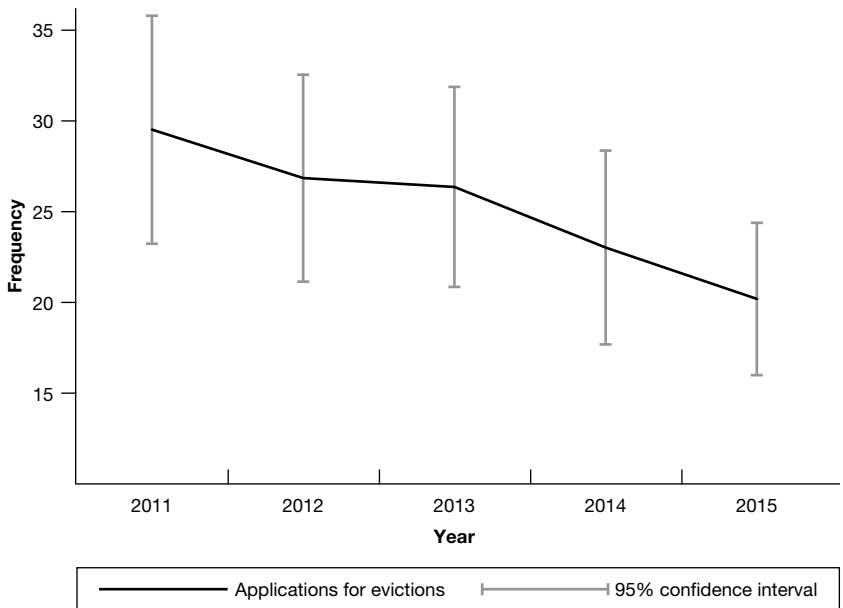
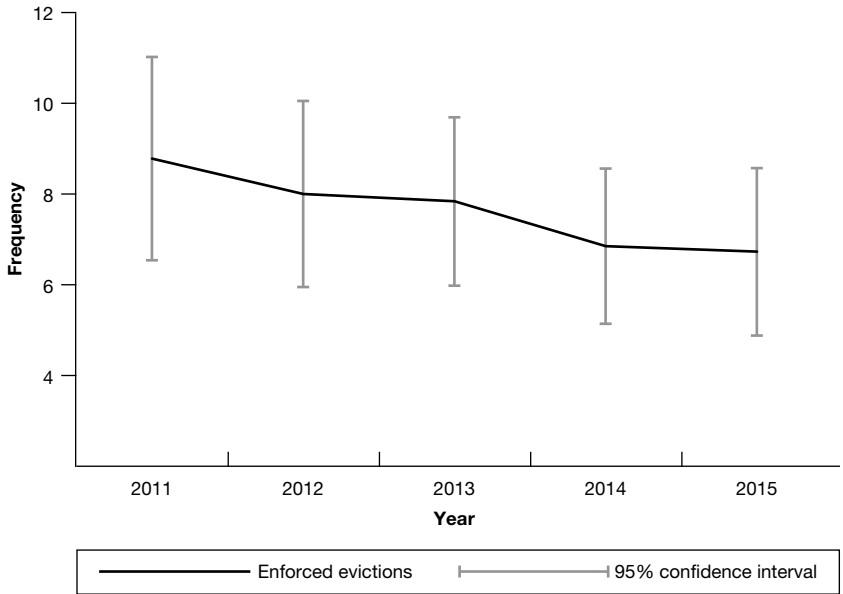
Table 1 offers descriptive statistics of the variables addressed in this study. The number of enforced evictions ranged between 0 and 235 and the overall average number of evictions was approximately 8 with a standard deviation of 17. The standard deviation of means of evictions between the 290 municipalities is almost 17. Finally, the within standard deviation is calculated within each municipality because there are five annual observations observed in every municipality. It tells us how much the variable varies within each municipality, while ignoring all variation between units. If we compare between and within variation, we can see that the variation between municipalities always is larger than the variation of the yearly observations within the municipalities. Ranging between 0 and 576, the mean number of applications for evictions was around 25. As shown in Figure 1, there was a negative trend in both these variables, which suggests that the number of enforced evictions and number of applications for evictions have diminished during the addressed period. As indicated by the broad 95% confidence intervals, there was a large variation across municipalities.

Focusing on the hypothesised independent variables, the average overall per cent of unemployed individuals was around 3.3. The mean number of means-tested social assistance recipients and individuals with only compulsory education was around 977 and 3519 respectively. The mean number of reported burglaries was approximately 73. The average number of single households without children, single households with children, divorced individuals, and individuals with foreign background was around 5489, 991, 163, and 6938 respectively. According to the range of these data (min-max values) and the size of the between-municipality standard deviations, there was substantial variation across municipalities.

**Table 1. Sample properties: descriptive statistics.**

Variable		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Observations
<i>Dependent variables</i>						
Enforced evictions	Overall	7.67	17.18	0	235	N=1 450
	Between		16.89			n=290
	Within		3.24			T =5
Applications for evictions	Overall	25.19	48.03	0	576	N=1 450
	Between		47.19			n=290
	Within		9.28			T =5
<i>Independent variables</i>						
Unemployment (%)	Overall	3.317	0.98	1	7	N=1 450
	Between		0.87			n=290
	Within		0.45			T =5
Social assistance reciprocity	Overall	977.08	2 316.61	0	25 397	N=1 450
	Between		2 315.66			n=290
	Within		138.63			T =5
Compulsory education only	Overall	3 518.98	6 222.51	228	79 717	N=1 450
	Between		6 230.02			n=290
	Within		116.62			T =5
Crime	Overall	72.769	211.77	0	3 525	N=1 450
	Between		210.52			n=290
	Within		25.508			T =5
Single households without children	Overall	5 489.18	12 983.10	170	178,42	N=1 450
	Between		12 999.08			n=290
	Within		226.44			T =5
Single households with children	Overall	991.18	2 227.20	37	28 176	N=1 450
	Between		2 229.48			n=290
	Within		59.54			T =5
Divorced	Overall	162.77	397.84	1	5 714	N=1 450
	Between		397.61			n=290
	Within		24.74			T =5
Foreign background	Overall	6 937.9	21 424.12	195	291 026	N=1 450
	Between		21 427.72			n=290
	Within		1 055.10			T =5
<i>Control covariates</i>						
Population size	Overall	33 203.65	68 100.79	2 421	923 516	N=1 450
	Between		68 044.25			n=290
	Within		4 525.31			T =5
Multifamily dwellings	Overall	8 369.101	27 777.2	82	405 452	N=1 450
	Between		27 803.05			n=290
	Within		834.89			T =5

**Figure 1. Trends in enforced evictions and applications for evictions across Swedish municipalities 2011-2015.**



### ***Multivariable panel regression estimates***

Table 2 reports the results when the dependent variable was enforcement of evictions. All interpretations of the coefficients assume that all other variables in the model were held constant. Increased rates of social assistance recipiency, only compulsory education, and single households with children were – as hypothesised – all significantly ( $p < 0.01$ ) associated with more evictions. For example, the random-effects estimates suggest that for every increase of one standard deviation of the number of social assistance recipients, the number of evictions rise by around 0.2 standard deviations ( $b = 0.222$ , 95% CI: 0.161; 0.284).

However, and in contrast to expected patterns, increased rates of family disruption/divorce and foreign background were negatively associated with the number of evictions, i.e. associated with fewer evictions. For example, for every increase of one standard deviation of the number of individuals with foreign background, the number of evictions decrease with around 0.3 standard deviations ( $b = -0.296$ , 95% CI: -0.421; -0.171). While the negative association for foreign background was statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), the association between divorce and eviction was nevertheless not statistically significant ( $b = -0.089$ , 95% CI: -0.238; 0.059).

Yet, the within-municipality effects of unemployment and crime were statistically different from their between-municipality counterparts, as can be seen from the small  $p$ -values in in the lower part of the table. For the statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) between-municipality effect of unemployment, the estimated coefficient indicates – as expected – that a between-municipality one standard deviation increase in unemployment was associated with approximately 0.1 standard deviation increase in the number of evictions ( $b = 0.101$ , 95% CI: 0.077; 0.126). However, the within-municipality effect of unemployment suggests a negative and statistically insignificant relationship ( $b = -0.016$ , 95% CI: -0.038; 0.005). This means that the previous positive between-municipality effect was sensitive for unobserved municipal-level characteristics. The statistically non-significant between-municipality effect of crime on the number of enforced evictions unexpectedly suggest that a between-municipality one standard deviation increase in the number of crimes was associated with fewer evictions ( $b = -0.017$ , 95% CI: -0.110; 0.076). However, focusing on the statistically significant within-municipality-effect of the number of crimes on the number of evictions, the coefficient is positive and suggests that a within-municipality one standard deviation increase in the number of crimes was associated with more evictions ( $b = 0.228$ , 95% CI: 0.137; 0.318).

With the exception of the positive but statistically insignificant random effect estimate of crime, the overall pattern found in previous analysis remained when the number of applications of evictions was the dependent variable (Table 3).

**Table 2. Risk factors for enforced evictions. Multivariable random effects within-between panel regression (OLS) estimates.**

Variables\Outcome	Enforced evictions Standardised b-coefficient (95% CI)
<b>Random-effects estimates<sup>a</sup></b>	
Social assistance reciprocity	0.222 (0.161; 0.284) ***
Compulsory education only	1.212 (1.065; 1.358) ***
Single households without children	-1.134 (-1.360; -0.908) ***
Single households with children	0.120 (0.072; 0.167) ***
Divorced	-0.089 (-0.238; 0.059)
Foreign background	-0.296 (-0.421; -0.171) ***
<b>Between-municipality estimates<sup>b</sup></b>	
Unemployment	0.101 (0.077; 0.126) ***
Crime	-0.017 (-0.110; 0.076)
<b>Within-municipality estimates<sup>b</sup></b>	
Unemployment	-0.016 (-0.038; 0.005)
Crime	0.228 (0.137; 0.318) ***

Note: n=290, T=5, N=1 450. OLS=Ordinary least squares. CI=confidence interval. \*\*\*/\*\*/\* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10 per cent level respectively. Intercept, control covariates (population size, multifamily dwellings, and trend/year dummies), and variance components estimates suppressed.

<sup>a</sup> Variables do not sufficiently vary within municipalities. Random effect estimates=mean of between- and within-estimates.

<sup>b</sup> Tests of the random-effects assumption:

b-coef.[Between Unemployment]=b-coef.[Within Unemployment]=0; p=0.0000,

b-coef.[Between Crime]=b-coef.[Within Crime]=0; p=0.0002.

**Table 3. Risk factors for applications for evictions. Multivariable random effects within-between panel regression (OLS) estimates.**

Variables\Outcome	Applications for evictions Standardised b-coefficient (95% CI)
<b>Random-effects estimates<sup>a</sup></b>	
Social assistance reciprocity	0.402 (0.317; 0.488) ***
Compulsory education only	1.402 (1.201; 1.603) ***
Crime	0.040 (-0.099; 0.179)
Single households without children	-0.059 (-0.872; -0.312) ***
Single households with children	0.083 (0.010; 0.157) **
Divorced	0.096 (-0.054; 0.245)
Foreign background	-0.844 (-1.001; -0.687) ***
<b>Between-municipality estimates<sup>b</sup></b>	
Unemployment	0.118 (0.080; 0.156) ***
<b>Within-municipality estimates<sup>b</sup></b>	
Unemployment	-0.006 (-0.027; 0.014)

Note: n=290, T=5, N=1 450. OLS=Ordinary least squares. CI=confidence interval. \*\*\*/\*\*/\* indicates statistical significance at the 1/5/10 per cent level respectively. Intercept, control covariates (population size, multifamily dwellings, and trend/year dummies), and variance components estimates suppressed.

<sup>a</sup> Variables do not sufficiently vary within municipalities. Random effect estimates=mean of between- and within-estimates.

<sup>b</sup> Tests of the random-effects assumption:

b-coef.[Between Unemployment]=b-coef.[Within Unemployment]=0; p=0.0000.

## Discussion

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Each year, a large number of individuals in Sweden and other Western countries are evicted from their homes, and these involuntary removes have been shown to have a wide range of negative personal and social consequences (Desmond, 2012; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2012; Desmond and Kimbro, 2015; Rojas and Stenberg, 2016). In order to inform policy interventions designed to prevent eviction and thereby stem its consequences, the purpose of this study is to further our understanding of various socioeconomic and demographic factors that might influence the risk of being evicted. This is achieved by examining whether and to what extent eviction rates across Swedish municipalities between 2011 and 2015 were related to rates a number of hypothesised risk factors that have been identified in prior empirical studies based on individual cross-sectional data. Under the assumption that a micro-level finding gain credibility if it could be replicated with data that do not share the same source of bias (Norström, 1989), this study is among the first to broaden the empirical basis by examining whether results from prior studies hold when accounting for temporal and spatial variations across municipalities. Doing so, this study strived to ensure that prior micro-level findings were not method-bound (see Norström, 1995; Norström and Skog, 2001).

Before discussing the results from the regression analyses, it is interesting to note that the number of evictions and the number of applications for evictions have decreased in the addressed period (see Figure 1). A possible reason for this can be that it has gradually become harder to obtain a lease (not least for poor individuals in the metropolitan areas), which results in fewer people with valid rental leases, and therefore there are less available people to evict (Stenberg *et al.*, 2011).

We estimated multivariable REWB panel regression models with year-specific fixed effects to model temporal and spatial variations in the addressed outcomes and hypothesised predictors. In contrast to traditional random-effects and fixed-effects models, REWB models check for which of the estimated within- and between-municipality associations differ systematically (Schunck and Perales, 2017). Rates of social assistance reciprocity, only compulsory education, and single households with children all show expected significant positive effects both for applications for evictions and enforced evictions. All in all, these factors are closely connected to economic strain that can cause rent arrears and consequently an increased risk of evictions, findings that also give credibility to studies based on individual-level data (Stenberg *et al.*, 2011; von Otter *et al.*, 2017). The number of single households without children and individuals with a foreign background are, in the current study, significantly negatively associated with more evictions and applications for evictions. These findings cast doubt on prior micro-level studies that have reported positive associations between these risk factors and the risk of getting evicted

(Desmond and Gershenson, 2017; von Otter *et al.*, 2017). With the reservation that Swedish micro-level studies have been based on all family disruptions, the non-significant impact of divorcees also makes prior micro-level findings seem less clear (Stenberg *et al.*, 1995; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017). Therefore, it seems safe to assume that these prior micro-level results probably are biased due to various sorting processes (i.e. selection bias).

Rates of unemployment and the frequency of crime show more complex associations. Unemployment has a positive and significant between-municipality effect for both applications and forced evictions, but has no within-municipality effect. Crime, on the other hand, only has a positive within-municipality effect on enforced evictions. As significant within-effects improve causal inference (Allison, 2009), the impact of crime supports previous studies that have highlighted the importance of crime rates in predicting evictions (Desmond and Gershenson, 2017). A high crime rate in an area is often associated with multiple socio-economic problems. These multiple factors can possibly also play a role as to why the eviction has been executed. Desmond and Gershenson (2017) suggest that the tenants that live in neighbourhoods with a higher crime rate are more willing to move when faced with an eviction. They also speculate that these individuals or families might not, at the same rate as individuals living in a more desirable neighbourhood, reach out to other family members for help, attend the court hearing, or negotiate with the landlord. Whether there is any truth in this is hard to say, but the results from the REWB model do not contradict it.

The impact of unemployment was expected, and perhaps not surprising, since unemployment/job loss is usually associated with loss of income. It can become hard to pay rent when one is faced with loss in income. Consideration should also be taken of the fact that job loss can result in multiple consequences for the individual such as a decrease in health due to stress. The reasons behind the link between job loss and evictions have nevertheless not been analysed in this study. Higher levels of economic strain/hardship, which was measured as the number of individuals receiving means-tested social assistance, is also found to be significantly related to more evictions, as was higher levels of individuals with only compulsory education. All in all, these findings are expected and they thus give credibility to such findings that are based on individual-level data (Stenberg *et al.*, 2011; von Otter *et al.*, 2017).

### ***Strengths and limitations***

Strengths of this study include the longitudinal design for which data from the same municipalities were collected repeatedly over time. In contrast to prior micro level cross-sectional studies, which for obvious reasons cannot account for trend, such an approach not only allows controlling for time-varying factors, but also for time-

invariant unobserved municipal-level variables (cf. within-municipality effects estimation). Aggregated data analysis is moreover less prone to selection bias (Norström and Skog, 2001). Although aggregated versions of bivariate individual-level associations may be susceptible to ecological fallacy due to aggregation bias (Robinson, 1950; Clark and Avery, 1976), multivariable regression analyses substantially reduce such potential problems (Firebaugh, 1978; Hanushek *et al.*, 1974).

Still, this study is not without limitations. All studies based on panel data have inherent shortcomings, and this study is no exception. A fundamental limitation refers to that data were constrained to municipal-level population data that are recorded in the national registers. The latter is the trade-off to working with aggregated administrative data in a longitudinal design. The discrepancy between prior micro-level operationalisations of the hypothesised independent variables and the operationalisations in this study may thus be too large. In addition, however well substantiated an estimated model might be, there is always a possibility that some (perhaps yet unknown) important predictor has been left out (Norström, 1989). Although our specified multivariable regression models bought some protection against ecological fallacy, potential problems related to omitted variable bias may remain. Moreover, if it had been possible to address a longer period of time (e.g. 10 years), estimates that were found to be not significantly related to the outcomes would probably have reached statistical significance.

Also, and in line with Desmond and Kimbro (2015), evictions are not always a predictable outcome of certain behaviours or chained events. It is not possible to state that all tenants that break their rental agreement become evicted and not everyone that gets evicted has violated their rental agreement. There can be many different reasons as to why some get evicted whereas others do not. For example, the landlord and the social services might come to an agreement for a plan that results in the tenant keeping their apartment or the tenant might have a landlord that is working for an eviction. The underlying factors have not been analysed in this study, which might affect the generalisability of the results. This study is further limited in its generalisability through its focus on the Swedish context. As a consequence of this, its findings are embedded in how the Swedish law and eviction system is designed. However, the panel data approach of this study can be adapted to other countries, which may allow for testing whether the empirical findings can be reproduced.

### ***Implications***

The empirical findings of this study do to some extent replicate previous micro-level research and therefore offer a stronger indication to addressing risk factors related to economic strain/hardship, unemployment/job loss, single households with children, low education, and crime rate. The Swedish welfare system mainly



protects people with economic support connected to income losses due to old age, illness, unemployment etc. As evictions in more than 90 per cent of the cases is caused by rent arrears (von Otter *et al.*, 2017) it is obvious that this support is not sufficient. Although Swedish tenants are strongly protected from arbitrary notices to quit, their situation is quite weak as soon as they by rent arrears or anti-social behaviour break the agreements stipulated in the lease. Furthermore, the time period between a rent arrear and an eviction is in an international comparison quite short (Kenna *et al.*, 2016). About three months after a rent arrear the tenant loses the right to the lease and the future tenancy is in the hands of the landlords. This means that the social services must act promptly to prevent an eviction. Due to heavy workloads, this is often not possible. Instead of post eviction action, it is more productive to initiate preventive action by a stronger collaboration with landlords and enforcement authorities in order to discover households under risk of eviction. An eviction is not only a disaster for the tenant; it is also a severe economic loss most landlords want to avoid. In order to perform anti eviction work properly social services need to consider factors included in this study. Of special interest is that this study finds that more individuals with foreign background were related to fewer evictions, despite the fact that previous research has shown a correlation between foreign background and an increased risk of becoming evicted. This indicates the need of further research to determine what the actual cause is when individuals with foreign background become evicted. However, consideration should be taken to what von Otter and associates (2017) have suggested, namely that immigrants seem to move out before the eviction is executed.

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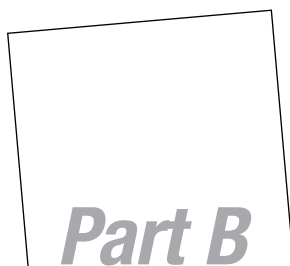
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# Research Notes



***Part B***

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# Developing a Model of Change Mechanisms within Intentional Unidirectional Peer Support (IUPS)

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- **Abstract\_** *Peers are those with lived experiences of adversity and are commonly utilised in services. However, little is known about change mechanisms, resulting in undefined concepts and weak assertions on peer supports' effectiveness. Further, peer interventions are becoming increasingly common in homelessness services, without the theoretical understanding to support it. This review systematically explores literature to close this gap. Iterative searches from PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, PubMed, MEDLINE, CINAHL, Web of Science, and grey literature resulted in 71 included sources. Through realist synthesis, a model of client and peer pathways through peer support was developed. Through inclusion of literature from multiple health contexts (i.e. homelessness, mental health, addiction, and criminal justice), the review identified mechanisms of working alliances, role modelling, experience-based social support, and processes of becoming a peer-supporter. The model asserts that 1) the working alliance quality influences client/peer outcomes, 2) clients learn behaviours modelled by peers, 3) peer outcomes are mediated by being a role model, 4) peers provide social support, impacting client/peer outcomes, and 5) training, supervision, and support are directly linked to peer-supporters' effectiveness.*
- **Keywords\_** *Realist synthesis; peer mentors; peer support; homelessness; working alliance*

## Introduction

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Peer support refers to the system whereby individuals with lived experience of a particular difficulty provide support to others. Peer support is prevalent; in England alone there are over 700 programmes that involve peers/consumers (Wallcraft *et al.*, 2003). It also features in international guidelines, recommended for use within high-risk environments in Finland, Australia, and homelessness services in Canada (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009; Creamer *et al.*, 2012; National Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016). The idea that peers can help others through specific struggles is used in homelessness services, rehabilitation of offenders, addiction treatment, and mental and physical health services (Adair, 2005; Chinman *et al.*, 2006; Chinman *et al.*, 2014). In the USA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) broadly defines peer support as “services [that] are delivered by individuals who have common life experiences with the people they are serving” (SAMHSA, 2015, para. 1). However, in practice and reflected in the literature, there are many different terms for peer interventions, such as ‘peer support worker’; ‘peer advocate’; ‘wounded healer’; ‘consumer survivor’; or ‘peer to peer’ (Bowgett, 2015; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016; Heidemann *et al.*, 2016). Each term may invoke different interpretations by the reader (about the type of lived experience or what the role entails, for example), which adds to the lack of clarity in this field. Certainly, research to define what is actually meant by “peer” and what constitutes common lived experiences is required. For the purposes of this paper, we will use the neutral/general term ‘peer mentors’ or ‘peers’ with the aim of being inclusive/encompassing all current variants/interpretations of peer interventions. Further, common life experience refers to peers’ experiences and assumes that the peer has similar life experience to the client.

Bradstreet (2006) discusses three types of peer support: informal (naturally occurring), participation in peer-led services, and intentional peer support (IPS). IPS is fostered and developed by organisations, occurring frequently in mental health and addiction services (Wallcraft *et al.*, 2003). Proponents of peer support in mental health define peer support as:

“Involving one or more persons who have a history of mental illness and who have experienced significant improvements in their psychiatric condition offering services and/or supports to other people with serious mental illness who are considered to be not as far along in their own recovery process” (Davidson *et al.*, 2006, p.444).

Despite being clear, there has been limited uptake of this definition. Peer interventions are still commonly referred to as ‘peer support’ or ‘IPS’ referring to both mutual and mentorship support, leading to mixed and uncertain conclusions about effectiveness (e.g. Repper and Carter, 2010; Lloyd-Evans *et al.*, 2014). This was

indicated in a study where peers and clients were recruited if they were providing/receiving IPS and 93% of participants described being involved in a mentorship-type of IPS (Barker *et al.*, 2018). The Barker *et al.* (2018) results describe one facet of IPS—unidirectional IPS, evidencing the need for further clarification in defining IPS interventions. To differentiate and clarify IPS that is currently being used in various services, it is necessary to functionally divide IPS into two types: intentional, unidirectional peer-support (IUPS) and intentional, bidirectional peer support (IBPS). Whereas IBPS reflects the reciprocal and mutual type of peer intervention, IUPS is a formalised, mentorship type of peer intervention where the peer is clearly more advanced and is mentoring the client in an organised fashion, similar to the definition provided by Davidson *et al.* (2006). This definition and new abbreviation are proposed with the aim of enabling clarity in future research and the development of peer interventions.

Given the popularity and effectiveness of IPS in mental health and addiction services, unsurprisingly, homelessness services have increased uptake of this intervention. However, those who experience homelessness suffer additional problems to those experienced by clinical populations, often evidencing the most complex, multimorbid conditions requiring significant resource to engage in health interventions (Maguire, Johnson, Vostanis, & Keats, 2010; Barker and Maguire, 2017). For example, street homeless people are 11 times more likely to have mental illness compared with housed counterparts (Fitzpatrick, Kemp, & Klinker, 2000; Aldridge *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the mortality rate is much higher than the general population—the average age of death for those who die on the street is just 47 (Thomas, 2011; Aldridge *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, drugs, alcohol, violence, and communicable diseases are everyday threats for homeless people (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2000; Thomas, 2011).

Although we have interest in understanding IUPS interventions for use with homeless people, this review considers literature across multiple health areas to identify change mechanisms that transcend contexts and can be applied to a homeless population (Wong *et al.*, 2013). That is, literature examining IUPS in the context of homelessness is sparse and therefore understanding of underlying mechanisms is even more limited, so we look to existing literature within mental health, addiction, physical health, and criminal justice to identify possible mechanisms that underlie multiple contexts. Additionally, the review has a psychological lens, whereby there is a focus on formulating the interplay between behaviours, emotions, and cognitions that are present in IUPS interactions.

This is not to suggest that context is unimportant, however, there are some prerequisites for IUPS to be effective—services should foster a person-centred work environment, be flexible and supportive for peers without judgement when difficulties arise (Moran *et al.*, 2012). Without this supportive culture, IUPS will be delivered

in a context that hinders its effectiveness and will likely have negative consequences for both peers and clients. Therefore, the following identification of change mechanisms of IUPS is assumed to function within a person-centred work environment for the peer-supporters.

The primary objective of this work is to identify and clarify concepts by examining change mechanisms that underlie IUPS that are potentially transferable across health areas and therefore useful to peer interventions with a homeless population. Secondly, the review aims to provide testable concepts to assess the utility of the developed model, in line with realist methods. The aim of developing a model is that once developed, it can then be tested and potentially modified/elaborated in different contexts to further our understanding of IUPS interventions.

## Method

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We used realist synthesis/review methods to build a model that identifies and examines the mechanisms of change within IUPS and the relationships between the mechanisms of change. Realist methods allow for inclusion of articles with varying designs, permitting researchers to draw interpretations from related literature and theoretical sources (Wong *et al.*, 2013).

### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

This review utilised broad inclusion criteria, given our aim and the lack of literature on IUPS and homelessness. Articles were included if they discussed elements of how or why IUPS works. Further, we did not exclude based on the papers' chosen term for 'peer', to capture the varying uses of the terms and to include a wide set of literature on peer interventions. We also included papers that described paid and unpaid peer interventions, again to capture broad descriptions/evaluations of peer interventions. Theoretical papers, commentaries, perspective papers, and literature reviews that potentially explain processes and common elements in IUPS, and empirical articles that identify or test common elements in IUPS were included. Articles were excluded if they lacked focus on IUPS, reported on a topic irrelevant to the research aims, and/or were not in English.

### *Search Strategy*

The search process was conducted in four phases. To begin with, in line with realist methods (Pawson *et al.*, 2005; Wong *et al.*, 2013), a known set of literature on IUPS was compiled from the researchers' familiarity with the topic, similar to methods used in McMahon and Ward, (2012; e.g. Mead *et al.*, 2001; Dennis, 2003; Davidson *et al.*, 2006 etc.).

Secondly, we searched academic databases including PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, PubMed, MEDLINE, CINAHL, and Web of Science using a combination of the keywords 'peer support', 'homelessness', 'adult/young adult', 'change mechanisms', and their synonyms. IUPS was not included in the search terms, as it is yet to be reflected in published literature.

The known set of articles and those identified through database searching were then sifted, to find papers relevant for inclusion. The included studies were then subjected to a citation search using Web of Science, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar to identify any missing literature.

Finally, once the initial model had been developed, the iterative search process concluded with a final citation search, which identified relevant literature to support and/or contradict the overall model of IUPS. Data extracted from all included studies can be found in supplementary materials.

### ***Quality Assessment***

Pertinent data was extracted from each article and quality assessed using the Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) and A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) (Shea *et al.*, 2007; Crowe and Sheppard, 2011; Souto *et al.*, 2015). The MMAT and AMSTAR provided justification on how much to weigh articles when considering the impact on the developing model. For non-empirical articles, we used guiding principles of relevance to the research aims and rigour as noted by Wong *et al.*, (2013).

### ***Model Development***

The realist review process requires analysis of the source documents in detail (Pawson and Bellamy, 2006). Thus, once data was extracted and quality assessed, we developed models for each of the included studies. Again, using similar methods to McMahon and Ward (2012), we then sorted articles into two groups – those with a primarily theoretical focus, and those with a primarily empirical focus.

Firstly, theoretical articles were examined to seek explanations of how IUPS works. The theoretical literature was divided into specific contexts (i.e. mental health, physical health, addiction, criminal justice, and homelessness), where formulations of the IUPS process were developed. Models of IUPS were then combined into one overall model. This process resulted in data from 28 articles being developed into a preliminary theoretical model of IUPS (available in supplementary material).

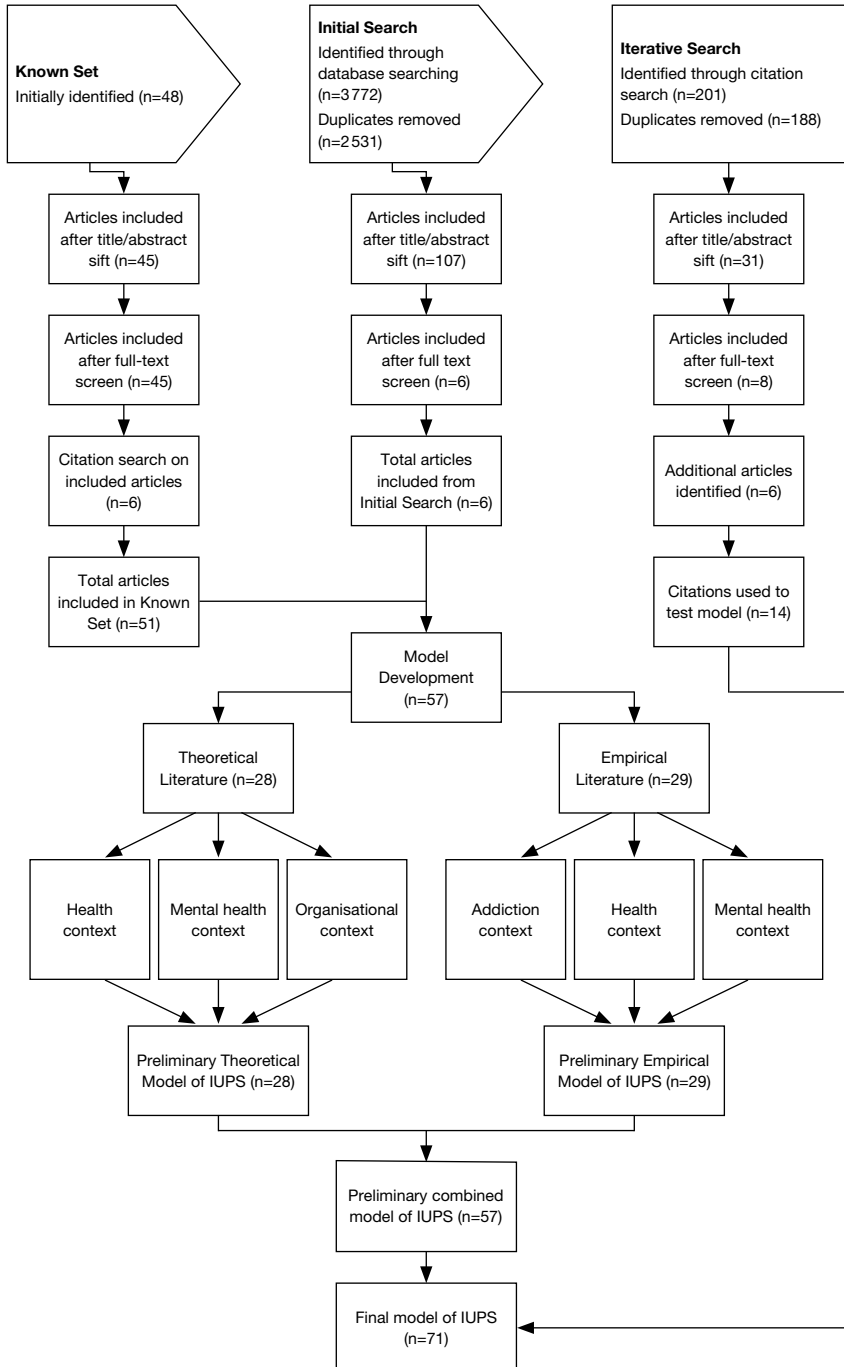
Secondly, empirical articles were assessed to seek explanations of how IUPS works but with a focus on explaining outcomes and evidencing pathways identified in the theoretical model. Again, articles were grouped into multiple contexts, formulating models for each, resulting in a model for IUPS within addictions, mental

health, and physical health. Again, these models were combined into one overall preliminary empirical model of IUPS with data from 29 articles (available in supplementary material).

Once both preliminary models were developed, they were combined to create an overall model of IUPS. As realist methods are predominantly theory driven, we prioritised the theoretical literature, using the empirical articles to ascertain the strength of each pathway and edit the preliminary models. Finally, in line with iterative methods, we refined the model using literature from the citation search. This process of model development is displayed in Figure 1.

It became clear during this synthesis that there are common elements for peers and their clients within IUPS. However, peers and clients experience these elements differently and the final model aims to reflect this.

**Figure 1. Flow chart of search strategy and model development.**



## Results

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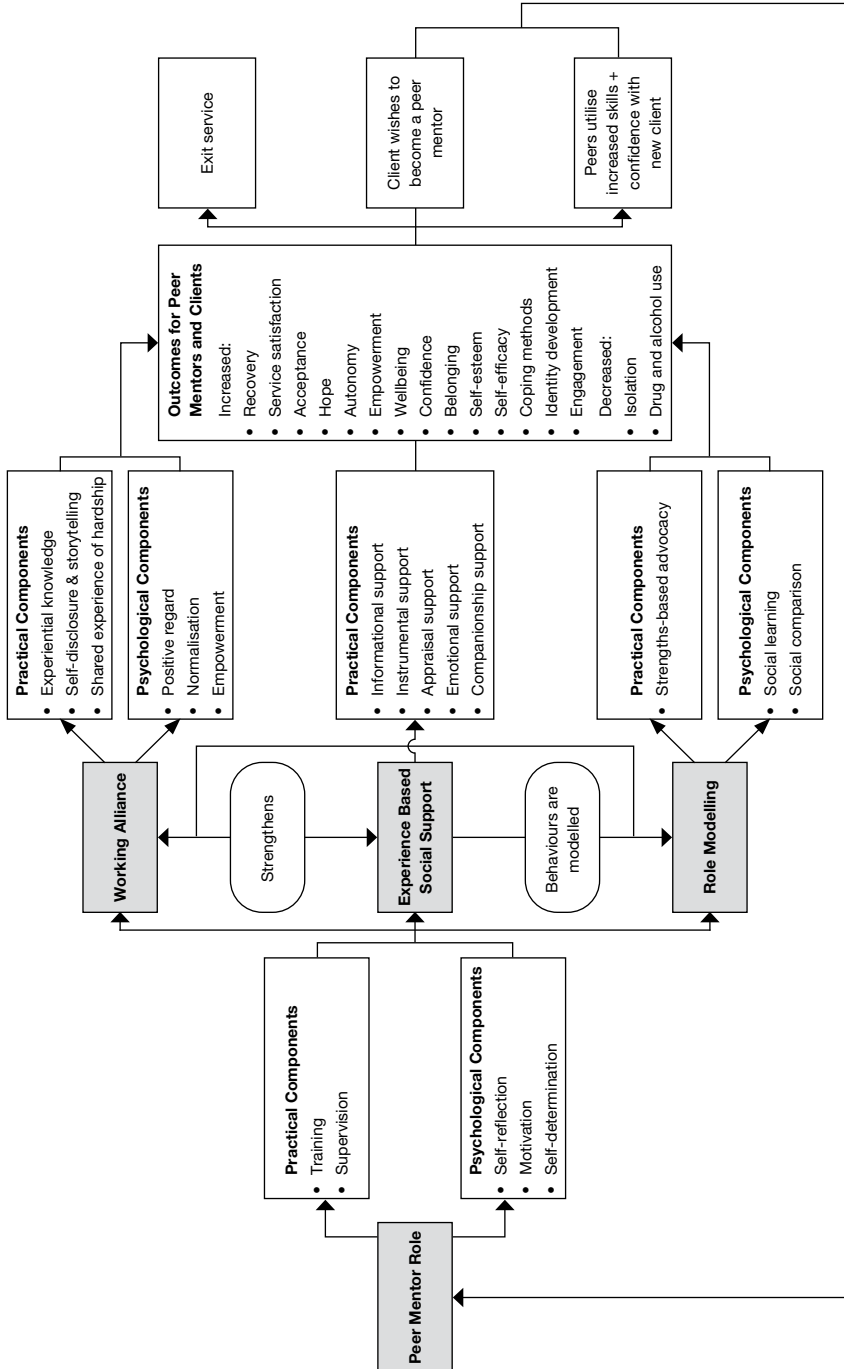
The following results are discussed as they are read within the model (see Figure 2). Reading from left to right, the first mechanism of the model is the peer mentoring role. This is deliberate as the peer mentors themselves – and their skills, knowledge, experience and personal qualities are central to the quality of support their clients receive – and essentially are *the* intervention. This is also the beginning of the process for peer mentors in IUPS and influences the other mechanisms in the model.

Next, the three main mechanisms of change – working alliance, experience-based support, and role modelling are depicted at the same level of the model. This is because temporally, these processes can occur simultaneously. The mechanisms are also multiply interlinked, with processes in one mechanism affecting the other. For instance, the experience-based social support component of the model is related to the working alliance component, as experience-based social support strengthens the working alliance between peers and their clients. Conversely, having a strong working alliance also increases feelings of social support. The experience-based social support mechanism is also related to the role modelling mechanism, as clients can model the behaviours of peers that they observe when receiving various types of social support. Peers may also be viewed as positive role models within the working alliance, and having a strong working alliance may offset any potential negative effects of upward social comparisons that occur during the role modelling mechanism.

The model describes practical and psychological components of each mechanism, and the outcomes they have for the peer mentors, their clients, and the working alliance between the two. We conceptualised practical components as tangible elements of the intervention that the peer mentors do, and psychological components as the underlying psychological processes that occur within each mechanism. It is important to note that while this model is presented as linear, in reality it is much more complex—clients and peers may enter or exit into any part of the model, and may engage with some processes in the model and not others. Thus, the model outlines the typical pathway that clients and peers can take. Each component of the model and the processes within it are discussed below.



**Figure 2. Combined model of change mechanisms within IUPS.**



### ***The Peer Mentoring Role***

The literature covers various elements and considerations of the peer mentoring role in IUPS, including practical considerations such as training and supervision of peers and psychological elements such as self-reflection, self-determination, motivation and personal growth.

#### **Training and supervision**

The development of this practical element of the mechanism came from 19 articles that discussed the importance of training and supervising peers. The literature stated that professionals involved in the IUPS service must train peers in the context of the intervention and ensure that they are sufficiently supported in their role. For example, with the provision of supervision from clinical professionals and opportunities for group supervision (Pilote *et al.*, 1996; Mead *et al.*, 2001; Faulkner *et al.*, 2012; Crawford and Bath, 2013; Bowgett, 2015; Faulkner *et al.*, 2015). From an organisational standpoint, training and supervision represents good practice—it would be negligent to send peers out to support clients without sufficient training and support (National Lived Experience Advisory Council, 2016). Additionally, as the recovery process is not linear, training and supervision can enable the peer mentors to manage their own emotional reactions when there are relapses or breakdowns in the working alliance.

Training and supervision also confer numerous benefits for both peers and their clients and is key to successful IUPS. Adequate training not only serves to screen out those who may not be committed to being a peer, but also provides the peers with sufficient knowledge and confidence to begin helping (Bowgett, 2015). For example, peers may receive training in basic psychological skills, enabling them to effectively communicate empathy and acceptance and equipping them with the skills to navigate working alliances (Weissman *et al.*, 2005; Creamer *et al.*, 2012). While peers undoubtedly have a range of problem solving strategies, training may help with the real-time handling of problem solving and coping, enabling the provision of comprehensive and effective support to clients (Tulsky *et al.*, 2000).

Further, engaging with the organisation during training allows the peer to develop pro-social relationships with other peers and professionals (Moran *et al.*, 2012). This supportive environment fosters personal growth, and encourages peers to be self-reflective and self-determined (Moran *et al.*, 2012).

#### **Self-reflection and motivation**

This psychological element of the mechanism was included as articles reported that peers should be reflective in their work and strive for personal growth (Mead *et al.*, 2001; Campbell, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2012; Simoni *et al.*, 2011). Self-reflective practice involves fostering an atmosphere where peers can reflect on their interactions with clients and examine their own beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions (Mead

*et al.*, 2001; Bassot, 2015). Having the opportunity and encouragement to be reflective in their work helps peers to develop their sense of self as a helper / role model and improves how they help others (Bassot, 2015). Peers themselves also benefit from being in a supportive role and can experience an increased sense of interpersonal competence, increased knowledge, and social approval from their work (Reissman, 1965). Further, from their training, peers will have developed a self-reflective manner, and helping clients to do the same will compound benefits learned from their training (Mead *et al.*, 2001).

Self-reflection and motivation are linked, as reflecting on reasons for engaging in peer work, understanding the motivations that drive moving into a helping role deepens self-understanding. This introspection enables the peer to avoid making judgements or behave in a potentially discriminating manner.

Indeed, Moran *et al.*, (2014) found that while peers entered into IUPS for instrumental needs (employment), they mainly cited internal motivations including autonomy driven needs (aligning with personal values), relatedness needs (opportunity to connect to others), and competence driven needs (feeling confident and capable to help others). According to self-determination theory, the satisfaction of these three needs allows for optimal functioning and personal growth (Deci and Ryan, 2008). The literature echoes this – peers who experience personal growth are more likely to be autonomous and function better (Mead *et al.*, 2001; Moran *et al.*, 2012; Croft *et al.*, 2013). Further, successful working alliances between peers and clients are built upon self-determination, respect, and shared responsibility (Simoni *et al.*, 2011; Ahmed *et al.*, 2012). Thus, peers' motivations are important to successful IUPS, as they affect the working alliance and are integral to the quality of the support clients receive.

### ***Working Alliance***

The next step in the model is the working alliance between peer mentors and their clients. This relational mechanism was described in 33 of the 71 included articles as the main mechanism for successful IUPS. Thus, it is argued that the quality and strength of the working alliance will be directly related to client outcomes (Goering *et al.*, 1997; Solomon *et al.*, 1995; Hurley *et al.*, 2016). The impact of the working alliance on outcomes for peer mentors was also described by 11 included studies.

Gelso (2014, p.120) states that the “real relationship” (part of all human relationships) is the foundation of the working alliance that can develop in IUPS. Horvath and Greenberg (1989) describe a sense of bonding, agreement on goals, and a collaborative approach as components of an effective working alliance. Research

has shown that an increased sense of working alliance can result in increased feelings of recovery, and increased service satisfaction and recovery outcomes in peer interventions. (Moran *et al.*, 2014; Thomas and Salzer, 2017).

The included literature states that a successful working alliance in IUPS involves practical elements such as self-disclosure, storytelling, and a shared experience of hardship – and psychological elements including positive regard, normalisation, and empowerment.

### **Experiential knowledge**

The practical components of the working alliance are based around the idea of experiential knowledge. Thirty-six of the included 71 articles discussed some aspect of experiential knowledge, including shared experiences, self-disclosure, or storytelling.

Authors cited the importance of the relationship being built upon shared experiences and how peers share their “experience, strength, and hope” with clients (Whelan *et al.*, 2009, p.7). Peers and their clients will typically have a shared experience of hardship, which fosters a bond, building the working alliance. Specifically, Salzer (2002) and Solomon (2004) suggest that the element of shared experiences in peer support increases acceptance, normalises the client’s experiences, reduces isolation, and increases clients’ social networks.

A particularly important process in IUPS involves the dialogue between clients and peers (Ahmed *et al.*, 2012). Self-disclosures are thought to enhance the working alliance between peers and clients by creating a bond. The use of storytelling and self-disclosure by peers facilitates cognitive restructuring—giving clients a new perspective and opportunities to change their thought patterns based on peers as models (Adame and Leitner, 2008).

Peers also benefit from sharing their personal story, finding new ways to re-interpret their past and further developing their identity to integrate a new sense of purpose and meaning (Anderson, 1993; Moran *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, hearing the clients’ story allows peers to be inspired by their clients’ growth and serve as a point of reference to learn from others (Moran *et al.*, 2012). However, it is important to ensure self-disclosure is practiced safely – where the peer is trained to only share what they are comfortable with and perhaps trained to identify which parts of their own history would be especially useful for their clients (Moran *et al.*, 2012).

### **Positive regard**

This psychological component of the model arose from 13 articles that described the importance of an approach incorporating attitudes and expressions of acceptance, care and respect. Strengthened through experiential knowledge, peers are understanding of client situations and provide empathy – which builds and fosters the working alliance. Peers’ endeavour to be genuine, accepting, and understanding

in their work is consistent with client-centred approaches (Raskin and Rogers, 1989; Salzer, 2002; Campbell, 2008). The articles asserted that a peer-client working alliance characterised by high levels of empathy, understanding, active listening, and acceptance, leads to client outcomes such as higher levels of hope, autonomy, insights, and feeling understood (Connor *et al.*, 1999; Davidson *et al.*, 2006; Repper and Carter, 2011; Chinman *et al.*, 2014; Gillard *et al.*, 2015).

One way in which peers engage with clients is through active listening, which develops the working alliance and builds trust. Active listening creates a constructive dialogue that pursues “a mutual commitment to personal and social improvement” (Mead *et al.*, 2001, p.138). Listening with the intent to help allows both clients and peers to develop a new sense of self (Crawford and Bath, 2013; Croft *et al.*, 2013). It encourages the listener to become more engaged with the meaning of the story and the impact on the client—enhancing peers’ helping skills.

### **Normalisation**

The included studies identified the psychological process of normalisation as an integral aspect of IUPS. Normalisation was described as peers developing strong working alliances with clients, helping to normalise clients’ experience of hardship, including associated emotions and cognitions (Davidson *et al.*, 2006; Davidson *et al.*, 2012; Repper and Carter, 2011). Normalisation may serve as both a mechanism and an outcome in IUPS. Empirical literature identified normalisation as a mechanism in IUPS as it leads to an increased sense of wellbeing, self-care, and feelings of empowerment (Repper and Carter, 2011). Normalisation through the working alliance enables the client to feel more accepted and that they belong, perhaps increasing feelings of social support (e.g. emotional and companionship support). However, theoretical articles identified normalisation as an outcome of IUPS, that is, the shared experience of hardship with a peer mentor fosters feelings of normalisation for the client.

### **Empowerment**

The included studies also identified the psychological process of empowerment as an integral aspect of IUPS. Adame and Leitner (2008) define empowerment as the degree to which a client has the agency and ability to make choices about what is best for them within the service/system that they are receiving treatment from. Through IUPS, clients experience personal empowerment and take active roles in their recovery (Campbell, 2008). Empowerment is described as a mechanism of IUPS as it allows the client more freedom, control, and choices in their recovery from hardship. (Cadell *et al.*, 2001; Davidson *et al.*, 2006; Adame and Leitner, 2008; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Repper and Carter, 2011).

In IUPS, power differentials are lower than in typical 'helper-client' relationships (but are still present given the *unidirectional* nature of the mentoring process), allowing peers to connect with clients on a different level, which may also be empowering. Further, engaging with peers and their affiliated organisations can provide avenues to engage with social justice work and getting lived experience voices heard, helping to reduce social inequities and stigma, which may increase social empowerment.

As reflected in current IUPS services, empowerment and advocating for excluded populations is a key element of IUPS (Moran *et al.*, 2012; Bowgett, 2015). Peer-supporters learn about how to advocate for their clients and to empower them. This enables peers to learn about coping with different stressors and teach lessons that they can use in their own life. Peers inevitably learn about the methods that they teach to enhance coping strategies and can integrate their learning in their own lives (Borkman, 1976).

### **Experience-Based Social Support**

Eighteen of the 71 articles discussed types of social support. These types include informational, companionship, emotional, instrumental and appraisal social support. Social support, as a general concept, was discussed by seven of the included articles, as a key process, as an outcome, or both. We conceptualised the whole mechanism of experience-based social support as a practical component of the model, as providing support to someone else is a tangible process of 'doing'. This is not to suggest that psychological processes do not occur alongside the practical elements, indeed, attachment may play a role within receiving emotional and/or companionship support, however, none of the included articles discussed this.

Social support is defined as "an exchange of resources between two individuals... intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984, p.11). Shumaker and Brownell (1984) assert that an important aspect of social support involves self-disclosure. In the context of IUPS these self-disclosures are generally based upon shared experiences and this may help to facilitate development of the working alliance. Peers and clients must have similar goals, similar modes of helping/receiving help, and interpersonal skills to accept support (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984).

### **Informational social support**

The most common type of social support provided by peers is informational support, which supplies recipients with useful or required information to help cope with challenging situations (Lakey, 2000; Solomon, 2004). Fourteen studies highlighting informational support suggest that the provision of information regarding specific illnesses, treatments, or methods of coping lead to increased treatment

adherence, knowledge, and problem solving skills (Fogarty *et al.*, 2001; Deering *et al.*, 2009; Repper and Carter, 2011; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016), and stronger working alliances between peers and clients (Goering *et al.*, 1997).

Further, providing informational support to clients confers benefits for peers. When engaging in the process of informational support, peers consolidate and find the limits of their knowledge, which may prompt them to seek out more information and increase their knowledge base (Borkman, 1976).

### **Companionship social support**

Companionship support includes linking clients to a social network and could be conceptualised as ‘belonging’ support, (Lakey, 2000; Salzer, 2002). While the term ‘companionship’ may imply an informal, even friendly type of relationship, here it is described as a process that provides the client with a sense of belonging. Peers introduce clients to pro-social peers (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)) increasing their social networks and enabling clients to feel supported. Seven studies cited that companionship support, provided by peers, helps clients to experience increased self-esteem, confidence, efficacy, belonging, social functioning, and increased social networks (Blondell *et al.*, 2001; Weissman *et al.*, 2005; Rowe *et al.*, 2007; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Gabrielian *et al.*, 2013; Chinman *et al.*, 2014; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016). Companionship support can also lead to a stronger working alliance and thus better outcomes for clients.

### **Emotional social support**

Emotional support is the third most common type of social support reported by six included studies. Emotional support serves to elevate someone’s mood and help them to feel better about whatever situation they are in (Lakey, 2000). An example includes peers expressing how they understand how the client is feeling and showing empathy for their situation. Peers communicate expressions of caring to clients and this enables clients to develop hope and to reduce stigma associated with homelessness, mental illness, addiction, and/or ill health, and leads to increases in perceived levels of social support. Emotional support is found to be critical for positive outcomes early on in the working alliance between peers and clients (Whelan *et al.*, 2009) and leads to a stronger relationship (Goering *et al.*, 1997; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016). Thus, emotional social support helps to build the working alliance, fostering trust and an emotional bond.

Peers also benefit from providing emotional and companionship support, as they further develop their skills in effectively communicating empathy and compassion (Mead *et al.*, 2001; Creamer *et al.*, 2012) and become better helpers (Borkman, 1976).

### **Instrumental social support**

The fourth most common type of social support, discussed by three articles, involves the provision of tangible support, such as buying coffee, meals, supplying transportation, assistance completing paperwork, and locating services (Pilote *et al.*, 1996; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016) to help an individual to cope with an immediate need (Lakey, 2000). Through their respective organisations, peers have resources to help a client get to a doctor's appointment, meals, and find accommodation. These instances help to increase treatment adherence, strengthen the working alliance, and increase perceived levels of social support (Pilote *et al.*, 1996; Goering *et al.*, 1997; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016).

Peers may also benefit from this process. For example, providing instrumental support to clients, such as coffee or transportation, may help the peer to feel competent in their role as a peer mentor (Barker *et al.*, 2018).

### **Appraisal social support**

The final type of social support, appraisal support, is that information is useful for self-evaluation and encourages one to take actions and get feedback to resolve a problem (Lakey, 2000), which was discussed by three articles. Peers encourage clients to take action to change their situation, for example, to go to the GP or sleep in a hostel, and then provide positive communication / feedback to assess the outcome of these actions. This results in clients engaging in restructuring beliefs about themselves and their situation (Dennis, 2003; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016).

### ***Role Modelling***

Many of the included studies discussed the importance of role modelling in IUPS. Key theoretical articles suggest the role of social learning and social comparison in IUPS models (Salzer, 2002; Solomon, 2004). Social learning and social comparison theories are thought to underpin the role modelling mechanism in IUPS and form the psychological component of this mechanism of change in the model. Additionally, empirical literature often described that IUPS uses a strengths-based approach in advocating for clients and is added as a practical component in the model. Further, included studies discuss the impact of the role modelling mechanism on the peer.

### **Social learning**

Social learning is an active cognitive process that occurs within social contexts, where we learn from observing the behaviour of others, particularly when we perceive the model as similar to ourselves (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 2010).



Twenty articles discussed role modelling or mentoring, suggesting that IUPS involves a stable and more advanced peer to mentor the client through a *unidirectional* relationship, in phases of treatment. Mentoring involves peers using their experience to model specific behaviours and practices through various types of social support – a critical element of IUPS (Solomon, 2004; Bradstreet, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2012; Crawford and Bath, 2013; Gillard *et al.*, 2015). As peer mentors and their clients have a shared experience of hardship, in this case the model may be perceived as more similar to the client than in other ‘helping’ relationships, making it more likely that the client reproduces the modelled behaviour. Thus, social learning through role modelling/mentoring is identified as a key mechanism of change within the model.

Indeed, Solomon (2004, p.5) suggests, “enhanced self-efficacy occurs as a result of interactions with peers”, and role modelling/mentoring engenders numerous positive outcomes for clients including: increased self-esteem (Fors and Jarvis, 1995; Stewart *et al.*, 2009), hope (Davidson *et al.*, 2006; Davidson *et al.*, 2012; Resnick and Rosenheck, 2008; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Repper and Carter, 2011), improved coping methods (Galanter *et al.*, 1998; Resnick and Rosenheck, 2008; van Vugt *et al.*, 2012), and reduced drug and/or alcohol use (Stewart *et al.*, 2009; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Tracy *et al.*, 2012; Bean *et al.*, 2013; Tracy *et al.*, 2014).

The modelling process also benefits peers; Barker *et al.* (2018, p.11) found that being able to ‘inspire’ clients led peers to feel that their work is beneficial. Peers experience increased self-esteem, confidence, independence, higher levels of quality of life, and become better helpers from role modelling (Moran *et al.*, 2012; Croft *et al.*, 2013; Eisen *et al.*, 2015).

### **Social comparison**

Six included articles discussed how clients compare themselves to peers, viewing them as positive role models within the working alliance and citing social comparison as an important theoretical construct in explaining how clients benefit from IUPS (Salzer, 2002; Solomon, 2004; Bradstreet, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2012; Crawford and Bath, 2013).

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) centres on the belief that there is a drive within individuals to self-evaluate, comparing themselves to others in order to reduce uncertainty and learn how to define the self. While upward comparisons for those with low self-esteem usually results in negative self-evaluations (Wills, 1981; Buunk *et al.*, 1990), in IUPS, clients’ desire to have a valued social position and be associated with the peers can convert these upward comparisons into positive ones (Tracy *et al.*, 2012; Tracy *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, peers can help circumvent negative effects of upward comparisons by developing a strong working alliance with the client, increasing the clients’ self-efficacy and self-

esteem. Further, IUPS contributes to client identity development to a recovery narrative in defining the self through peers' modelled experiences (Mead *et al.*, 2001; Salzer, 2002; Campbell, 2008).

Further, peers can conduct positive self-evaluations of themselves, bolstering their self-esteem by comparing themselves to clients, serving as a reminder of their own journey. Additionally, Tracey *et al.*, (2012; 2014) suggest that the peer role is a valued social position, and peers report living with meaning and purpose while in a supportive role (Moran *et al.*, 2012; Barker *et al.*, 2018).

### **Strengths-based advocacy**

As described by Moran *et al.* (2012), the contextual factors that contribute to effective peer interventions include acceptance and valuing of lived experience. That is, the service (including personnel at all levels) prioritises and recognises the skills, insights, and abilities which are fostered through lived experience. There is also a focus on advocacy, where peers identify and break down barriers that clients often face in accessing services, developing and setting goals, reaching milestones, and generally, helping clients to learn how to self-advocate (Fogarty *et al.*, 2001; Rowe *et al.*, 2007; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016). Thus the final component of role modelling describes IUPS as a strengths-based advocacy approach.

The empirical literature states that IUPS uses a strengths-based approach to advocating for clients and is a mechanism in reducing stigma (Freddolino and Moxley, 1992; Rowe *et al.*, 2007; van Vugt *et al.*, 2012; Gillard *et al.*, 2015; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016). Strengths-based advocacy has been shown to lead to better outcomes for the clients including, higher engagement with services (Finlayson *et al.*, 2016), fewer hospital admissions and days (Repper and Carter, 2011; Davidson *et al.*, 2012), increased autonomy (Davidson *et al.*, 2006), and higher levels of hope (Solomon, 2004; Bradstreet, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Lloyd-Evans *et al.*, 2014). Further, a strengths-based approach enables clients to challenge internalised stigma, increasing hope (Gillard *et al.*, 2015).

### ***Refining the Model***

The final iterative search yielded papers that provided further considerations and additions to the IUPS model. The literature supported the overall model, and also highlighted that clients and peers may exit the IUPS process through any of the mechanisms.

For example, although the peer mentoring role confers benefits for peer mentors, it is possible for peers to have negative experiences while being a peer. For instance, peers may develop inappropriate relationships with clients, which leads to relapses or romantic relationships that interfere with their work (Barker *et al.*, 2018). They may also feel overwhelmed and quit because they lack support to cope with the

demands of the role. These events can be alleviated with thorough training and support from organisations. Peers must have support to navigate boundaries with clients (Mead, 2001; Mead *et al.*, 2003) and ensure that they do not engage in maladaptive behaviours that negatively impact their own or the client's recovery (Finlayson *et al.*, 2016). However, peers can also exit the service in a positive manner i.e. new job opportunities.

In terms of working alliance, further literature searches supported the mechanisms described as being vital to successful IUPS relationships. However, it is possible that working alliances between peers and clients may be unsuccessful. For example, a negative working alliance lacking trust has the potential to leave clients feeling that their peer was withholding support, engaging in detrimental behaviours such as gossiping, being controlling, and abusing their power. This may be prevented by peers taking time to develop trust, being available, sharing power and control, and listening (Coatsworth-Puspoky *et al.*, 2006).

Through IUPS, peer mentors provide multiple types of experience-based social support. However, clients may also desire different support and drop out of the service as they feel their needs are not being met (e.g. clients may require psychological therapies).

Finally, through the role modelling mechanism, clients can learn positive behaviours and skills (e.g. coping strategies) directly or indirectly from their peer-supporters. Conversely, clients can learn negative behaviours from their peer-supporters, make social comparisons that are damaging, and exit the service. Some of these potential undesirable outcomes are avoidable, given that the peer has adequate training and support to mitigate transfers of maladaptive behaviour (Tulsky *et al.*, 2000).

## Discussion

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This realist review sought to identify the mechanisms that underpin effective IUPS by reviewing literature on IUPS in various contexts. The initial search resulted in 57 articles examining IUPS within homelessness, addiction, mental and physical illness, and criminal justice areas. In accordance with realist methods, synthesis began focusing on theoretical literature in developing a preliminary model of IUPS. Next, a second model for empirical literature was developed with an emphasis on evidencing identified pathways. The two models were combined and a final literature search was conducted, where an additional 14 articles were included in the review. Synthesis resulted in a final model of IUPS. The model shows that both clients and peers experience mechanisms of the working alliance, role modelling, and experience-based social support. However, clients and peers experience each of these mechanisms differently.

### ***Summary of IUPS Process***

Peer mentors enter the process of IUPS when they take on a peer mentoring role. In an organisational context, they are provided with training and supervision and opportunities for self-reflection, self-determination, and personal growth. The peers themselves are *the* intervention and provide support to their clients through three main mechanisms: the working alliance, experience-based social support, and role modelling.

The working alliance between peers and their clients functions through experiential knowledge, positive regard, normalisation, and empowerment. As part of the intervention, peers may provide a variety of experience-based social support to clients (e.g. instrumental, emotional), strengthening the working alliance. The behaviours peers carry out when providing experience-based social support may then be modelled by their clients. The role modelling mechanism functions through social comparison, social learning, and strengths-based advocacy.

Clients voluntarily enter into IUPS and experience benefits through these mechanisms. Peers progress through the same mechanisms as clients, however, they experience different outcomes. Once clients have progressed to a point of stability and recovery, they can exit the services or they can continue in the IUPS pathway and begin the process of becoming a peer mentor, through training, self-reflection, and self-determination.

While these mechanisms potentially transcend contexts they are still a simplistic representation of the actual process of IUPS and the human relationships that develop. Clients can, and do, exit IUPS services at any point of this model—through the breakdown of a working alliance, negative social comparisons, and mismatched support needs, for example.

### **Outcomes for clients**

Peers and clients bond upon their shared experience of hardship, fostering a strong working alliance and improving outcomes for clients (Gidugu *et al.*, 2015; Solomon *et al.*, 1995). Strong working alliances, characterised by shared experiences, empathy, acceptance, and understanding, result in the client experiencing increased hope, self-esteem, empowerment, treatment engagement, decreased hospital days, isolation, and fewer missed appointments (Felton *et al.*, 1995; Connor *et al.*, 1999; Cadell *et al.*, 2001; Weissman *et al.*, 2005; Whelan *et al.*, 2009; Repper and Carter, 2011; Creamer *et al.*, 2012; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016).

Clients benefit from experience-based social support that peers provide to them directly and indirectly. For example, clients may receive instrumental support such as transportation and a meal prior to a doctor's appointment, but this event also serves to develop the working alliance and as an opportunity for the peer to share

some of their own story, model recovery, and develop their position as a role model. Peers model recovery through social interactions and sharing their personal stories with clients, which enables clients to feel as though they are able to achieve a similar lifestyle. This process leads to enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, hope, coping methods, and positive self-evaluations (Freddolino and Moxley, 1992; Solomon, 2004; Rowe *et al.*, 2007; van Vugt *et al.*, 2012; Finlayson *et al.*, 2016;).

### **Outcomes for peers**

Peers benefit from the helping relationship and develop their identity as a helper. For example, when peers share their own recovery stories with clients, they engage in a re-construction of their personal narratives. This encourages the peers to develop their identity and integrate their sense of self (Mead *et al.*, 2001; Moran *et al.*, 2012; Croft *et al.*, 2013). By developing strong working alliances, being admired and respected by clients, working in organisations that value lived experience, peer-supporters undergo an increased sense of interpersonal competence and social approval, which leads to them becoming better helpers and experiencing an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and coping skills (Borkman, 1976).

### ***Implications for practice***

It is important to note that this review highlights key aspects for service providers to consider when implementing or modifying IUPS interventions. These elements have been identified as integral to successful IUPS. Therefore, services may consider creating or amending policy around the peer role with consideration to the training and supervision of peers, namely processes that enable self-reflection, self-determination, motivation, and personal growth. However, flexibility is required given that reality is much more complex and organic than this paper could convey. The identified mechanisms could be considered when developing training materials for peers, and breakdowns in the working alliance could be used as sources of reflection for the peers.

### ***Strengths and Limitations***

The key limitation of this review is that it involved a significant amount of interpretation and arguably, could have been interpreted differently. To manage this, we attempted to be as explicit as possible in describing the methods and encourage readers to access our additional materials by contacting the first author to assess the progression of the synthesis. Included studies have different strengths and limitations but were not excluded on quality assessment scores. Overall, quality appraisal scores were moderate to high. Only nine articles scored less than 50% on the MMAT. There were very few randomised controlled trials, however it was common for studies to have comparison groups. The main limitation was the lack of randomisation and accounting for bias in empirical studies. Another limitation is that the literature search

was conducted by one researcher, although the research team was consulted throughout the search and synthesis process. This review did not delineate between genders of client groups, and although we attempted to be as broad as possible in our literature search/inclusion, there was no explicit discussion of the requirements for female service users. Arguably, service providers could match peers with clients who have similar life experiences (and this could include matching by gender), but should consider specific circumstances for their female service users. Lastly, this review is limited to peer support models that use IUPS. Thus, it cannot be generalised to interventions involving IBPS or peer-led interventions.

This review is strengthened by the diversity and number of included studies that enabled the development of the IUPS pathway. This enabled mechanisms to be identified across contexts and which are found to be key elements of IUPS. Additionally, the use of a systematic and well-described method for synthesising diverse sources of evidence, i.e. realist synthesis (Pawson and Bellamy, 2006; Wong *et al.*, 2013), strengthens this review. Further, the search was iterative, across multiple databases, and information was used from multiple sources (i.e. interviews, organisational reports, and grey literature). A further strength of this work is that the realist review was completed with theoretical and empirical sources from multiple contexts, resulting in a model that can transcend contexts and is useful for English-speaking researchers and practitioners across homelessness, mental health, addiction, and physical health IUPS interventions. Previous reviews have focused on the effectiveness of peer support and collectively, they have mixed or weak evidence for peer support (e.g. Repper and Carter, 2011; Lloyd-Evans *et al.*, 2014; Barker and Maguire, 2017). Presumably, this results from the embryonic nature of IUPS in the literature and the lack of clarity and defined concepts. Thus, this review serves as a cornerstone for future research to research the underlying mechanisms of different types of peer support.

### ***Future Research***

Included literature did not discuss the role of power and power differentials that can exist in IUPS models. Literature on IBPS often discusses how peer interventions reduce power differentials (e.g. Mead *et al.*, 2001). Arguably, power differentials are lowered in IUPS but they are still present and future research should explore how these do or do not affect the working alliance. Specifically, research should examine if/how power differentials are related to the provision of companionship and emotional support. Additionally, included literature lacked explanations for the psychological processes for peers in experience-based social support. Future research should evaluate and identify these process beyond the inferences made

in this paper. While we did find some literature that explains the process for peers, there is still a lack of understanding of how peers experience each of these mechanisms and future research should explore the assertions in this paper.

Future research could explore the nature of breakdowns in the relationships between peers and services and/or clients, identifying where in the mechanism this occurred. Further, future research should address the issues around terms and definitions identified in the introduction. Specifically, clarity is needed around what the term 'peer' actually describes and further understanding around common life experience.

With the development of this model identifying potential mechanisms that underpin IUPS's effectiveness, the following assertions can then be tested and potentially modified/elaborated on in different contexts: 1) the quality and strength of the working alliance has a direct impact on both client and peer outcomes, 2) through social learning and comparison, clients learn behaviours modelled by peers, which impact client outcomes, 3) being a role model has positive and negative impacts on peer outcomes, 4) peers provide all five types of social support, each having impacts on client outcomes and enhancing peers' effectiveness, and 5) training, supervision, support, and opportunities to be self-reflective are directly linked to peer-supporters' effectiveness.

### ***Conclusions***

IUPS use with a homeless population exploration in the literature is lacking and this review identified mechanisms specific to IUPS by examining a diverse range of literature on IUPS and other populations. The mechanisms are reported through a visual pathway model of how clients enter IUPS interventions and become peer-supporters. Clients develop a relationship with their peer-supporter, whom they learn from and compare themselves. Peers are role models for clients and provide them with various types of experience-based social support throughout their work. Peers benefit from entering into a helping role by experiencing identity development that integrates their sense of self and improves their self-esteem, confidence, and knowledge.

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# Experiences of Frontline Workers' Engagement with Mental Health Services for Homeless Adults in Ireland

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- **Abstract\_** *Ireland is experiencing a deepening homeless crisis with few sustainable solutions identified. This study explores front-line service providers' experiences in their engagement with mental health services for adult service users who are homeless within the South-East Region of Ireland. Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory approach was used to guide twenty in-depth interviews with front line service providers. Five key service gaps emerged: (1) inter-agency communication and collaboration; (2) assertive community recovery-orientated care; (3) training, information sharing and up-skilling; (4) building and sustaining trust, and (5) discharge planning and resource constraints. The findings suggest that the provision of bespoke tailored Mental Health Services, improved inter-agency collaboration and the development of relevant staff educational programmes are required. Further research to inform targeted service provision, policy and practice development is recommended.*
- **Keywords\_** *Homelessness, mental illness, front-line staff, barriers, challenges, Ireland*

## Introduction

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Ireland is experiencing a deepening homeless crisis (Government of Ireland, 2018), which is at the centre of political and social debate, with few sustainable solutions identified (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2018). Various approaches have been used to study groups of homeless people, for example, Kuhn and Culhane, (1998) identify three distinct clusters of homeless individuals: (1) transitional, (2) episodic and (3) chronic. Indeed, a recent Irish study found that an average of eighty percent of people who experience transitional forms of homelessness remain homeless for just a short period of time and this experience is not repeated. This situation is comparable to similar studies conducted in America, Canada and Denmark (Waldron *et al.*, 2019).

Homelessness has a human cost encompassing emotional distress from intense social isolation, stigma and loneliness (McGrath *et al.*, 2015; Pleace, 2015; Abiri *et al.*, 2016). People experiencing homelessness are often exposed to trauma (FEANSTA, 2017), such as street violence, victimisation and entrapment within street sub-culture (Hopper *et al.*, 2010; Davies and Allen, 2017), with their physical and emotional health deteriorating as they become entrenched in long term repeated homelessness (Murphy *et al.*, 2017; McMordie, 2018; Singh *et al.*, 2019). Socio-economic influences such as poverty, stigmatization and marginalization compound the difficulties a homeless person with mental health issues may experience, which negatively impacts their engagement with local mental health supports (Montgomery *et al.*, 2013).

The prevalence of mental illness amongst people experiencing chronic and episodic forms of homelessness averages at sixty percent compared to fifteen percent in the general population (Murphy *et al.*, 2017). In terms of serious mental illness, it is argued that socioeconomic deprivation combined with living with a serious mental illness is more likely to account for a risk for homelessness rather than just the prevalence of the illness itself. This highlights the importance for more intense secondary and tertiary mental health service provision (Montgomery *et al.*, 2013). Admissions to Irish psychiatric hospitals between 2005 and 2014 indicate that nearly sixty per cent of homeless people have a mental or behavioural diagnosis with evidence of deliberate self-harm (Barrett *et al.*, 2017), which is an increase of fifty per cent over this period (Glynn *et al.*, 2017). Dual diagnosis, for example, depression with an underlying substance misuse disorder, is more prevalent among homeless people than in the general population (Millier *et al.*, 2014; Glynn *et al.*, 2017) with an upward trend in suicidal behaviour (Edidin *et al.*, 2012; Department of Health, 2015; Office of National Statistics, 2019). Homelessness has also significantly increased among drug users in Ireland (Fazel *et al.*, 2014; O'Brien *et al.*, 2015) with the Central Methadone Treatment lists showing a rise in attendees from 5 500 to 11 500 during this period (HSE, 2016).

People experiencing homelessness often experience a paradox in their care provision, occurring because their health needs become more complex and the availability of services to meet their growing needs becomes restricted (Dunne *et al.*, 2012; Dear and Wolch, 2014). For example, those with a dual diagnosis of active drug/alcohol dependency, coupled with an underlying mental illness may experience exclusion from mainstream mental health services. This occurs because many times addiction services do not have the capacity or expertise in the wider field of mental health care (Canavan *et al.*, 2012; Fazel *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, people who are experiencing chronic forms of homelessness often have limited knowledge of the range of mental health services available to them (Krausz *et al.*, 2013; Chant *et al.*, 2014) 2014). Those who do have a chaotic lifestyle and poor engagement with services challenge mental health providers in their efforts to provide optimum care (Canavan *et al.*, 2012) with a need for the provision of more tailored interventions (Tyler *et al.*, 2019).

Australian homeless policy has integrated an assertive outreach model for managing homelessness, which is adapted from UK and USA best practice guidelines integrating focused interventions into service delivery (Parsell *et al.*, 2013). A review of Emergency Department presentations by homeless people with addiction issues suggest that psycho-social interventions such as assertive outreach is a valuable support for their recovery (Parkman *et al.*, 2017). In Ireland, mental health care for homeless people is limited, complicated by this population being unable to positively engage with most support services (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2011; 2018). Delivering quality mental health care is further impacted by factors such as staff shortages and increased economic challenges (Cullen *et al.*, 2017; HSE, 2020). Emergency Departments often become the de-facto primary and acute care provider for mental health service users (The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2010) and are often the only out-of-hours mental health supports available for homeless people in crisis (Ceannt *et al.*, 2016; Farrell *et al.*, 2016; Murphy *et al.*, 2017), with limited engagement from the homeless person to the care offered (Lam *et al.*, 2016). Arguably bespoke mental health services could mitigate against protracted hospital admissions and unnecessary presentations to Emergency Departments (Pleace, 2015).

Front-line service providers working with homeless adults face many challenges in their work with mental health services (Canavan *et al.*, 2012; Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). Safetynet, an innovative free Dublin based primary health care service (Keogh *et al.*, 2015) targeting the health care needs of homeless people, has reported significant increases in GP attendance, health diagnoses and reduced hospital presentations. Ongoing training and up-skilling of key hospital and community front-line staff is recommended so that evidence-based recovery-orientated mental health care which is culturally and human rights sensitive is offered (WHO, 2013; Jones

and Radford, 2015). There is limited research that explores the challenges faced by front-line workers and homeless people who are mentally unwell and solutions required to meet their needs. Therefore, this paper presents the findings of a study that explores the challenges that front-line staff experience within the South-East Region of Ireland.

## Methodology and Approach

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A qualitative methodology using Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory approach was used. Initially, data collection was guided by purposive sampling with the principle of selection directed by the researcher's judgement as to the 'typicality' of the group (Robson, 2002). As initial coding and concepts emerged from the data, this led to a theoretical sampling approach guiding and developing the sample (n=20). Homeless Action Team (HAT) members were recruited and consisted of sixteen females and four males ranging in ages from thirty to sixty years. They work across a range of local homeless services, Department of Justice, youth and addiction services, community health and hospitality sectors. Interviews ranged from 30 to 70 minutes and permission to audio-record interviews was granted. A topic guide used to steer discussion and data, was entered into a qualitative data analysis computer package – NVivo 11. This software package was used to facilitate data storage and management only. Data analysis followed Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three levels for coding (1) open coding to find categories and their properties; (2) axial coding to identify interconnections between categories and (3) selective coding and moving to a more abstract level to establish the core category or in the case of this study five key processes. The method of constant comparison was used as well as memo writing. Ethical approval was granted by the HSE South East and Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland.

## Findings

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Five key processes emerged: (1) inter-agency communication and collaboration; (2) assertive community recovery-orientated care; (3) training, information sharing and up-skilling; (4) building and sustaining trust, and (5) discharge planning and resource constraints.

### *Inter-agency communication and collaboration*

Front-line workers recognise that quality mental health services are offered for homeless people; however, such services are not consistent in terms of communication and collaboration across the relevant community agencies and care departments. The inter-agency shared care and case management framework is viewed

as inadequate, leading to front-line workers feeling ill-equipped to effectively case manage. Many workers expressed concerns relating to insufficient information regarding the homeless person's mental health not being provided from the relevant treating teams. Concerns were reported that standards of communication between relevant departments within mental health services and the front-line staff supporting the homeless person were inadequate. Staff were uneasy about *'weak and disjointed interactions... with connections... missing between all services... a kind of a block'* (P16) that compromised recovery. There is a lack of transparency and communication of treatment plans due to limited *'background information on a [homeless] person's mental health status'* (P6).

There is a view that mental health services do not adequately facilitate inter-agency shared care arrangements for homeless people. As one front-line worker stated *'... mental health services don't really tell me anything because of confidentiality, so I just try to handle the lads [service users] myself the best I can'* (P7). This leads to front-line workers feeling *'abandoned'* in terms of shared care planning and worry about the potential risk posed to service users. Furthermore, service user's recovery is compromised as a result of a limited approach to the implementation of a recovery model of care, within a dominant medicalised mental health care system. Such services are reported as being reactive, which results in high levels of *'frustration'* among many front-line staff. They suggest that, frequently, homeless people have no choice but to access mental health service through very often overcrowded Emergency Departments particularly during out-of-hours time frames.

A lack of follow-up care for homeless people is a concern expressed by many front-line workers. Limited awareness by care and administration staff regarding the transient nature of homeless people leads to appointments being sent to incorrect or out-of-date addresses. Other challenges as a result of not having proof of address include; claiming welfare benefits, difficulty in registering with a primary care practice and processing medical cards. As one front-line worker states *'the medical card issue is huge and then not having a General Practitioner or a mental health outreach worker... affects their mental health care'* (P14).

General Practitioners are often regarded as gatekeepers to mental health services and front-line workers feel that they are at times *'unwilling to refer homeless people for expert mental health care'* (P18). In addition, front-line staff report that homeless people lack knowledge regarding where services are located or the nature of care and supports offered by these services. It is felt that homeless people do not prioritise their mental health care and /or their attendance to services. This can often be due to a denial or poor insight of their mental health problems, living chaotic lives, poor self-confidence, underlying social phobias or feeling embarrassed about their appearance due to sleeping rough in squats or open spaces.

There is a need for mental health professionals to have stronger links with hostels for homeless people. Front-line staff feel the need for community clinics to be provided, where primary care services, housing advice, welfare supports, befriending and peer support services can be offered. A policy requirement by voluntary housing providers of not housing tenants in supported long-term accommodation unless they have comprehensive mental health supports in place, such as counselling and medication management is challenging, as assertive outreach mental health services are not available in many catchment areas. This leads to marginalisation and further isolation for the homeless person in need of care.

### ***Assertive community recovery orientated care***

Tailored outreach and in-reach assertive community recovery orientated care services are required. Such services are viewed as '*helpful*' due to homeless people being reluctant to engage with mainstream services as a result of their '*chaotic lifestyles*'. Homeless people do not prioritise their recovery due to their '*struggles with isolation and inability to cope*' with the many challenges that confront them, further compromised due to limited availability of relevant mental health supports in their areas.

Women's refuge centres are unable to accept homeless women engaged in active addictions, highlighting the need for separate homeless women's emergency accommodation. Furthermore there is no hospital diagnostic coding system to track hospital care and the complex '*accommodation needs of homeless people*' (P3) challenges robust discharge care planning.

The value and support offered by liaison mental health services designated to care for homeless people with mental illness is widely acknowledged. However, limitations to their role are noted, particularly in relation to covering large geographical areas and related responsibilities. Front-line workers report that homeless service users often feel '*abandoned*' by their mental health teams and are '*scared*' to approach services. A designated community outreach case manager, such as a nurse or social worker is required to aid continuity of care for service users with advanced skills in counselling and addiction issues who would be attached to each treating team. This is viewed as a means to building therapeutic relationships between homeless people, mental health care teams and front-line workers. As suggested by one front-line worker that '*it's very hard to expect a homeless person to fit into a system designed for those in stable housing, they have different priorities*' (P7).

Most front-line workers feel '*isolated*', expressing concerns that they are often unable to access mental health teams or other multi-disciplinary staff who are skilled in counselling and challenges related to dual diagnoses. Front-line workers suggest that

homeless people are '*...lone ranger[s] in the community... there is no recovery orientated care... no team...no staff member to call to see them from mental health teams who know about addictions and have counselling skills...*' (P12).

The lack of assertive in-reach care to where the person is living was also highlighted. Bespoke mental health services are required to help meet the specific needs of people who were previously homeless who are now housed. This is because they are at risk of losing their new home due to potential deterioration in their mental health and being unable to manage their tenancy. As one worker suggested '*... when the supports from here are gone and they [homeless person], are on their own, that's when they are really vulnerable, and things break down and they lose their home*' (P10).

### ***Training, information sharing and up-skilling***

Inter-agency collaboration, shared care and case management practices are limited and front-line workers acknowledge they have limited training in the areas of '*risk assessment*'... , '*therapeutic interventions... behaviour management techniques*' (P12), '*mental health and managing substance misuse issues*' (P3). Front-line workers have concerns regarding their ability to manage a mental health or substance misuse crisis and subsequent case management issues. They worry that they do not have the skills to support a homeless person's recovery from mental illness and live a meaningful life. Advanced training in medication management could minimise crises occurring and as one front-line worker suggests that they cope by '*... learning on the job... nobody is here to support us from the treating teams, I google everything in relation to medications*', (P6). Risks minimisation through enhanced mental health care and case management is argued for. A greater understanding of professional roles and responsibilities particularly in relation to nursing and social worker roles is required as such roles are often unclear. Referral pathways and assertive outreach practices, such as interventions by community pharmacies could act as a central point for providing relevant supports. Mental health service updates could include mental health service professionals contact details, '*service update emails... directory of services... and service information days*' (P5).

### ***Building and sustaining trust***

Front-line workers describe a limited understanding of how mental health services are configured and the supports available, with a notable lack of trust and respect evident between homeless people and service providers that affect the therapeutic relationship. Front-line workers feel isolated from statutory health services, which results in poor information sharing. This is further reinforced by a perceived stigma of homeless people by service providers. Consequently, front-line workers suggest

that the homeless person may feel ‘... *threatened... unsupported and judged by them* [mental health service providers]’ (P5), with breaches of confidentiality often reported to front-line workers. As a result, homeless people are reluctant to consent to share information with services.

Front-line staff report that many homeless people are frustrated by long waiting lists for mental health and homeless services. Homeless people are discouraged by the mental health system as they are repeatedly asked to deal with their substance misuse and alcohol related problems. As one front-line worker states:

*‘What they [homeless people] experience is constantly being asked to give up substances, when they are actually looking for something to help them deal with their anxiety and depression’* (P1).

Many front-line workers report that service users prefer the use of non-pharmacological therapy such as counselling interventions, but the emphasis appears to be mainly on medication therapy. Some report that homeless people can be intimidated by the perceived authoritative nature of care services. However, efforts by mental health service providers and the bespoke services available are acknowledged by front-line workers in their efforts to engage homeless people prior to discharge from services.

### ***Discharge planning and resource constraints***

The absence of a discharge policy for homeless people has a significant impact for planning and managing after-care and recovery. This is further complicated as homeless people report to front-line workers that discharge planning is not ‘*person-centred*’. ‘*We [front line workers] seem to be working in isolation... there is no discharge policy with clear responsibilities... for staff to know what to do when discharging the [homeless] person...*’ (P13).

Homeless people are often poorly informed about their discharge plan and can be discharged with a prescription for medication and often not registered with a primary care service to follow this up. Front-line workers receive little or no notice of discharges, resulting in poor follow-up in the community. The practice of discharge for non-attendance following two missed outpatient appointments is also challenging as quite often appointments are sent to incorrect addresses.

Front line workers feel isolated in their work with homeless people as ‘*there is often no follow through when someone is discharged... they just turn up at your door and that’s it... we feel abandoned*’ (P2). This is further complicated by a lack of out-of-hours mental health and social work services, which negatively impacts meaningful engagement with services during crises periods. Services required include a



women's emergency shelter, a damp house, which is a space where homeless people can drink in a controlled way, and the provision of short and long-term supported accommodation options that will optimise recovery.

## Discussion

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The Mental Health Commission in Ireland recommend that statutory services should work more closely with non-health stakeholders to identify and address gaps in mental health care (Mental Health Commission, 2016), with a greater emphasis for improving quality care for homeless people (Partnership for Health Equality, 2015; Murphy *et al.*, 2017). Findings from this study are consistent with previous research that suggests that care agencies should improve their partnership with each other to facilitate effective services (Maher and Allen, 2014; Casey and Farrelly, 2016; Tyler *et al.*, 2019). The provision of integrated care between hospital and community agencies for the homeless is complex and requires greater efforts by all care agencies to ensure quality care (Stergiopoulos *et al.*, 2015; Mental Health Foundation, 2015). However, there is little consensus regarding how integrated care should be configured and implemented (Burrows *et al.*, 2013; Kaehne, 2015; Tyler *et al.*, 2019). Developing integrated services that minimise barriers and retains the ability for communities to respond to political and financial sensitive environments is required (Shaw *et al.*, 2011; Anderson *et al.*, 2012). The introduction of the Irish Mental Health Service Providers Self-Auditing Guidelines (Health Service Executive, 2017) has potential whereby care providers can compare service delivery against international best practice frameworks (Almond and Esbester, 2018).

Promoting mental health recovery for homeless people requires strong inter-agency collaboration and agreed shared care protocols (Stergiopoulos *et al.*, 2010; Kelly *et al.*, 2011). A shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities by the various professionals and agencies working with homeless people is required in order to galvanise cohesive working arrangements (Royal College of Nursing, 2011; Bee *et al.*, 2015). Similar findings were expressed by front-line workers in this study with role ambiguity affecting shared care and inter-agency collaboration (Kelly *et al.*, 2011). For example, there are no clear job descriptions detailing responsibilities for the accommodation needs of homeless service users (Manthorpe *et al.*, 2013; Manktelow *et al.*, 2016) and very often the role of the social worker tends to be dominated by issues relating to child protection and probation matters (Maddock, 2015). Too often a blurring of professional roles and boundaries can negatively impact the division of work within mental health teams, particularly in the area of social work and addressing the housing needs of homeless people (Maddock, 2015; Thompson, 2015) leading to poor discharge planning (Mental Health Commission, 2010). This absence of an agreed discharge policy is a barrier for

positive mental health outcomes (Gonçalves-Bradley *et al.*, 2016; Lamann *et al.*, 2018). The National Homeless Discharge Guidelines were introduced to address such issues (Health Service Executive, 2016) with political will to implement now required (Tyler *et al.*, 2019).

Findings from this study suggest that assertive outreach mental health services are a positive means to incentivise proactive engagement of homeless people with appropriate health services. Such services can be delivered through existing mainstream community care or through the provision of targeted mental health outreach services that recognise the unique needs of homeless people (Canavan *et al.*, 2012). In-reach care provision for those in temporary accommodation prevents illness relapse and subsequent loss of tenancy (Irish Psychiatry, 2011) with outreach and shelter-based care being central to the delivery of mental health care for the homeless (Phillips and Parsell, 2012; Nazari and Raistrick, 2014; Pauly, 2014).

Front-line workers identified a training need for case management and further education in the Stepped Model and Trauma Informed Care approaches as trauma is often experienced by homeless people (Huckshorn and LeBel, 2013). Previous research identifies a need for enhanced educational supports and skills development with regards to crisis management (Dowds and McCluskey, 2011; Kelly *et al.*, 2011; WHO, 2013; Welsh *et al.*, 2016) and this is reinforced by a lack of out-of-hours mental health crisis teams (Henwood *et al.*, 2015; Maddock, 2015; Ceannt *et al.*, 2016). Front-line workers identified effective case management, coupled with agreed inter-agency protocols as central to supporting homeless people to positively engage with services (Maher and Allen, 2014). Further research is required to assess the specific health needs of homeless people within a person-centred model of care (Mills *et al.*, 2015; Hippl *et al.*, 2016).

Historically, Irish mental health services have been poorly resourced, which has had a negative effect on the care of homeless people and their limited capacity to engage with the necessary services (Partnership for Health Equality, 2015; Murphy *et al.*, 2017). However, targeted primary mental health services have demonstrated effectiveness in engaging homeless people within mainstream health care delivery locally and nationally (Keogh *et al.*, 2015; Partnership for Health Equality, 2015). A lack of supported accommodation hinders positive engagement with mental health services (National Disability Authority, 2013) resulting in delayed interventions (Partnership for Health Equality 2015).

Front-line workers identified a range of accommodation options required for homeless people, which include a women's emergency hostel (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2015), mental health day care centres with a specific focus on homelessness and the provision of high support residential units (Fazel *et al.*, 2014). They suggest that Irish homeless services are predominantly modelled on a 'male experi-

ence' which are unsuitable for women leading to further marginalisation, trauma and distress (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2015). Consequently, gender-sensitive strategies to incentivise homeless women to engage with services are required, whereby specific targeted interventions such as trauma informed care are offered (Machtlinger *et al.*, 2015) which respects the autonomy and dignity of women (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016).

Arguably, mental health facilities should be co-located and integrated within wider mainstream community services. Such targeted service provisions could include multi-disciplinary specialised primary care services with user-friendly referral routes, both to and from mainstream primary and secondary care (Irish Psychiatry, 2011; HSE, 2020). Self-explanatory information leaflets detailing treatment options, along with the development of a housing clinic and expanding mental health clinics are identified as potential resources for meeting the complex mental health needs of homeless people (Tam, 2010). Furthermore, a directory of mental health services with updated service lists are required (Health Service Executive 2010; Health Service Executive, 2011; Dowds and McCluskey, 2011; Health Service Executive, 2016).

Homeless people face great difficulty in securing medical cards which negatively impacts their engagement with both primary and secondary mental health services (Simon Communities of Ireland 2013; The Journal.ie, 2018). The following service provisions are required; designated primary care services, a more simplified medical care application process, the availability of a homeless services generic medical card (Canavan *et al.*, 2012; Simon Communities of Ireland, 2013; Bonevski *et al.*, 2014), and improved intra and inter-agency collaborative care protocols (Downey, 2011; Kaehne, 2015) to enhance the care of homeless people with mental health problems. This would require tailored staff training with agreed discharge policies, guided by the Stepped Model of Care (Simon Communities of Ireland, 2018) and Trauma Informed Care approaches. (Lambert *et al.*, 2017) In addition, hospital in-patient diagnostic coding is required to assist in monitoring incidents of homelessness and this would in turn reduce hospital costs, as protracted admissions and readmissions would be reduced. (Hwang *et al.*, 2011). To conclude, findings from this study suggest that the provision of bespoke tailored mental health services, improved inter-agency collaboration, tailored community services and the development of relevant staff educational programmes are required. Further research targeting dedicated service provision, policy and practice development is recommended to optimise recovery and quality of care for homeless people.

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# Understanding the Experiences of Homelessness Hostel Staff who have Found the Body of a Deceased Hostel Resident: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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➤ **Abstract\_** *Working in a homelessness hostel can involve exposure to stressful and distressing situations. Finding the body of a deceased resident may be an example of such a situation, but little is known about what experiencing this might be like. The aim of this cross-sectional research was to explore experiences of UK homelessness hostel staff who had found the body of a deceased resident. Eight participants completed semi-structured interviews and an Impact of Events Scale-Revised questionnaire (Weiss, 2007). Interview data were analysed via interpretative phenomenological analysis. Most participants described emotional distress seemingly influenced by bodies' often-upsetting physical presentations, feeling unprepared, and reminders of the experience. Participants attempted to understand their experience to cope and obtain closure, and found meaning in awareness of existential issues and fundamental changes. Perceptions of inadequate organisational support appeared frustrating but informed views on what support should involve. The findings demonstrate the potentially distressing and traumatic experience of finding a dead body in this context and the perceived lack of support. Staff reactions have been theoretically linked with aspects of bereavement and grief. Implications for homelessness practice are discussed. Homelessness organisations should consider staff experiences and review their ability to provide proactive, timely, and adequate support.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Homelessness, staff, death, trauma, bereavement*

## Introduction

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Working in homelessness hostels can be challenging; hostel staff report high levels of stress, vicarious trauma, and burnout (Waegemakers-Schiff and Lane, 2016), and have complained of feeling frustrated, powerless, and unheard (Cockersell, 2015). Working with homeless people might be particularly challenging because of their pronounced physical, psychological, and social needs: people classified as homeless are more likely to have experienced childhood abuse than the general population (Sundin and Baguley, 2015), often have complex histories including experiences of trauma, abuse, and violence (Hopper *et al.*, 2009), and experience higher-than-typical rates of mental health difficulties (Rees, 2009; Mental Health Foundation, 2015) characterised by complex trauma (Maguire *et al.*, 2009).

Homelessness sector staff are regularly “faced with highly stressful events” (Waegemakers-Schiff and Lane, 2016, p.7) and are “constantly exposed to those who are traumatised and to traumatic situations” (Waegemakers-Schiff and Lane, 2019, p.454). This research focuses on one specific and potentially stressful, distressing, or traumatic situation hostel workers encounter by exploring the experiences of staff who have found bodies of deceased residents.

### *Homelessness and mortality*

Some evidence has suggested that mortality rates in people classified as homeless are higher than in the general population; age-adjusted risk of death for these people is up to six-times higher than those in the UK general population (Thomas, 2012). However, the data used to calculate these mortality rates do not differentiate between those that could be categorised as transitionally homeless (approximately 80%; Culhane and Kuhn, 1998; The People’s Project, 2020) and those who are episodically (approximately 10% (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998) to 15% (The People’s Project, 2020)) or chronically homeless (approximately 5% (The People’s Project, 2020) to 10% (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998)). This is meaningful given evidence suggesting that episodically or chronically homeless individuals have higher rates of death than those who are transitionally homeless or the general population (Culhane and Kuhn, 1998). Regardless, people classified as homeless in the UK appear more likely to die young: the mean age of death for people classified as homeless in the UK in 2017 was 44 for men and 42 for women, compared to general population means of 76 and 81 respectively (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018). Over half of deaths of people classified as homeless in the UK in 2017 were caused by suicide, drug poisoning, or liver disease, causes which accounted for only 3% of general population deaths (ONS, 2018). Compared to the general population, people classified as homeless are three-and-a-half times more likely to die by suicide, seven to nine times more likely to die of alcohol-related causes, and 20 times more likely to die of drug-

related causes (Thomas, 2012). The Museum of Homelessness (2019) estimated that in the first six months of 2019 more than 30% of deaths of people classified as homeless occurred in accommodation settings including hostels. In the UK, rates of deaths of people classified as homeless sadly appear to be increasing; per-year deaths have increased by 24% since 2013 (Independent, 2018). Compared to 9% homeless population growth in the three years between 2016 and 2018 (Shelter, 2018), latest three-year figures (2015 to 2017) for deaths of homeless people indicate an increase of 18% (ONS, 2018), meaning the likelihood of hostel staff encountering death in their work has probably increased in the UK.

### ***Relevant research***

There is limited research related to the topic of homelessness sector workers and death of homeless people. However, grounded theory research conducted by Lakeman (2011) explored how workers in the Irish homelessness sector “make sense of, respond to, and cope with” (p.925) sudden deaths of homeless people. Lakeman found that workers wanted to positively frame the death, had not anticipated the deaths, and suppressed difficult emotions.

Although the topics are similar, this research differs from Lakeman’s (2011). Firstly, this research focuses specifically and exclusively on experiences of homelessness hostel staff who found bodies of deceased residents, whereas participants in Lakeman’s research worked in various settings and multi-disciplinary professions. Further, only “some” (p.931) participants had found dead bodies; others were informed of deaths by service users, other staff, or in meetings. Secondly, Lakeman utilised a modified grounded theory methodology which generates constructs that cannot be traced back to individual participants. In contrast, data in this research were analysed thematically and interpretatively with a phenomenological underpinning to preserve fidelity and identify patterns common to the individual experiences of staff. In this approach an audit trail of the data analysis ensures that emergent themes can be reconnected to individual interviews. Such findings in turn contribute to generating tentative new theories that can be further tested empirically.

### ***Rationale***

In the UK, mortality rates of people classified as homeless are higher than the general population and while both are increasing, rates of deaths of these people appear to be increasing faster than the rate of growth of the number of people classified as homeless. Therefore, the likelihood of homelessness staff encountering death has probably increased. Due to the lack of specifically relevant research, the experiences of homelessness staff finding dead bodies are not well understood. Understanding this specific experience may benefit homelessness practitioners and organisations.

## ***Aim***

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of homelessness hostel staff who had found the body of a deceased resident.

## **Method**

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### ***Design***

A cross-sectional interview design was employed. Qualitative data obtained via semi-structured interviews were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) because it facilitates analysis of “detailed examinations of personal lived experience in its own terms rather than one prescribed by pre-existing theoretical preconceptions” (Smith and Osborn, 2015, p.41). IPA is therefore particularly useful for exploratory research such as this where there is little underpinning theoretical understanding. Data from the Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) (Weiss, 2007) were also collated. Responses on this questionnaire provided reference points relating to trauma-related symptoms with which interview responses were contextualised.

### ***Researcher background and subjective position***

The first author is a Clinical Psychologist who, prior to the research, facilitated reflective practice groups for staff in two homelessness hostels for nine months. During these groups, three instances of bodies of deceased residents being found by staff were discussed. The first author’s subjective position prior to the research was that the experience appeared to have been considerably upsetting to some staff. The second author is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Programme Director for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology course at the University of Plymouth. She is a member of the committee for the Bereavement Research Forum and a founder member of a charitable bereavement support service.

### ***Ethics***

Ethical approval was provided by the University of Plymouth (18/19-1085). All identifying information has been removed or anonymised. Informed consent was obtained.

### ***Recruitment***

Representatives of 15 homelessness hostels in nine UK locations were contacted about the research. Managers of four of these hostels agreed to facilitate recruitment via purposive sampling.



## Participants

Eight staff from three of the four recruiting homelessness hostels participated. Participants were heterogenous in age, gender, time spent working in homelessness, time since finding the body, and job role. Table 1 outlines basic demographic characteristics of participants and the respective deceased people whose bodies were found. To protect confidentiality, specific ages, time working in homelessness, and organisations are not listed. Seven participants were White British, one was White European. Participant ages ranged from 22 to 52 (mean 40.3). Time working in homelessness ranged from 15 months to 28 years (mean 7.9 years). Five participants were support workers; three were in leadership roles. Two participants found the same deceased person, Rose. Four of the seven deaths were caused or suspected to have been caused by overdose; three had natural causes.

**Table 1. Participant and Deceased Resident Demographic Information**

Participant Name <sup>1</sup>	Time Since Body Found	Deceased Resident Name	Deceased Resident Age Range	Cause of Death
Catherine	2 years, 1 month	Rose	30-39	(Suspected) Overdose
Roz	2 years, 1 month	Rose	30-39	(Suspected) Overdose
Chloe	6 months	James	30-39	Overdose
Samuel	6 years	Simon	40-49	(Suspected) Overdose
Jessica	1 year	Fred	55-64	Pulmonary embolism
Danielle	6 years	Peter	40-49	Brain haemorrhage
Joel	8 months	Christopher	50-59	(Suspected) Cardiac arrest
Jim	1 year	Bill	50-59	(Suspected) Overdose
<i>N females=5</i>	<i>M=2.5 years</i>		<i>(Estimated) M=46.3</i>	
<i>N males=3</i>	<i>R=0.5-6 years</i>		<i>(Estimated) R=38-59</i>	

## Procedure

Participants completed the IES-R (Weiss, 2007) prior to interviews, which lasted 60 to 100 minutes. Following interviews participants were debriefed. Additional signposting information was provided to participants whose IES-R scores were above a suggested 'clinical concern' cut-off (Asukai *et al.*, 2002).

## Method of analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed individually in chronological order using a stepwise IPA process outlined by Smith *et al.* (2009).

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonymised to protect confidentiality and reduce likelihood of identification.

## Results

Six master themes were identified.

**Table 2. Master Themes**

Master Themes	Subordinate Themes
Memories of the body	-
Preparedness to find a body	Feeling unprepared Part of the job <sup>(d)</sup>
Significant impacts	Feeling distressed Environmental reminders
Trying to cope	Coping well Coping poorly
Searching for meaning and understanding	Understanding the death Existential issues and fundamental changes
Support	Positive organisational support <sup>(d)</sup> Inadequate organisational support The value of informal support

Master themes were recurrent in the majority of participants' responses. Additional subordinate themes were mostly recurrent, although two represent divergence<sup>(d)</sup> from the other subordinate themes encapsulated by a master theme. This section describes identified themes, including exemplar quotes, and represents an interpretation of the participants' interpretations of their experiences.

### ***'Memories of the body'***

All participants were able to recall detailed information about the physical presentation of the body they had found. Six participants noted disturbing and emotionally upsetting physical bodily presentations, most commonly its appearance and smell:

*"the smell was a very distinctive smell, it was... like knacker's lorries that pick up dead animals from farms."* – Samuel

*"what we saw that day was really severe, like really horrific... I've never seen a human body look like that."* – Chloe

Physical processes relating to death such as *rigor mortis*, fluid leakage, and discoloration seemed to cause distress. These processes made physical contact particularly challenging:

*"the horrible thing was as I touched him, he sort of went that way (gestures falling sideways) because he - obviously rigor mortis or whatever. He was stiff..."*  
– Danielle

Some participants were so averse to physical contact that they were hesitant to interact with the body physically, even when requested by emergency call handlers:

*“they wanted me to flip her over, do CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation)... and I said “Look, you know, I can’t”. I did move her as requested, which is when I realised that she was stuck solid and I said “Look, I’m not flipping her over, I’m not doing any of that stuff”.” – Roz*

The body being moved from its original position caused discomfort for some participants:

*“The way he was found was absolutely fine but to remove him from that position, put him on the floor... it was just unnecessary, and it caused unnecessary stress.” – Jessica*

Some participants perceived that the dignity of the person had been impacted by the presentation of the body:

*“He never, I’m sure, would ever want anyone to find him like this because it was very, obviously, undignified because of how we found him.” – Chloe*

Overall, the physical presentation of the body was central to participants’ accounts and understanding of the experience, and the severity of the physical presentation seemed to influence the impacts experienced:

*“he had nothing on and it was all so open and graphic... I don’t think it would have affected me as badly if I had found someone clothed or in bed.” – Chloe*

### ***‘Preparedness to find a body’***

Participants reported differing degrees of preparedness to find a dead body or to be exposed to death in the course of their work.

#### **‘Feeling unprepared’**

Six participants reported feeling unprepared for their experience. Some reported feeling unprepared to find a body at work in general terms:

*“Before that day I’d never really thought I would see that.” – Chloe*

*“it was a life-changing experience that I wasn’t prepared for, that I didn’t expect.” – Roz*

Some also felt unprepared for the death of the specific resident because of prior good-health or engagement with hostel programmes:

*“But it wasn’t very expected because in other ways he was quite fit and he was quite healthy and... he’d been on quite a good spell.” – Jessica*

Some reported their belief that the work should not include exposure to death, and a sense of injustice:

*“staff in hostels come to work with people to ultimately get them to live independently. They don’t come in... to find dead bodies, deal with dead bodies.”*  
– Samuel

### **‘Part of the job’**

Contrastingly, Jim and Danielle described their preparedness to find a dead body, believing it was an inevitable part of the job:

*“In this line of work, you are going to come across it.”* – Danielle

Six participants discussed the need for prospective staff to be made aware of the realities of the role including the possibility of finding a dead body:

*“once they’re being interviewed... there needs to be some kind of explanation that... “we do have deaths in here; we’ve had them in the past. And there might be a chance that you might find that” and make them very aware. And then if they still want to come and work here, they fully know what they’re in for.”* – Chloe

Feeling unprepared, like the physical presentation of the body, seemed to relate to the impacts experienced:

*“had I have felt prepared maybe I wouldn’t have responded in the way that I initially did.”* – Jessica

### **‘Significant impacts’**

Participants described the significant impacts and seemingly unavoidable reminders of the experience.

### **‘Feeling distressed’**

Most participants described feeling significantly distressed, and some traumatised, by the experience.

*“it is... the most distressing thing that I’ve ever dealt with, ever seen in my life. It’ll never leave me. I’ll always be traumatised by it and I’ll always have times when I’m reminded of it.”* – Samuel

*“It was horrendous and it massively... I think traumatised me in a way I didn’t expect... But finding Rose, yeah, it shocked me how much it affected me.”* – Roz

However, three participants described not being particularly distressed by the experience:

*"I don't feel that find(ing) somebody dead has had any impact on, on my work or made me regret or made me think I, you know, why I am doing this (type of work)?" – Joel*

Some participants described factors they believed prevented further distress, including maintaining professional boundaries, not knowing the person well, and not seeing the person's face:

*"I didn't see her face, I think that could have- that was a massive, massive, thing. I think if I'd have seen her face it would have been completely different."*  
– Catherine

### **'Environmental reminders'**

Participants reported substantial physical and emotional difficulties associated with returning to the place in or task during which the body was found, most commonly welfare checks:

*"maybe it was about a week and a half (later), I had my first panic attack... I would be physically sick every morning knowing that I had to go and knock on people's doors, because as soon as I went to open that door all I could see, hear, and smell was that day." – Roz*

*"The only vulnerable part that I find is after the death and then knocking on people's doors. I'm quite shaken up when I do that, for some reason." – Jim*

Participants also reported anticipating future negative events, especially when entering residents' rooms:

*"I like expect to see someone hanging, even though that's not how I found James. I'm just thinking about all the things that could go wrong and all the gruesome things I could find." – Chloe*

### **'Trying to cope'**

Participants described the various coping mechanisms and strategies they adopted after finding the body.

#### **'Coping well'**

Some participants described coping strategies they believed to have been effective, at least in the short-term. These strategies included reassuring themselves that there was nothing they could have done:

*"it was natural causes, could have happened to anybody, there was nothing (that) could have changed or been done differently." – Jessica*

Similarly, participants made 'downward comparisons', noting that experiences and their impacts might have been worse:

*"I think it could have been completely different if I'd seen her face." – Catherine*

For some, coping strategies seemed to begin immediately, such as the use of avoidance: Jessica left the building to avoid seeing the body being removed; Catherine avoided confirming Rose's death to her family; and Roz avoided seeing them completely:

*"I was also very avidly avoiding her step-dad who I knew was only up here (in the offices), and I was in the room below so I just stayed in the room (with Rose's body) for what felt like hours." – Roz*

In some cases, participants relied on their self-perceptions of resilience to reassure themselves that they could cope with the experience:

*"I think I've been through so much in my life, you kind of have to take whatever life throws at you on the chin." – Catherine*

Joel believed he coped well because he was able to 'block out' the experience:

*"I think I have blocked quite a lot of things that happened. I do remember things, but I think the way I deal with something like this is by blocking memories." – Joel*

Many of the participants reported trying to take support from people in their personal lives:

*"I then just left feeling like a child, I reverted to like- almost like a child-like state. I just wanted to go and see my mum and have a little cry." – Roz*

### **'Coping poorly'**

Sometimes attempts to cope with the experience were not effective, including failed attempts to move on:

*"I think she's (colleague) a lot more, you know, "He had an overdose, and this happened"... I wish I could be a bit more like that. It would be a bit more helpful." – Chloe*

Some participants reported that trying to carry on like normal or using typical coping strategies had been ineffective:

*"(Trying to carry on like normal) I made myself ill. I was just really unwell. I was run down. I wasn't coping at all. I was not talking to anyone." – Roz*

### **'Searching for meaning and understanding'**

A way for participants to process, and perhaps cope with, the experience appeared to be to seek meaning in and try to understand the death and their own experience.

### **'Understanding the death'**

Some participants struggled to understand the actual death, including the cause, intentionality, and circumstances:

*"I was googling 'If you overdose, how long does it take you to die?'... 'What fluid leaks out of a body?'... really graphic things... I needed to know the name of it or, you know, the process of things." – Chloe*

Participants tried to understand the experience of the person who had died:

*"I just wanted to know if he had suffered, if he knew, if he just thought "This is normal for me". – Chloe*

Some also wanted to understand elements of their own experience:

*"it (the aim of private therapy) was understanding me better to understand why I reacted the way I did." – Roz*

Some participants sought closure. Those who found it typically did so via positive contact with the family or by engaging in death rituals such as attending the funeral:

*"there was like one positive out of it... we found a contact number for his brother in his room and his brother actually flew over from (country of origin) and they flew Fred back... for his funeral... that was around about the seven-day point when I started to feel better because my feelings were immediately "This guy's been found here, will anyone ever know?", so when there was progress made with his family, that helped me to feel better." – Jessica*

*"I think the real sense of closure comes when you go to the funeral." – Samuel*

However, others struggled to obtain closure, which seemed especially prevalent when the cause of death was unclear:

*"I guess it's almost like closure... it just kind of, I guess, gives a bit of closure. But we often don't get told or hear about it (cause of death)... yeah, I think it would be nice to know." – Roz*

Struggling to obtain closure was also the case where contact with the family was less healing:

*"I just want(ed) to let her know that, you know, her Dad was a good man. But she said "Well, you know, I just don't want to talk". And I respect that." – Joel*

### **'Existential issues and fundamental changes'**

For some, the death led to existential issues arising or fundamental changes taking place in their own lives. Participants noted an increased awareness of their own and others' mortality:

*"I started to become very aware of my own mortality as well." – Samuel*

Significant social relationships changed because of the impacts of the experience and increased mortality awareness:

*"it certainly was at least 50% of why my marriage come to an end, definitely."  
– Samuel*

*"I don't want to be in that situation where somebody pass(es) away and I haven't had the opportunity to, you know, say goodbye or say how much I care and I love that person." – Joel*

Additionally, fundamental changes to practice and beliefs about themselves or the work occurred:

*"you constantly catastrophise things after that, because before that I didn't think of welfare checks as that... for that purpose, but now I think of it more for that purpose... just like a death watch really." – Jessica*

### **'Support'**

Participants described the support they received, inadequate organisational support, and the value of informal support.

#### **'Positive organisational support'**

Three participants described positive formal organisational support (structured, procedural, or 'official' rather than informal support). These people also seemed to be least affected by the experience overall:

*"his (the hostel manager) responsibility was to come in and in fact he was here on both of those occasions we've spoken about... so I felt supported. I guess that's important." – Danielle*

#### **'Inadequate organisational support'**

The other five participants described organisational support as being ineffective or absent:

*"I was asked if I was okay but there was no offer of support." – Catherine*

*"Nothing (was offered by way of support). Nothing at all. Nothing at all." – Roz*

Samuel described trying to obtain organisational support as a battle:

*"I asked about support for it and that was an absolute battle to get any kind... I think that that had a massive impact on me and in many ways in my view what it does is embed the trauma..." – Samuel*



Some also discussed their resentment and feelings of being mistreated by their organisation, in some cases because they felt blamed for the death, but primarily because of the lack of support:

*“they didn’t give a shit then and I should have taken time for myself and I didn’t. I allowed myself to continue working like an ass when actually I should have taken time for myself... They didn’t give a shit.” – Roz*

Some reported feeling as though organisational operations merely continued as normal, leaving participants feeling alone:

*“she (colleague) said “Things tend to just go on as normal”. And I think that’s awful... when we had our next regular team meeting... it was just part of an agenda with lots of other things. It wasn’t just about what had happened, what we had gone through.” – Chloe*

All participants, even those who experienced organisational support as positive, acknowledged the need for better support when a body is found. They discussed what support should involve, arguing that it should be proactive;

*“it shouldn’t be that we have to make (the) first step... not a single one of us wanted to make that first step.” – Roz*

*“One of the things that I’ve always said is that the onus should not be on me to ask for support. I shouldn’t have to chase it.” – Samuel*

timely;

*“I’d say maybe the day after would be a good time (for support).” – Jim*

*“But I would prefer (support) maybe within a week? You know, to give people a few days to maybe get through the practical bits and think about how they’re feeling.” – Danielle*

and include the death being acknowledged and discussed, as they believed their experiences and the death were not acknowledged by the organisation:

*“remember saying to (the hostel manager), and I suggested... that it would be good for everybody to come together and just talk about that (death).” – Chloe*

### **‘The value of informal support’**

Most participants described receiving informal support, mostly from colleagues but occasionally from other sources. Many spoke positively of informal support provided by colleagues:

*“Colleagues were really supportive... they made me a cup of tea and a fag and... because I was all shaky took me outside to get some fresh air.” – Jessica*

Others reflected on the importance of support obtained in other ways, including staff reflective practice groups, via external professionals, or by seeking private therapy:

*"I did have like a reflective practice session the day after. That was quite helpful because it was time to just be like you know... like get it out there."* – Jessica

*"I found it (therapy) really, really useful. It was a really positive experience. And, yeah, I went for a long time, so it wasn't like a quick-fix treatment."* – Roz

## Discussion

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Finding the body of a deceased resident appeared to be distressing to most people, and this seemed to relate to the physical presentation of the body, feeling unprepared for the experience, and environmental reminders. Attempts to cope were mixed in effectiveness. People tried to understand their experience and the death by searching for information and closure. Some existential issues arose including mortality awareness, which influenced personal relationships. Most people described their organisations as not providing adequate support but valuing informal support provided primarily by colleagues.

Three interpretative findings that encapsulate elements of the six master themes identified in the analysis are described in this section. These findings are: that most found the experience distressing, and some found it traumatic; that most considered their organisation's response to the experience to be inadequate; and that most reported trying to make sense of their experience.

### *Distress and trauma*

The experience was considered distressing by most participants. Elements of the experience that appeared to relate to distress included the physical presentation of the body, unpreparedness to find a body, identification with the deceased, environmental reminders, and anticipatory processing of future negative events.

The physical presentation of the body was recalled in detail by all participants and considered distressing by most. Consistent with past research (Fullerton *et al.*, 1992) the physical presentation, including the "visual grotesqueness, smell, and tactile qualities" (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990, p.398), of the bodies appeared to lead to emotional distress.

Lack of preparedness to find the body of a deceased resident also appeared to relate to the distress experienced by participants. Feeling unprepared potentially having led to greater distress is consistent with the findings of Lakeman (2011, p.932), who reported that deaths of homeless people were "almost always accompanied by shock" of homelessness sector workers, and findings that unex-

pected exposure to dead bodies or unexpected elements of the experience can be particularly distressing (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990; McCarroll *et al.*, 1993; Delahanty *et al.*, 1997).

Participants who reported more significant impacts appeared to identify with the deceased resident. This is consistent with findings that identification with the deceased appears to increase distress (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990), and predict post-traumatic distress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ursano *et al.*, 1999; Hargrave, 2010; Coleman *et al.*, 2016). Identification by participants occurred via acknowledgement of similarities between themselves and the deceased, identifying with the family of the deceased, and obsessing about the deceased person's experiences and lives. Disidentifying with the deceased can be protective (Ursano and McCarroll, 1990; Rowe and Regehr, 2010). General disidentification appeared to be a strategy adopted by the participants seemingly less impacted by the experience, who reported the maintenance of emotional distance and professional boundaries.

Participants described distress associated with returning to places in or tasks during which they found the body, most commonly welfare checks. These and other reminders of the experience, including smells or temperatures, might be considered trauma triggers – stimuli that lead to recall of a traumatic experience – via behavioural conditioning, a process called “trauma coupling” (Goultson, 2011, pp.39-41). Complete disidentification with the deceased and avoidance of distressing environmental triggers appeared to be difficult for most hostel staff. This might differ from emergency or disaster workers who, in many cases, may not know the deceased or return to the location of the incident.

One of the most universal elements of the experience was increased worry about imagined further negative events. This may be understood as an example of anticipatory processing; repetitive thoughts about the future associated with anxiety (Clark and Wells, 1995), and is similar to findings reported by Lakeman (2011) that homelessness workers anticipate more harm to homeless people following a death.

People working in various professions exposed to death are at greater risk of experiencing post-traumatic distress or developing PTSD (Wagner *et al.*, 1998; Clohessy and Ehlers, 1999; Corneil *et al.*, 1999; Regehr *et al.*, 2002; Mealer *et al.*, 2007; Violanti, 2014; Petrie *et al.*, 2018). Participant interview responses and IES-R scores suggest this might also be true of homelessness sector staff. Three participants scored above the IES-R cut-off where PTSD is a ‘clinical concern’ (Asukai *et al.*, 2002) (two of whom scored above the ‘probable diagnosis’ cut-off (Creamer *et al.*, 2003)). Additionally, one participant scored one point below, and another scored below but reported an earlier formal PTSD diagnosis after finding the body. Subjectively, participants reported significant distress and trauma. Finding the

body of a deceased resident was traumatic for at least three, and potentially five, of the eight participants. This is demonstrative of the potentially serious nature of the experience, and the resultant need for appropriate support.

### ***Inadequate organisational support***

Participants described some positive elements of support, including informal and extra-organisational support. However, the majority described inadequate organisational responses to their experience.

Informal social support was provided, mostly by colleagues, and was the only way many felt helped. Social support, including from peers, can be protective to those exposed to dead bodies (Fullerton *et al.*, 1992; McCarroll *et al.*, 1993; Declercq *et al.*, 2007) and more generally protect against burnout (Lavoie *et al.*, 2011).

Three participants, who also seemed to be least negatively impacted, described positive formal organisational support. Although the direction of this relationship cannot be established here, it is possible that for these participants the provision of organisational support reduced negative impacts associated with the experience. However, most participants described their frustration with absent or ineffective organisational support, and argued that proactive and timely support was necessary. Participants also described their belief that organisations should inform prospective staff of the possibility of finding bodies of deceased people in their work, as suggested by Lakeman (2011).

Many of the participants reported trying to carry on as normal. For some this aligned with natural coping styles, whereas for most it appeared to be a consequence of the busy hostel environment. Some participants described the short-term benefits of carrying on as normal. However, participants also reported longer-term difficulties, explaining that trying to carry on as normal in the immediate aftermath led to fatigue and merely delayed emotional responses.

For most, opportunities for individual or community-wide reflection on the deaths, which Lakeman (2011) recommended, were not facilitated. This appeared to contribute to participants feeling unsupported by their organisations.

### ***Making sense of the experience: bereavement and grief***

The deceased were not friends, family, or loved ones of the participants. However, participants' responses to the experience appeared similar to some elements of bereavement, including aspects of grief.

Participants feeling unsupported by their organisations was characterised by the perception of some that the hostels merely operated in a 'business as usual' fashion, failing to formally provide support or assess their wellbeing. Some partici-

pants also reported feeling that organisations did not mark their experiences. This seemed to result in feelings similar to disenfranchised grief – grief experienced after a loss that is not or cannot be socially supported or openly acknowledged (Doka, 1999). For most, opportunities to mark the death were not available or facilitated, which appeared to be frustrating, consistent with previous findings (Lakeman, 2011). It is plausible that these absences and failures led some to develop an implicit belief that any grief or difficult emotions associated with their experience was disenfranchised, which can be isolating and lonely as the “right to grieve” (Doka, 2002, p.5) is not respected.

Rituals, such as attending the funeral or marking the death including via positive family contact, appeared to help some participants process their experience. However, these opportunities were not available to all participants. In order to counter potential feelings of disenfranchised grief or distress, organisations might consider ensuring that deaths and the experiences of those impacted, including those who find the bodies, are marked in a way that enables a sense of social support and closure.

The perceived lack of organisational support left participants feeling alone with their attempts to understand and cope with what had happened. Most sought to understand and derive meaning from their experiences. For many, the first step appeared to manifest as attempts to obtain or review information about the deceased, the deaths, or their experience. Attempting to understand a death can be important to those affected: “making sense of loss requires developing an ‘account’, an explanation of how it happened.” (Parkes and Weiss, 1983, p.156).

Participants attempting to understand their experience and find meaning in the lives and deaths of the residents might be considered a normal manifestation of bereavement as an “active process of meaning reconstruction” (Gillies and Neimeyer, 2006, p.32). People who struggle to find meaning in loss experience more painful and prolonged grief (Coleman and Neimeyer, 2010). Searching for meaning is more common when losses are traumatic (Davis *et al.*, 2000; Neimeyer, 2011), such as deaths involving suicide or accidents. Participants unable to gather important information about the cause of and circumstances surrounding the death reported that the degree to which they could obtain closure was limited. In the absence of closure, some attempted to reassure themselves that the death was unpreventable, perhaps defending themselves against self-blame.

Another potential source of distress was that the death of the homeless person seemed to cause consideration of wider, societal factors. Some participants talked about societal attitudes towards homelessness and death, reporting frustration about perceived injustices. Homeless people are marginalised, existing on the periphery of society (Lakeman, 2011). The death of the residents might have rein-

forced their marginalised status to staff: “Workers do grieve in this sense, but how they do so is affected by the marginalised social position of the homeless person and indeed themselves as workers in the sector.” (Lakeman, 2011, p.943).

As well as reinforcing the sense of marginalisation of the residents, the deaths seeming random or unfair might have contributed to participants finding very little meaning in their experience, perhaps leading to increased motivation to obtain it. The experiences of the participants were consistent with this interpretation; those seemingly most affected appeared to have more unresolved questions about the deaths and their experiences. In more typical grief, bereavement disrupts survivors’ self-narrative, resulting in searching for meaning in the loss and their own lives (Neimeyer, 2011). The equivalent reaction for hostel staff appeared to have been to search for meaning in practical, relational, and existential terms (Neimeyer, 2011), in their roles and their lives. Participants noticed fundamental changes to their practice or to their beliefs about the workplace or their roles. Participants searching for meaning in their own lives appeared to be associated with an increased awareness of existential issues, such as their own and others’ mortality. Participants reporting this seemingly experienced positive changes in personal relationships, including apologising to those they felt they had wronged, spending more time with loved ones, and ending a relationship with a long-time but unsupportive spouse. These positive relational shifts might be examples of post-traumatic growth – positive psychological changes that can follow traumatic experiences (Park and Helgeson, 2006).

### *Clinical implications*

Homelessness staff and organisations may wish to be aware of the following to inform policy and practice:

- The experience of finding the body of a deceased resident can be distressing and potentially traumatic.
- Many staff felt unprepared to find the body of a deceased resident and believed that prospective staff should be made aware of this possibility. Discussions of or training regarding this prospect may be protective.
- Staff described the value of informal support but also wanted proactive and timely organisational support to be provided.
- Staff who were distressed and able to experience marking of the death via rituals or closure described these opportunities as beneficial. Homelessness organisations might consider ensuring this occurs after deaths.
- Environmental tasks or reminders of the experience can be anxiety-provoking, distressing, or potentially retraumatising. Support relating to potential triggers



of distress could be provided in a similar fashion to a 'site visit', an intervention utilised during trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) (Murray *et al.*, 2015) that should be delivered by a suitably trained professional.

- PTSD appeared to be a risk for staff who find bodies of deceased residents. Appropriate sources of professional support for the prevention, assessment, and treatment of PTSD should be identified and provided in a proactive and timely manner. Currently, recommended treatment for PTSD in the UK includes TF-CBT (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2018).

### ***Future research***

Potential areas for future research are broad given the lack of existing relevant research. Firstly, future research could explore the experiences of other hostel residents following a resident's death. Hostel residents (Ko *et al.*, 2015) and staff (Hudson *et al.*, 2017) have previously suggested that such deaths may be distressing to other residents.

Further qualitative exploration of the experiences of, or quantitative exploration of the range of symptomology displayed by, homelessness staff who find bodies of deceased residents might be valuable. Foci of this research could be on trauma symptoms specifically, broader mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety, or work-related difficulties homelessness sector staff are known to experience such as burnout (Waagemaker-Schiff and Lane, 2016).

Further research could also examine the efficacy of interventions that are designed to mitigate negative impacts of the experience. Examples of possible interventions include informing prospective staff about the realities of the role or introducing mandatory 'rituals' with which to mark deaths of residents.

### ***Limitations***

The findings of this research may have been influenced by a participant selection bias. The first author is anecdotally aware of two otherwise participation-eligible people who left the homelessness sector because of distress caused by finding the body of a deceased resident, and another participation-eligible person who declined to participate because of concern about potential upset. It is possible that the recruited participants were those comparatively less negatively impacted by the experience.

The findings may not be as widely generalisable as if participants had been recruited from additional overarching organisations. Other organisations may operate differently to those whose staff were recruited, for instance by providing formal organisational support when bodies of deceased residents are found.

Similarly, the homogeneity of participant ethnic and cultural background limits generalisability. Finally, because the research was conducted in the UK, applicability and generalisability to wider cross-national contexts is unestablished.

### ***Conclusion***

The experience of finding the body of a deceased resident can be distressing, and for some, traumatic. Distress experienced related to the physical presentation of the body, feeling unprepared, identification with the deceased, and environmental reminders. Staff attempted to make sense of the death and their experience, and perceived a lack of formal organisational support. Support provided might include the facilitation of site visits, deaths being marked, or appropriate discussion of the experience including via reflective practice groups. Exposure to dead bodies should be acknowledged as potentially distressing and traumatic by homelessness organisations and policy makers, and support should be provided where this might be the case:

*“I think as a standard, if we’re going to be in this role and it’s going to be the norm... finding dead bodies going forward, there needs to be that support because else how can you- how can you do your job?” – Chloe*



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# On the Inappropriability of Homelessness: An Experience of Inhabitation of Public Space in St Peter's Square, Rome

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- **Abstract\_** *This article's aim is to engage intellectually the approach to homelessness under the point of view of architectural and urban studies. By taking back Lancione's claim in which the scholar appeals for a rethinking of the approach to homelessness, in which interested practitioners are invited to ask how rather than what homelessness is. By engaging with this topic the paper seeks to move beyond the dichotomy between what and how homelessness is accounted. Through a combination of historical accounts on homelessness in the city of Rome and ethnographical observations carried out in the area around St Peter's Square, the paper will introduce the possibility of intending homeless people as inappropriable bodies. This possibility is intended as an inversion of the modalities with which homelessness is approached both in terms of scholarly and institutional approaches. By accounting this inappropriability, the paper highlights that how and what homelessness is cannot be considered separately. By doing so, the paper offers a critical reading of the modalities with which public spaces in Rome are inhabited by people who are homeless, advancing a request for a renewed ethics towards people experiencing homelessness.*
- **Keywords\_** *Homelessness, Rome, St Peter's Square, charity, public space, inappropriability, Agamben, Urban Studies*

In the book *La MendicITÀ Proveduta, Nella Città Di Roma Coll'ospizio Publico, Fondato Dalla Pietà, E Benificenza Di Nostro Signore Innocenzo XII Pontefice Massimo: Con Le Risposte All'obiezioni Contro Simili Fondazioni*, Italian writer Carlo Borromeo Piazza described the condition of homeless people and poverty in the city of Rome during the Seventeenth century (Piazza, 1693). The book is interesting for several reasons: One, as argued by Irving Lavin, for the first time the word homeless people (*senz'atetto*) was introduced to qualify people who inhabited the streets of Rome as a consequence of their condition of poverty (Lavin, 2007). Second, the book provides a description of what homelessness is: Homelessness is associated with the word *ozio*, which can be translated with idleness or laziness and whose Latin derivation is *otium*. The importance of this aspect will be evidenced soon. Homelessness was described as a condition that surrounds, characterises and determines the disgraced life of the homeless inhabitants of Rome in the Seventeenth Century. Third, to this condition, Pope Innocent XII attempted to provide a remedy with the institution of a hospice or hospital for the poor. The idea of constituting a hospice for the poor in the city of Rome, on the one hand served charitable purposes, which, as Lavin outlines, represented a way of assimilating homeless people's dignity to the Pope's own (Lavin, 2007). The image of the Pope became one of poor among the poor. On the other, the opening of the hospice also followed the request from other dwellers of the city concerning the removal of the homeless people from the streets. This request was based on the fact that homeless people were regarded as an annoying and disturbing presence in the city (Piazza, 1693). This was a display of a disgraced way of living, which resonated in daily annoying interactions between homeless people and other city-dwellers. The institution of this charitable hospice was in fact not only aimed at hosting exclusively homeless people present in the city of Rome. Rather, while hosted inside the hospice, the homeless guests were introduced to working, producing and manufacturing objects, along with carrying out other activities such as praying. In other words, the notion of idleness as a disgrace and a distorted way of living a life was opposed against work, production as a way of liberating these people's lives. While *otium* was utilised to represent homelessness and what the homeless body is, by contrast, work and production, *negotium*, were intended as the only possibility of salvation for these disgraced people (Piazza 1693).

The main reason I decided to introduce and present Piazza's story of homelessness in Rome, as I will also show in the article, is that current approaches to homelessness have not basically changed. This is particularly verified both at the local scale of the city of Rome and at a larger scale.

Hence, the way homelessness is managed in Rome is still largely related to high-profile initiatives led by the Vatican. These initiatives, on the one hand aim to achieve media coverage. On the other hand, they are akin to the same rhetoric mechanisms



employed by Innocent XII: to give homeless people the same dignity as the one deserved to the Pope, who is poor among the poor. This mechanism however, I argue, is counter-productive, reifying the condition of people who are homeless as the poor, vagrant and in need people. But above all, this image of homelessness is also reified in the eyes of other housed individuals, to whom the homeless person remains incapable of providing for him/herself.

The account provided by Piazza is also verified when the initiative led by Pope Innocent XII. In this respect, the contrast outlined by Piazza, between idleness/laziness (*otium*) as the representation of homeless people's lives and work/production (*negotium*) as the only possibility of salvation for these people can be included into contemporary debates that question how homelessness is approached. These approaches have appealed for a rethinking of the way homelessness is tackled, proposing a move beyond asking what homeless is to favouring how homeless practices are carried out to inhabit public spaces (Lancione, 2013b). This passage from what to how homelessness is, was remarkably evidenced by the request from Lancione to stop attempting to provide a definition of homelessness (Lancione, 2016).

On the one side, this article certainly agrees and seconds this move, which as asserted by Lancione enables learning from the homeless body more than just trying to ask what this body means (Lancione, 2013b). On the other side, I would argue these current approaches to homelessness present certain problematic issues. The first is that they create a dichotomy between what and how homelessness is (See Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2020); second, as I will show later, the way homelessness is managed in Rome still depends on showing what homeless people are. In other words, both institutional and charitable bodies including the Vatican are mostly interested in exploiting a presumable representation of what homelessness is to support charitable initiatives. Third, the dichotomy between what and how homelessness is eludes the views of people experiencing homelessness. These, by contrast, are akin to logics of preferences and convenience. These logics reveal that what and how homelessness is cannot be considered separately. In this respect, by taking back Lancione's appeal to stop defining homelessness, this article aims to advance the hypothesis of considering homeless people as *inappropriate*.<sup>1</sup>

In order to argue homeless people's *inappropriability* and what this implies, I will use the ethnographical experience I had with a group of homeless people in the modern city of Rome. By describing how public space near St Peter's Square in Rome is inhabited, it is possible to highlight how the representation of poverty in Rome becomes a means to carry out charitable initiatives by the Vatican, which at

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of inappropriability was developed by Agamben in several of his books. Camillo Boano has recently developed some of Agamben's concepts, arguing about a 'Whatever Urbanism' which can be somehow assimilated to the concept of inappropriability presented in this paper.

a level of public perception of homelessness remains ephemeral. The modalities with which public space is inhabited will also evidence how, from the side of charitable bodies and public authorities, homeless practices are regarded as passive and tolerated.. However, it is precisely from a closer look at these practices that it is possible to reveal how homeless people in St Peter's Square oscillate consciously between the representation of what they are and how they inhabit public space. Finally, by looking at how public space is inhabited, it is possible to learn how people who experience forms of chronic homelessness remain *inappropriate*, revealing a possible ethics concerning the approach to homelessness and also advancing a nuanced knowledge concerning how the management of precarity may be intended by current scholarly approaches on the theme.

In the next section, I will introduce the theoretical context within which the analysis and ethnographical observations have been carried out.

## **Between And Beyond What And How Homelessness Is**

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By abstracting the description made by Piazza from the religious and spiritual context in which Pope Innocent XII promoted the institution of the hospice for the poor, it is possible to frame the difference between idleness/laziness and work/production into a more contemporary framework. This contrast seems to be evidently connected with a series of recent criticism coming from academic and more activist contexts, concerning approaches to homelessness (Cloke *et al.*, 2008; Lancione, 2013b, Lancione, 2016; Duff, 2017). These approaches have brought to light the necessity of moving beyond asking what homelessness means, to focussing instead on how homeless practices are carried out. In other words, these scholarly accounts have appealed for a move from asking what the homeless body means to how this body does what it does (Duff, 2017).

The reason behind this move lies in the fact that by asking what homelessness means implies the presence of an *a-priori* frame that limits the definition of homeless people within common notions: the poor, vagrant, displaced, rough sleeper and so on (Lancione, 2013b). Consequently, if the approach to homelessness is based on these *a-priori* definitions, the latter function as a constraint. This constraint influences the accuracy of the analysis or worse, it may contribute to reifying pre-assumptions concerning what homelessness is. To make a concrete example of this sort, we can frame this aspect into my profession – architecture. If as an architect I start from the pre-assumption that homelessness means only sleeping rough as the consequence of a lack of permanent housing, then my approach to the topic of homelessness will look at it only in terms of rough sleeping. Perhaps, the obvious conclusion from my pre-assumption will lead me to design tiny little

shelters; or to appeal for a policy-centric approach that demands the provision of permanent housing conditions to end the experience of being chronically homeless people. However, by doing so, I may lose track of aspects that matter, concerning how people who are rough sleepers inhabit the city. These modalities may include, but are absolutely not limited to, aspects related to sharing spaces with other homeless comrades (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009; Parsell, 2011), to cognitive processes of creative re-invention of the fabric of architectural spaces (Lancione, 2013a; Lancione, 2013b; Lenhard, 2018); to the way cardboard or duvets are utilised but also the way they are collected; or how urban spaces change from day to night time and so on (Doron, 2000, Doron, 2002; Gesuelli, 2018).

By contrast, by looking at how the homeless person, who eventually experiences forms of chronic homelessness and inhabits the city, I may be able to unveil and disclose aspects relating to how the city is inhabited. This last aspect, as scholars have also suggested, concur to form a performative map of the homeless city (Cloke *et al.*, 2008). The formation of this map may help nuance new modes of cohabitation of the city, questioning the relationship between housed and unhoused individuals (Duff, 2017). Additionally, this map evidences how places in the city may acquire new meanings through practices of inhabitation of public space, highlighting how homeless actions are enacted against precarity (Duff, 2017). However, as I mentioned in the introduction, accounting for how homelessness is carried out, which is further channelled by performative scholarships, is problematic for at least two reasons. The first reason lies in the self-intuitive aspect that the request to move from what to how homelessness is enacted may be intended, as a way of saving the homeless person. In other words, the homeless person can be saved from the stigma of common pre-assumptions perpetrated by scholarships that aim to account what homelessness is. The second reason lies in the dichotomy established between accounting what homelessness is and how it is enacted. This dichotomy, which resonates with the contrast between Piazza's notion of *otium* and *negotium*, may risk depriving the homeless person of self-reliance and autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

As I will account in the next section, the way public space is inhabited by the community of homeless people near St Peter's Square shows that how and what homelessness is, are not separate terms. Rather, they form part of a modality of inhabitation of public space that seconds logics of preference and convenience, which even challenge a description of homeless practice as a form of performative language (Cloke *et al.*, 2008; Duff, 2017). There are circumstances in which practices that may be ascribed into how homelessness is enacted are employed to secure a

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<sup>2</sup> A similar concept is developed by Deleuze with the use of the term logic of preference, which according to the French Philosopher undermines notions of preformativity and pre-determination (See Deleuze and Agamben, 2012).

permanence underneath the portico near St Peter's Square. However, having granted this possibility, the application of a logic of preference made this group of homeless individuals prefer to show what they are, poor and homeless people, in order to augment their possibility of getting donations from passers-by (Parsell and Parsell, 2012). It must be noted then that the way homelessness is managed by both the Vatican City, through the Papal Almoner, as much as the way homelessness is intended by other charitable bodies in the city of Rome evidence a convenience of showing what homelessness is. The reason is self intuitively that, the description of the homeless person as the poor and in need is simply more functional to the necessity to carry out charitable projects that may have media impact on the public.

On the contrary, if I were asked what I could learn from the observations I carried out, the reply would be that, to me, people who experience homelessness are *inappropriable* bodies. In this respect, I would like to claim that *inappropriability* is an invitation to look at homelessness as a form of self-reflexive experience of poverty. Poverty, as Agamben writes, is the relation with something *inappropriable* (*inappropriabile*) (Agamben 2011; Agamben, 2017, p.68): "being poor means: being kept in a relation with [something or somebody who] is *inappropriable*". In this sense, this article aims at advancing a critical position towards a rhetoric idea of poor among the poor, which although it is pursued with good intentions, does not seem to produce significant social changes. Likewise, the idea of poverty in relation to inappropriability represents a critical stance towards the idea of asking how rather than what homelessness is. As a thought-provoking claim I would argue this is a way of saving homelessness. However, on a more basic level I would argue that asking how rather than what represents simply an alternative way of looking at homelessness. The latter, as Awan *et al.* (2011) argue concerning alternative ways of doing architecture, implies the presence of two distinct poles in which the centre remains substantially untroubled. Rather, I would like to open the possibility of inverting the approach to homelessness: to invite the reader to take seriously into consideration the fact homeless people are *inappropriable*. This implies to start considering the fact that in front of homeless people, we, researchers, scholars, policy makers, Papal almoners, may be effectively the poor. And that together with these other poor people we can start learning but also constructing the space of our cities.

With this in mind, the best way to start presenting the ethnographical observations I carried out, is to begin by accounting on poverty in St Peter's Square.

## Poverty in St Peter's Square

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Around the area that circumscribes St Peter's Square, a number of chronic homeless people use the spots near the Square as sheltering spaces to sleep rough overnight. These spaces comprise the two porticoes that prompt the Square directly, the Bernini's colonnade but also the numerous entry doorways of shops and churches along Via della Conciliazione and also the streets behind, which are included in the area known as Borgo Pio. Within this area, just a few years back, Pope Francis, who has given poverty high importance, putting it at the top of his agenda, decided to open a series of services dedicated to the homeless people orbiting the area of St Peter's Square (Gasparroni, 2015; Santambrogio, 2015). One of the last initiatives took place last November 2019, when Pope Francis organised a lunch with poor and indigent people in Rome (Ceraso, 2019).

The observations that I carried out were focused on the group of chronic homeless people that use the portico area next to St Peter's Square as a congregational area to sleep rough at night. During the day, some of the homeless inhabitants, such as Maurizio (a fictionalised name), leave the portico. Maurizio in particular works as a car valet in the squares and streets near the Vatican area. Hence, this is a modality for him to socialise with other housed individuals, but above all, to contrast precarity related to his personal life conditions. As he told me, the activity of valet, although it is carried out in the black market, enables him to make some money during the day. Additionally, he could also make himself known to clients who work in the area and that, eventually, even cared about his life conditions. Maurizio went from sharing an occupied flat with a friend, to being evicted, ending up sleeping rough on the street. On that occasion, one of his daily clients donated a camping stove to him. Hence, although he wanted to overcome the experience of homelessness, finding a regular job and house, the donation of that camping stove was told with enthusiasm, which echoed with the story of his staying in the park next to Saint Angel's Castle (not far from St Peter's Square). Thanks to that donation, Maurizio could make his own food, small and simple things, nothing really sophisticated. However, he felt cooking for himself was a way of not depending on charitable services. A condition that gave him a sense of freedom and control of the self. Maurizio was in fact very sceptical about the charitable services that the city of Rome affords to the community of people who are homeless. This, according to what Maurizio told me, which was also supported by the report released by Michela Braga on poverty and homelessness in the city of Rome, may bring about forms of addiction to such charitable services, failing to provide emancipative measures to chronically homeless individuals (Braga, 2014).

### *Inhabitation of the portico in St Peter's Square*

The portico area near St Peter's Square hosts a variable number of people who are homeless. The number changes from day to night time and from winter to summer. Self intuitively, over summer time, as the season is very mild, many homeless inhabitants prefer to sleep rough in the park that Maurizio once attended, which is located around a kilometre from St Peter's Square, next to the Tiber river. The majority of homeless inhabitants of the portico are originally from Poland. This has a particular relation with the Papacy of John Paul II leading me to question the duration of the experience of being homeless. John Paul II's papacy lasted for about thirty years and finished only in 2005, nonetheless it is not significant that the Papal almoner, who is in charge of the organisation and management of charitable services towards the poor of Rome, is himself Polish.



Illustration 1: Images and references to Pope John Paul II made by a homeless person nearby St Peter's Square, Rome

The Papal almoner, Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, was appointed by Pope Francis to run charitable projects for the poor in the city of Rome.<sup>3</sup> His activities have also embraced recent activist actions to support poor people who occupy a building in Rome (Allegrì, 2019). When encountering the community of people who are homeless in St Peter's Square, all the members of this group of people knew the Papal almoner very well. The impression I got is that this group of people regarded 'Father Konrad' (as they use to call him), as the only person who could help them, alleviating the condition of being homeless. Once, Maria (a fictionalised name) showed me a hand-sewn portrait of the Papal almoner. This, according to her, was a means of a gift exchange for the help Archbishop Konrad Krajewski had given to her.

In recent years, there were also a series of high-profile initiatives led by the Vatican. These comprised the opening of the Sistine Chapel to the homeless inhabitants that orbit the Vatican area; or the opening of a brand new service near Bernini's colonnade, which hosts toilet and barber services and is specifically dedicated to homeless people (Gasparroni, 2015). Hence, when I went to present my research to the Papal almoner, he was particularly honest about describing the aims of these initiatives. While my issue with people who are homeless concerned an acknowledgement of their practices and presence in public space, he clearly admitted that the Vatican agenda for the poor was rather different. It mostly aimed at carrying out projects that may have had impact on the media rather than pursuing low-profile projects. He was also particularly aware of the situation with homeless people near the Vatican. Likewise, he was also aware that the situation concerning the presence of people who are homeless was somehow tolerated: During the observations, on only one occasion I personally witnessed policemen demanding the group of homeless inhabitants of the portico to leave the space temporarily. The reason for this was that a press conference was to be held in the office underneath the portico.

When framing the portico in an architectural analysis, this becomes a type of changeable architectural space. It completely changes from day to night time. The nightly usage is one of a congregational area, which is relatively safe and sheltered, for rough sleeping. This is a 'safe refuge' as Maurizio once told me. This, according to Maurizio did not just imply that the portico area was perceived as a stable place, to spend the night among homeless fellows with whom Maurizio felt he had established friendship relations. Rather, the perception of the portico as a safe refuge

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<sup>3</sup> As stated in the website, "The Office of Papal Charities is the department of the Holy See charged with exercising charity to the poor in the name of the Holy Father". See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/institutions\\_connected/elem\\_apost/documents/rc\\_elemosi\\_neria\\_pro\\_20121106\\_profile\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/institutions_connected/elem_apost/documents/rc_elemosi_neria_pro_20121106_profile_en.html)

was also due to its proximity with St Peter's Square, a highly patrolled area of the city in which the constant presence of police but also the Vatican contribute to a feeling of safety.

This last aspect is only one of the numerous codes that are broken by people who are homeless in order to utilise architectural spaces in ways that may be described as emancipative (Lancione, 2013b). The literature and press coverage may have made us used to reading stories of police confiscating, charging with fines and even arresting people who are homeless (Bergamaschi *et al.*, 2014; Quinn, 2014; Petty, 2016; Sparks, 2017; Speer, 2019), and, in this respect also, Piazza reported how, as a consequence of the opening of the hospice for the poor in Rome, begging was consequently banned from the streets of Rome (Piazza, 1693). On the contrary, in this case, which is similar to what happens in other areas of Rome, (i.e. the two main train stations), the presence of police most of the time is not regarded as an obstacle, a threatening presence or a constraint. Rather, this patrolling presence is exploited for rough sleeping safely and relatively safeguarded from potential harms deriving from malicious individuals.

In contrast to the activities that are carried out at night, during the day the portico area becomes a type of multi-faceted space, hosting a multitude of practices and city-dwellers: tourists, pilgrims or clergy people, who pay a visit to the Cathedral. There are also people who work in the shops nearby, police officers and other passers-by who go by the area to reach other destinations. The portico itself, then, hosts the entrance to the Vatican press offices. Within this context, the negotiation of space in the daytime by people who are homeless is enacted through a series of procedures and tactics, which at a first glance may be described as disguising.

Hence, on the one side, the occupation of this space by people who are homeless is made tangible over night by the presence of cardboard layers, duvets, voices, the presence of pets and more generally convivial practices but also discussions among the homeless inhabitants that temper the atmosphere of this space (Duff, 2017). In the daytime, this presence is made less tangible and more discrete, described by the presence of few signs that determine and reveal the multiple uses that the portico has. Some of these signs are more tangible than others; a hat placed on the ground utilised to collect donations from passers-by, whose presence is highlighted by means of a stuffed panda bear next to the hat. Conversely, some of the most characterising elements of the nightly occupation such as cardboard layers and duvets are hidden inside black rubbish bags, which are then left at the corner of the portico.<sup>4</sup> Of this stack of objects enclosed into anonymous black plastic bags, which to the eyes of unwitting city-dwellers may contain anything and

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise, also their voices are somehow hidden, kept silent and made docile during the day.



come from anywhere, what struck me the most was the presence of a broom. I have enquired the community of homeless inhabitants of the portico about the use and reason for the presence of that object.



Illustration 2: Homeless people's belonging collected at the corner of the portico in St Peter's Square

Although the explanation they gave me may seem obvious: this community of people provide the cleaning of the space of the portico every morning before the arrival of street cleaners, the implication of this practice is paramount in the possible understanding of how the portico is inhabited. Hence, at a first glance, the discrete occupation of the portico area in the morning frames this space within the description provided by Steven Vertovec of a particular type of public space, a *room without walls*. The portico is a type of particular space where the negotiation of it takes place by means of practices of occupation. These practices enable the community of people who are homeless to interact with other housed city-dwellers (Vertovec, 2015). However, on a closer inspection, it must be noted that practices of cleaning and tidying up of the space of the portico are, per se, very controversial. Hence, on the one hand this practice aims to distance the community of people who are homeless from the stigma of being characterised as just homeless people (Perry, 2013). In other words, these practices are intended to contrast against a series of pre-assumptions that intend describing people who are homeless as, following Lancione's article, poor, disgraced and vagrant or simply rough sleepers (2013b). On the other hand, as I will show later, the community of people who are homeless is also not interested in letting housed individuals be aware of this practice, preferring to show the fact they are poor through the activity of begging (Parsell and Parsell, 2012). In this sense, it urges to highlight and evidence that by describing how the portico area is inhabited by this community of homeless individuals, complicates and contradicts common pre-assumptions concerning what

homeless is. Rather, by accounting how homeless practices are enacted, it is possible to learn how the inhabitation of the portico gives nuanced meanings to public space and accounts to emancipative modalities through which public space is inhabited.

## Dis-closure

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At this point of the article, I would like to come back to the aspects mentioned in the previous sections concerning the difference between idleness and work (*otium* and *negotium*), to start delineating a line of possible research that frames people who are homeless as *inappropriate*.

In this respect, idleness/laziness (*otium*) was assumed as the consequence of a life in disgrace, up to the point in which Piazza describes this as a pejorative and decaying aspect accompanying the life of homeless people in Rome (Piazza, 1693). Lavin accounts this situation by describing how the disgraced presence of homeless people reached the point of preventing the possibility of nurturing the spiritual life of other Roman city-dwellers (Lavin, 2007). The entrance to the numerous churches in the city was made impossible by the large number of poor homeless individuals, shouting blasphemies and begging both outside and inside these places. In other words, homeless people became a problem and an upsetting presence in the streets of Rome. Although, words such as laziness (*otium*) are no longer utilised to depict people who are homeless, at least not as a pejorative term in the context of the Church and most of the homeless studies I worked on, certainly the presence of poor people in public space is still regarded as a sign of decay of certain areas. The contemporary city of Rome makes no difference in this respect.

The presence of people who are homeless in the city has been prevented through the use of tactics and policies such as the removal of city benches as happened inside the two main train stations of the city, Rome Termini and Tiburtina. As much as the portico area in St Peter's Square, these areas change completely from day to night. In other cases, city benches, even those in the areas near St Peter's Square, were turned into anti-homeless items of furniture. Through the introduction of an armrest in the middle of the bench, the possibility of laying down is thus prevented. In other cases, there was the adoption of more tangible tools akin to anti-homeless architecture such as the use of urban bollards to prevent people who are homeless from sleeping rough (without success).

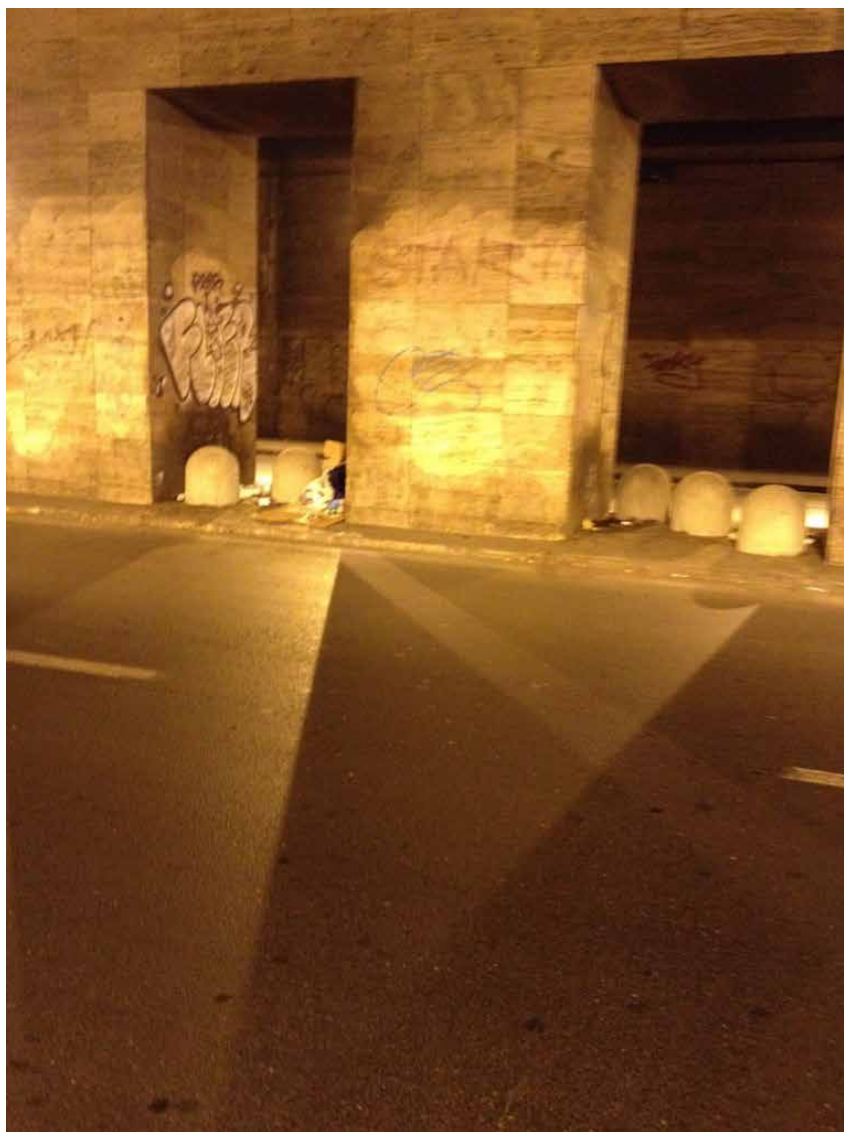


Illustration 3: Bollards are used to prevent homeless people from using an underway passage nearby Termini Station

Additionally, it is possible to note the perception of the presence of homeless people in the city of Rome has not changed also in its more positive aspects. Hence, Piazza's book describes how the aim of opening a homeless hospice in Rome was one of liberating the streets from this upsetting presence; in fact, homeless people were given hospitality in one of the most, if not the most, prestigious and luxurious palace of Rome at that time: the palace of St John at the

Lateran (Piazza, 1693; Lavin, 2007). The goal underlying this operation was and is still crystal clear. It is not just concerned with giving back dignity to people who are homeless. Rather to make these individuals have the same dignity as the Pope himself, who used to live in that same Palace before St Peter's Square's restoration. The rhetoric mechanism that accompanied this operation is self-evident as much as, I would argue, genuine: giving back dignity to the poor. However, the same symbolical mechanism also applies to the Pope, who was himself assimilated to a poor among the poor (Lavin, 2007).

By maintaining the same interpretation, it is thus possible to read what the current Pope is doing towards the poor in St Peter's Square and more generally in Rome. Earlier I mentioned the opening of the Sistine Chapel exclusively to people who are homeless in St Peter's Square or the opening of services for the homeless person. These initiatives were also corroborated by other actions such as the celebration of a public lunch in the occasion of the world day against poverty alongside other initiatives. However, the main risk inherent in patronising these high-profile projects is that they may remain ephemeral in terms of impact on the social fabric of our cities. These initiatives seem not to have exchange value in the modality with which homelessness is regarded in the realm of our cities. In other words, as it was reported to me during my ethnographical fieldwork, these types of charitable operations enable housed individuals to have a teleological perception of homelessness: I am allowed to ignore the presence of people who are homeless because there will always be someone else taking care of them.<sup>5</sup> By doing so, the common pre-assumption of people who are homeless as simply people who are in need, poor or incapable of providing for themselves is reified and perpetrated throughout (Lancione, 2013b). Additionally, as the particular case mentioned of the Papal almoner, these patronising initiatives may risk to emphasise addiction and co-dependance, tending to diminish individuals who face homelessness' self-reliance and dignity (Braga, 2014).

This last aspect also resonates with daily patterns of utilisation of the city, which may contribute to render a representation of chronic homeless people whose presence is merely tolerated simply because they are less visible in the daytime. This is not simply the case of media coverage that seldom describes homelessness in Rome as happening only at night, when homeless individuals sleep rough, forgetting or ignoring how these same spaces change completely at day. Rather, as it was reported to me during the meetings I had with charitable bodies that operate in

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<sup>5</sup> This is the summarisation of the responses received when interviewing housed individuals who are not involved in charitable projects nor part of charitable bodies on aspects concerning the perception of homelessness in public space.

Rome<sup>6</sup>, the fact that urban spaces, which are utilised at night by homeless people, change during the day is included into a logic of tolerance towards the presence of homeless people in the city. In other words, as a means of 'merciful totalitarianism' (Žižek, 2008), homeless people's presence is tolerated because the perception that city-dwellers and public authorities have of places that are inhabited only at night is completely different during day.

In this sense, I certainly would like to fully embrace Lancione's opening to stop asking what homelessness is. Hence, telling how the space of the portico is inhabited by the community of homeless individuals in St Peter's Square evidenced a contrast between the way public space is inhabited and its perception by housed individuals and charitable institutions. However, I must somehow assume that in order to carry out charitable projects, which are also accompanied by certain rhetoric mechanisms, the easiest way is to frame homelessness into common pre-assumptions related to poverty, displacement, rough sleeping and so on.

Nevertheless, I would like to argue that the neutralisation of homeless people from the stigma of pre-assumptions (which may be provocatively intended as their salvation) does not come to pass solely through a discussion of how homeless practices are enacted, nor how public space is inhabited. Rather, I would like to argue how these accounts underlie a series of issues, which depend on the assumption of the practice into a form of work; k; what I previously mentioned as *negotium*.

The telling of the *negotium*, of how public space is inhabited certainly contributes to a nuanced knowledge concerning local tactics of negotiation and transformation of public space (Cloke *et al.*, 2008). Likewise, it may highlight how homeless practices are enacted as forms of resistance to precarity (Duff, 2017), aiming to define an agency that people who are homeless surely possess. However, it is possible to argue that even the description of how public space is inhabited risks to remain ephemeral. Additionally, accounts concerning how homeless practices are carried out seem to neglect the fact that both how and what homelessness is cannot be discerned.

For what concerns the first aspect, even by telling how the space of the portico is inhabited by the community of homeless people, e.g. the fact it is cleaned up everyday, may be said to remain ephemeral. The first obvious reason for this claim is that the 99% of other city-dwellers that step-by the portico area, including the Papal almoner, more or less voluntarily ignore such practices. The use of the expression 99% is, in this case, voluntarily provoking. It is aimed to give the same meaning of legitimisation utilised during recent protest movements. Numbers matter

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<sup>6</sup> I had a personal meeting with Caritas and Comunita' di Sant' Egidio along with Focus Casa dei Diritti Sociali, Cotrad and Il Cigno.

as accounted by eminent scholars to highlight how these protest actions were legitimated (Butler, 2011). This aspect should resonate with scholarly accounts concerning a presumable claim towards a right to a just city, which as accounted by Duff, cannot be granted but must be invented (Duff, 2017). Secondly, as mentioned before, the fact that practices of cleaning and tidying up the space of the portico are unnoticed should invite the reader to question whether this followed a particular choice, i.e. the homeless individual's main interest may be not one of letting other housed individuals be aware of this practice. Though one may claim how the cleaning up of the portico may be regarded as a modality of making that space more welcoming for the housed individuals in the daytime. Conversely, it must be noted that the aim the homeless people inhabiting the portico pursue in the day time is to show precisely what they are: homeless and poor people in order to augment their possibility, by begging near St Peter's Square, of getting donations in form of coins (Parsell and Parsell, 2012).

Hence, we must treat this aspect carefully as it is paramount in understanding what I intend by *inappropriability* of homelessness. This attitude shows that both how homelessness is carried out and what homelessness is are not contrasting aspects. Rather they are mutual factors, resulting from creative processes enacted by people who are homeless. In this specific case, cleaning and tidying up the portico as much as begging should not be regarded as passive attitudes, as it seemed to emerge from the meeting I had with charitable bodies operating in Rome. Conversely, these attitudes signal a rupture of codes, to employ the same term suggested by Lancione (Lancione, 2013b). Codes are constraints, which depict the homeless person as a tolerated presence up to the point s/he does not show up in the morning. The other code sees the homeless person not just as the poor who is in need. Rather, as the patronising initiatives led by the Vatican seem to indicate, homeless people in St Peter's Square are still incapable of taking care of themselves. These constraining conditions are, by contrast, re-worked creatively, and I would add, actively, opening themselves up into the possibility of staying underneath the portico over the day. This operation has the twofold implication of allowing the homeless inhabitants of disguising the traces of their nightly presence and to receive donations from passers-by. These attitudes underlay a logic of preference in which what they are and how they do what they do coincide and cannot be regarded separately. Rather, they participate in the processes of home-making enacted by people who are homeless in public space. Finally, these logics contradict both the way homelessness is managed locally in the city of Rome and at the general level of possible approach to homeless practices.

By taking back Lancione's opening to stop asking what homelessness is, I would like to look at it by recalling the feeling of frustration and how I felt ineffectual when I carried out my observations. By observing the homeless inhabitants of the portico in St Peter's Square, what they taught me and what I could learn from them is that to me they are *inappropriate*.

## Closure

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In light of this claim, homeless practices must be intended as a continuous oscillation between what, their representation as such, and how they are enacted, their existence. In other words, by observing how homelessness is carried out, the feeling one may get is more or less the same as happening in quantum mechanics where the descriptions of waves and particles are mutually exclusive and yet equally valid for a full description.<sup>7</sup> To mention another account, this time from philosophy, when observing how homeless people inhabit the portico area in St Peter's Square, this reminded me of the description that Badiou makes of the excrescence (Badiou, 2005). Although, the sound of the word does not recall anything pleasant, excrescence is instead used to describe elements that are represented into a system without belonging to it (Hallward and Badiou, 2003; Adkins, 2012). This particular condition enables the excrescence with the possibility of assuming multiple forms according to logics of preference and convenience. Is it maybe this aspect of multiplicity within one that frames the homeless body as a monstrous body, which runs against and must be moved away from public space? Is it this monstrous body that must be moved away from the sight of the idealised body of the housed individual intended as unity within one (Dorrian, 2000)? And perhaps, it is by virtue of this constant possibility of being removed that homeless practices are enacted as a means to resist against precarity (Duff, 2017)? But if this is the case, then, it must be noted that precarity has been mis-recognised. Precarity does not seem to be intended as a particular form of reality, which depending on probability, accidentally happens (Agamben and Chiesa, 2018). Rather, precarity is intended as a form of disgraced yet stable reality that has to be governed through homeless actions and practices. And this reasoning must be also included into the governance of precarity offered by the various charitable projects to support the homeless person.

*Inappropriability* is thus an invitation to consider the encounter with homelessness as a particular form of experience, a form of poverty which should nuance the approach to homelessness beyond scholar and academic studies. However, from

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<sup>7</sup> I invite the reader to intend this example as a metaphor of the relationship between two complementary factors, resulting in a contrasting relationship. See Holzhey (2014).

the point of view of scholarly research and approaches to homelessness, it seems there is a difficulty in deliberating and acknowledging this aspect. Recently, Watts and Fitzpatrick (2020) warned about approaches to homelessness that may tend to regard homeless people as “exotic outsiders, in essence different to the rest of us, with fundamentally distinct needs, desires and life goals”. What I aimed to highlight in this paper was precisely to affirm that the homeless person is not simply the other. Rather, during my observations I was often confronted with claims from the group of homeless people referring to a quality of life defined as ‘slumdog’, to which a political, social and ethical answer is mandatory. On the other hand, inappropriability is also meant to highlight the necessity of not considering the homeless person as simply the same as another housed individual. This paper evidenced that meaningful processes of social inclusion cannot involve initiatives and policies that reveal themselves to be akin to rhetoric mechanisms. These approaches seem to work as a sort of cold fusion process, e.g. being poor among the poor, as accounted throughout this paper, in which an alleged social status of homeless people remains, at a larger scale, untroubled. However, this reasoning should also resonate with its counter-part, being housed among the housed (see Lancione, 2020). Hence, as accounted by Lancione, social differences matter. However, to effectively matter, this paper advances the hypotheses that social differences may be turned into a differential process of social inclusion. One possible way to enact this differential process is to look at the possibility offered by the contamination between so called ‘exoteric strands’ (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2020) from urban studies and disciplines akin to design and architecture in questioning the role of urban intermediaries, e.g. street furniture, in processes of social inclusion (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Thrift, 2005; Amin, 2008). In the specific case of this article, inappropriability has influenced the development of a design intervention, whose theoretical and practical implications I reserve for further development and discussions (Gesuelli, 2018). The intervention, by virtue of its precarious nature remains inappropriable, involving both housed and unhoused individuals into a self-reflexive logic of acknowledgement of alterity in the realm of public space.<sup>8</sup> I believe this approach conveys with the accounts on urban home-making mentioned by Fitzpatrick and Watts, without regarding homeless people as exotic outsiders. Rather, homeless people are inserted into a context of concrete and emancipative dialogue in the formation of publics. Likewise, I argue that inappropriability, properly understood and enacted does not prevent nor criticise the possibility of developing housing policies. These are nurtured and accompanied by a differential process of social inclusion of homeless people that should also start from the public realm of our cities.

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<sup>8</sup> See also the positional paper “Decentralising Social Inclusion: *taut*, Homelessness and St Peter’s Square” presented at DIS 2017, Edinburgh available at: <https://designingdaos.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/gesuelli-decentralising-social-inclusion.pdf>



In this regard, inappropriability stands as an in-between position that aims to nurture an ethics of self-reflexivity in the encounter with homelessness involving scholars, policy makers but also a wider audience formed by city-dwellers in their daily interactions with people who are homeless. The risk inherent in attempting to codify homeless actions and practices, into either normative approaches or forms of 'radical housing' is to tear them off a threshold of inappropriability that needs to be first acknowledged and properly understood, principally beyond academic studies. Following this perspective, however, the article also acknowledges Fitzpatrick and Watts' (2020) opening to the necessity of including and questioning an ethics concerned with approaches to homelessness. It is precisely upon this ethics, which entails a complete inversion of the gaze through which homelessness is observed and accounted, that I believe it is possible to nurture new modalities of sharing the city and to delineate more socially inclusive policies.

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# Homelessness Prevention for Refugees: Results From an Analysis of Pathways to Shelter

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► **Abstract** *Ending homelessness also includes effective prevention of homelessness. For families experiencing homelessness, one potential opportunity is diversion, based on the unique pathways into homelessness they experience. With growing concern regarding the increase of refugees in family shelters, this research sought to understand pathways of refugee families to shelter with a consideration of the potential for diversion, or other interventions. Using an interpretive description approach, 15 participants were interviewed from two family shelters as an opportunity to understand in detail complex journeys of migration and homelessness. Three themes are proposed from the interviews: 1) Starting with nothing; 2) Shelter as a refuge; and 3) Wading through the bureaucratic mire. It was notable for our participants that rather than diversion, best experiences came from early access into family shelters, particularly where there was expertise in working with refugee claimants. In noting the difference between our sample and those families experiencing homelessness who have citizenship, diversion does not appear to be as promising a practice for this sub-population. Rather, we*

*recommend building knowledge of the refugee claimant process and resources within the homeless serving system and allowing family shelters to be a site of intervention.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Homelessness prevention, shelters, refugees, refugee families*

## Introduction

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Effective systems of ending homelessness must also include the prevention of homelessness (Oudshoorn, Dej, Parsons and Gaetz, 2020). In this paper we explore what homelessness prevention might look like, focusing on refugee families in two cities in Canada. Family homelessness presents a unique opportunity for prevention, as families are more likely than single adults to call ahead to an emergency shelter versus arriving at the door (Forchuk *et al.*, 2018). As a result, shelter diversion is being enacted in family shelters to assist families to remain housed or to re-house them, rather than families having to enter the homeless-serving system. These interventions can include working with current landlords or family members to allow the family to remain in place, facilitating access to emergency funds for rehousing or assistance in accessing services to prevent violence against women (Forchuk *et al.*, 2018).

In 2016 and beyond, the demographics of family shelters in Europe, and globally, shifted rapidly in the face of the Syrian Civil War (Zisser, 2019). Some constituents in countries such as France, Greece, and Italy have noted that refugees were increasing pressure on homelessness and social service systems (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). This has become a focal point for contemporary debates regarding deservingness for services and the plight of newcomers (Aigner, 2019). While these discussions have captivated attention, fewer researchers have considered specific interventions at this time, including the consideration of shelter diversion for refugees. In some early research on the topic, shelter diversion appears to be working well for families (Forchuk *et al.*, 2018). Because refugees may be contributing to the increase in family shelter utilisation, a primary system focus might include diverting refugee families from emergency shelters. Conversely, if diversion is not indicated for refugee families, appropriate prevention or intervention activities must be defined.

Essential to effective shelter diversion or other forms of prevention is understanding pathways into homelessness (Main and Ledene, 2019). By knowing these pathways, the appropriate points of intervention may be determined (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). However, it is notable that refugees, particularly asylum seekers, do not necessarily



have the same pathways into homelessness as citizens (Murdie, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand pathways of refugee families into emergency family shelters. The ultimate goal is to determine if, and to understand how, shelter diversion might be provided to this unique population. By understanding experiences of pathways into shelter we are able to critically consider prevention alternatives to diversion if it is not proving effective.

### ***Refugees Worldwide***

Understanding refugees' experiences of homelessness requires understanding refugees more broadly. In general, the term 'refugee' refers to someone who has been displaced due to conflict or persecution, without the immediate prospect of return (UNHCR, 2020a). This can include both internally displaced persons, meaning those within the borders of their country of citizenship, or externally displaced, meaning those who have crossed international borders. The use of the term 'refugee' without the qualifier of 'internally displaced' customarily refers to those who have had to cross a border and is how the term will be used here. Another important term is 'asylum seekers', which is used to indicate those who are making a refugee claim in a new country when that claim has yet to be processed (UNHCR, 2020a). In this way, the term 'refugee' may be used to indicate all displaced persons, or particularly to indicate those who have been granted a formal refugee status, thus allowing them to temporarily or permanently remain in the new country. Where it is important to distinguish between formally recognised refugees and asylum seekers, the term 'asylum seeker' will be used to refer to those who do not have official refugee status; otherwise, the term refugee is used to refer to all persons who are internationally displaced without necessarily receiving formal immigration approval in advance.

While the statistics on refugees can shift rapidly, the United Nations maintains general statistics on the refugee situation globally. Currently, there are 29.4 million refugees worldwide with 57% of these coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2020b). Turkey and Germany are the countries hosting the most refugees in Europe at 4.0 and 1.5 million respectively (UNHCR 2020c), with 612 700 first time asylum applications across the European Union in the calendar year 2019 (Eurostat, 2020). Within Canada, there has been fluctuation in the number of asylum applications over the years; however, it is important to note that the number of asylum applications has tripled since 2015, with over 50 000 in 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

## *Homelessness*

Statistics on refugee homelessness are more complex, given disparities in both service responses and data collection processes from nation to nation. Some nations have well established and distinct refugee reception systems and processes and these people are frequently excluded from statistics on homelessness. Others have such systems but include these individuals in homelessness counts. Some countries have no such distinct services and refugees are a high proportion of those served within the homeless shelter system; others do not allow non-citizens to access these social services (European Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Where asylum seekers are excluded from services, they may represent a large number of those who are rough sleeping, so whether a nation does effective street enumeration will determine if they are counted. If asylum seekers are granted refugee status, what this means in terms of housing supports again varies widely across countries. A study by the European Observatory on Homelessness (2016), released just at the heightening of the Syrian Civil War, concluded that refugees have not created increased pressure on homelessness services in most countries as they have either always been a part of these services or always excluded. This situation is now shifting as shelters that allow access to refugee families see a continual increase in this population (Sprandel, 2018).

There are several evidence-based trends globally in relation to preventing and ending homelessness. Individual services and entire systems have been shifting to a model of Housing First, where the focus is on permanent, stable, affordable housing, supported as necessary (Goering *et al.*, 2011). Housing First is a philosophy and a programmatic approach that prioritises rapid access to permanent housing without pre-conditions (Goering *et al.*, 2011). In this model, emergency shelters function as access points to housing, or successful diversion points from homelessness. Under a system wide commitment to Housing First, government resources could be diverted from shelter services to permanent housing and housing supports. Therefore, metrics used by all orders of government on the success of ending homelessness include reduced unique individuals accessing shelters and reduced lengths of stay in shelter (Gaetz, 2010). Research has demonstrated that people are more likely to remain housed in the long-term if the journey into housing is expedited and efforts are put into housing-related supports and services (Goering *et al.*, 2011). In contrast, poor health outcomes related to long-term emergency shelter stays (Frankish *et al.*, 2005) should be mitigated and overall rates of homelessness should be reduced under Housing First.

However, Housing First as it is being enacted in many contexts has some limitations. In particular, Housing First often involves intensive case management, a high level of in-home and one-on-one support that is resource intensive. In the face of resource limitations, jurisdictions are using prioritisation measures such as acuity

scales to determine who has access to these supports, such as the DESC Vulnerability Assessment Tool and VI-SPDAT (Fritsch *et al.*, 2017). These acuity measures shift Housing First from primary or secondary prevention to tertiary prevention as they screen for long-term emergency shelter users. By putting a priority on rehousing those who have already been in shelter for extended periods there is a gap for early intervention with those who score lower on the acuity scales (Oudshoorn, Dej, Parsons & Gaetz, 2020). Therefore, Housing First as a programme is only one tool within a broader homelessness prevention framework (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). Homelessness prevention includes a diversity of approaches including structural prevention, systems prevention, early intervention, eviction prevention, housing stability, and empowerment (Oudshoorn, Dej, Parsons & Gaetz, 2020). These differing modalities add opportunities for primary and secondary prevention on top of current Housing First models. For families experiencing homelessness, shelter diversion has received particular attention and is reviewed next, in the context of pathways of families into homelessness.

Pathways into homelessness are unique to each individual or family who experiences homelessness. However, there are commonalities found in the research, including: experiences of violence, relationship breakdown, job loss, mental illness, addiction, and poverty (Anderson and Christian, 2003). For families who become homeless, there are particularly high rates of experiences of violence and relationship breakdown (Buckner, 2014) as primary causes, with parental mental illness and addiction at times being background concerns (Curtis *et al.*, 2014; Wood *et al.*, 1990). Unique to families is that they are much more likely to be housed at the time of considering access to an emergency shelter and therefore are more likely to call ahead prior to entering shelter (Forchuk *et al.*, 2018). This provides a unique opportunity for diversion and early research on family diversion has proven it to be successful (Forchuk *et al.*, 2018). This involves such interventions as negotiating with a landlord, supporting families in reaching out to other opportunities for housing, or providing referrals to emergency rent or utilities support. Within a homelessness prevention approach, family shelters are uniquely positioned to optimise safe and effective diversion. However, research has not explored diversion as a prevention modality for refugees in particular.

### ***Refugees' Pathways to Homelessness***

Pathways into homelessness for refugees are, in a way, dependent on their particular status (Assefa *et al.*, 2017). Because those who have been granted legal refugee status versus those who are asylum seekers/refugee claimants have differential access to health and social services, they have different risks related to homelessness. From a statistical perspective, it is unfortunate that homeless-serving systems do not always record citizenship status in demographics, or do

not necessarily distinguish between those who have been granted formal refugee status, those awaiting a claim, and those whose claim has been denied. This makes it difficult to make clear conclusions regarding differential experiences. However, research in Canada has found that those granted refugee status are more likely to enter shelter due to family breakdown or conflict, whereas refugee claimants are more likely to enter shelter due to being directed there by formal services or informal networks (Assefa *et al.*, 2017). Whereas refugee claimants often have little to no financial resources and limited awareness of resources that could be accessed, approved refugees are more likely to have access to settlement workers who can communicate in their language personally or through interpretation, have access to government income supports, and are supported directly into rental housing (Murdie, 2008). Approved refugees should be less likely to utilise emergency shelter services but may still experience issues such as intimate partner violence that lead some individuals to access shelters (CAMH and CAS Toronto, 2014).

Ultimately, if we are to prevent homelessness for refugee families, we need much better information regarding pathways into homelessness for refugees. Interventions to prevent homelessness must be tailored to the ways through which people become homeless (Gaetz and DeJ, 2017). Knowing that emergency shelters have high occupancy rates and do not provide the best long-term outcomes, it is imperative to understand how refugee families are experiencing entry into homelessness. To systematically reduce emergency shelter utilisation, with a focus on preventing refugee homelessness, the overall purpose of this paper is: To understand the complex and diverse pathways of refugee families into homelessness. Through this understanding we can begin to consider tailored possibilities for prevention.

## Methods

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This project is situated within a critical research perspective and a human rights approach. Within the critical perspective, value is placed on the voices and experiences of those on the margins (Weaver and Olsen, 2006), hence the focus particularly on refugee families in shelters. Within a human rights approach, housing is seen as a right for all people (Hoover, 2015). Methodologically, the study followed Thorne's interpretive description (Thorne, 2016) with a focus on finding practical meanings within the stories of refugees. Interpretive description assists researchers in generating recommendations for policy and practice directly from in-depth and often small sample studies (Thorne *et al.*, 1997). In-depth interviewing was utilised, with interviews structured in a narrative approach, inviting participants to talk about their journey from as far back in their personal history as they chose, leading into

the ultimate question of how they arrived in an emergency shelter. Narrative interviewing is a semi-structured approach that crosses cultural differences by centring storytelling (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000).

The study included the purposive sampling of 15 participants from two family shelters in a mid-sized and a large city in Canada. Participants were purposefully recruited if they had refugee status, were claiming refugee status, or had been denied refugee status; participants were not required to disclose their exact status to participate, only confirm that they fit one of these categories. However, it became clear through the stories shared that the majority of our participants were currently refugee claimants. Interviews were conducted with a single family member of the family's choice, and compensation of \$20 was provided per interview. Interviews were conducted by two research assistants utilizing the same interview guide and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. An interpreter was provided as necessary, with two interviews being conducted through Arabic-English interpretation. This high proportion of fluency in oral English is likely due to recruitment materials being distributed in English and the majority of staff supporting recruitment having English as a first language. Eleven of the participants identified as male and four as female, with all participants being over the age of 16. While all participants were situated in family shelters, two of the women accessed the shelter related to experiences of violence and were not currently co-situated with their partners or children. Thirteen of the participants migrated from the African continent and two from Asia, and participants identified as African, Asian, or Arabic. Migration routes included both direct entry into Canada and journeys through one or more other countries, several having arrived through the United States. Research Ethics Board approval was obtained prior to commencing data collection.

Data analysis followed a multi-stage interpretive description analysis involving the six members of the research team. All digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The 15 transcripts were reviewed and memoed by a research assistant and a second research assistant wrote a narrative summary for each participant. These memos and narrative summaries were reviewed by the team and preliminary key elements of meaning were identified. The transcripts were coded by these elements of meaning and the extracted quotes were then reviewed by the principal investigator to coalesce the elements of meaning into themes. The themes and associated quotes were reviewed by the full team and revised into the final thematic structure presented here.

## Findings

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Our findings have been structured into three themes to provide clarity to the meaning we derived from the conversations with our participants. Congruent with the interpretive descriptive approach (Thorne, 2016), the themes in and of themselves are less relevant than how they advance our thinking to guide practices. We have labelled these themes: 1) Starting with nothing; 2) Shelter as a refuge; and 3) Wading through the bureaucratic mire. Ultimately, the meaning that we propose from these findings is that for this particular population of refugee families, particularly asylum seekers, being encouraged to access family shelter might be a more appropriate approach than shelter diversion.

### *Starting with nothing*

This theme reflects the diversity of starting points for migration and the diversity of experiences of migration shared by participants, yet the similarity of being without resources by the time they entered shelter. Motivating factors for migration ranged from risk of interpersonal violence, risk of state violence, discrimination based on sexuality, or failed settlement in another country. Similarly, pathways into the country were diverse, from use of existing visas (school, work, travel), to irregular border crossings, use of false documents, “identity loans”, use of other black-market support, and accepted pre-migration claims. Locations of arrival were equally diverse with no common entry point; for example, someone making a claim while in the country on a student visa could be anywhere in the country, whereas border crossings tended to be concentrated in a few key locations. One family describes how they got caught up in the Egyptian revolution, ultimately fleeing to the United States and then crossing into Canada:

“So what happened is that in one day [my] wife wanted to go downtown, to the city and she was using the metro there. Again, the financial and the political issues were not stable, so there was an increase in the metro ticket price. So people started to do kind of a protest and demonstration and she was there, wanting to use the service, the metro itself. So the police came and they detained her. So they detained her, they attacked her, they violently hit her. They were interrogating her in an office. They didn’t put her in a jail, but they put her in an office and they violently attacked her.... The problem here in Egypt is that if you have any history with the government you will be always in danger, because they will do a background check-up and whenever any problem happens around the city they will come right away to your house, they will attack the house itself.” – Participant 14

Regardless of the journey involved, what we noted was that participants were different than citizens experiencing homelessness in that they were more likely to have no resources whatsoever. This is in contrast to citizens who may be housed but facing eviction, may have access to income assistance, may have access to health services, may have children already in school or subsidised childcare, and may have a broader social network. By the time they reached shelter, participants had fully exhausted any and all financial resources they had started with, even trading goods such as clothing to cover their basic needs during migration. For example, multiple participants noted that when they were paying for visas or paying for long-distance travel between and within countries, they were spending all financial resources, and using all possessions to sell or trade to cover costs for basic necessities. As a result, they showed up to family shelters upon arrival in Canada with nothing, no money and no possessions, including no identification.

Many participants also expressed that upon arrival at the family shelter in Canada, they had no knowledge of the housing system, shelter system, health care system, or immigration system. In addition, they sometimes had little to no English language ability to help them along the way. Participants expressed relying on others' knowledge of where to go and how to navigate these new systems:

“I have no idea how to apply for the refugee [status]... I'm really out of money... I told them that I didn't have any status because I don't have any Canadian ID here, that I have my Sudanese passport only.” – Participant 12

Participants being absolutely homeless versus at risk of homelessness begins to limit the prevention and diversion opportunities.

### ***Shelter as a refuge***

In the context of traumatic experiences in one's home country, difficult migration journeys, and exhausting all resources, the analogy for the shelters was clear and consistent: shelters were a refuge.

“But when I arrived here at first I didn't open up to them, I was scared. But when I came I saw the signs they had up, they're welcoming to everyone, so I felt at peace.... Because they're giving me care, it's like a family here.” – Participant 2

For families, the contrast between the shelters and their migration journeys and traumatic experiences was profound. Arriving at a place that invited them in, that provided interpretation so they could be supported in their own language, and that offered to meet their basic needs was an incredible moment of relief.

“Because they're [shelter staff] giving me care, it's like a family here, and because I don't know anyone here. And [shelter], like what I want to say – it's like a home for me. Because if I compare it to the other shelters, because I get some informa-

tion from my friends, and they're and like, I'm lucky to be here. Yeah, they helped to do my refugee claim, they helped me – they helped me from the start, from scratch – I didn't know anything." – Participant 2

"Before I came here I had no money, and they gave me money. I didn't have ID at that time and last week I got my ID, so this month I can get more money." – Participant 8

What we noticed is that the participants' arrival in family shelters provided them with access to a full range of services from refugee claim assistance, to healthcare, to income, to food, and beyond. Therefore, the families who had the best potential for positive long-term outcomes were the families who went into the shelters the earliest. It is worth noting that this is particularly in the context of family shelters alone, as some participants had conversely negative experiences in general emergency shelters. Participants, who were initially drifting out on their own, trying to make it, were the ones who had more crises along the way before they gained access to appropriate supports. Participants also expressed trying to survive on their own outside of the shelter system as a way to remain invisible to child welfare services and avoid potential child apprehension. For example, one family expressed that their strategy to remain invisible was for the father to go into a men's shelter while the mother and baby might walk through the evening, and then go to a library, and sleep in a library during the day. The subsequent health and social consequences of trying to live in unsheltered homelessness prior to accessing shelter were significant.

"You know people are trying to survive, but you know – some have to steal to survive, some have to go into prostitution to survive." – Participant 3

Participants did best when a family shelter was approached as a first resort rather than a last resort, as they had immediate access to food, clothing, safety, interpretation services, and an entry into the Canadian social and health systems.

These positive experiences with the family shelters were contrasted by some participants with experiences they had in first accessing general shelters. Family shelters are more likely to have self-contained units, lower exposure to interpersonal conflict, more resources geared towards children, and may have staff expertise related to migration. General emergency shelters did not necessarily have staff expertise in the refugee system and were unable to provide particular guidance. Additionally, these shelters were less likely to have translation services available. Families residing in general shelters felt they were more likely to be exposed to substance use or violence:

"Because also inside the building there were like, people were using drugs." – Participant 11



“Because at [the first shelter the participant went to] they take only maybe [people] who do drugs only because at first day I was bullied and they realised it – so they saw it on the cameras, and [staff] told me no, it isn’t good to be here. Because they take drugs and... [residents] wanted to give me injections – they thought I used drugs.” – Participant 2

Most concerning was that when participants were asked about any experiences of racism, two identified feeling discriminated against by staff of emergency shelters prior to coming to the family shelters. Participant 9, when asked about experiences of racism in Canada, identified a shelter staff member in a large shelter they occupied prior to the family shelter:

[Interviewer] “Yeah, and have you had any – I know it sounds like you had a pretty rough time before you left, but since you’ve gotten to Canada have you experienced any things like violence or anything like”

[Participant 9] “Yeah, just only one staff.”

[Interviewer] “Oh okay.”

[Participant 9] “Yeah, following me around, you know. Calling me refugee, telling me I’m a refugee. And I complain to [the shelter manager], [the shelter manager] still supports her that she’s doing her job and everything. So I just said to her that ‘I know that like maybe I’m not a White person and I’m not a Canadian so that’s why she’s telling me all this stuffs and you are supporting her.’ So I kept complaining from the very first day that I went to the shelter, she’s following me, following me, following me, you know, because she knows everything that is on my file, right? And she keeps telling everybody in the [name of shelter], you know, about my file that I’m a refugee, that I came with a fake visa, that I do that, that I do that, you know, even though I complained.”

So where the family shelters were identified as a refuge from life on the street, for some participants they were also a refuge from other spaces within the homeless serving system.

### ***Wading through the bureaucratic mire***

While shelters offered a variety of supports, this did not necessarily change the broader structural challenge that participants faced in terms of the bureaucratic maze required to be navigated in order to gain citizenship and access health and social services. For the refugees in this study, gaining full access to supports was a multi-step, multi-month process. One must first apply for the first piece of ID, then for the second piece of ID, then make a refugee claim. To be successful with the claim, one must acquire the services of a lawyer, which includes getting on the waitlist for a pro-bono refugee lawyer. Getting children in school, getting access to

social assistance income, applying for affordable housing, and obtaining a card to access public health services were each separate applications to be completed in English and often requiring ID and a service fee.

“Because I’m new to Canada I don’t know anyone. How do I get a reference [for a housing application]?” – Participant 2

“I had to cross the border illegally. So I was detained at the border. So from there I made [my claim], they took me to immigration where I had to sign some documents. From there I was taken to a shelter, then I went to the immigration board, got my paper, my identification paper. Then I applied for my work permit, I got my work permit...but I had an issue with the language, it wasn’t easy for me. And then I was like okay fine I can deal with it at first. I stayed there for a while, but I didn’t get a good job.” – Participant 6

This bureaucratic mire is best approached with the guidance of dedicated workers in the family shelters:

“I don’t understand where to go, you know. On arriving in Canada they are talking like, ‘Go to south, go to this, go to that,’ but I didn’t even know what that is.... So from that I came here [to the shelter], you know, they started to show me like how everything goes and everything. So then when I arrived they said to me like ‘Oh, so you are a refugee? Sure, this is the way that you will do your thing and everything.’” – Participant 9

In the family shelters, the workers support all families in accessing permanent and affordable housing options. For the refugee families, the workers are aware of the steps involved in seeking official refugee status and that the process can take many months, even years if there are multiples appeals involved in obtaining legal refugee status. This leads to a different approach for shelter workers supporting refugee families that focuses on a step-wise process of gaining stability versus rapid exit into unsupported housing. The best hope of exiting homelessness into housing for these families was through the resources and system-navigation services available at the shelter.

## Discussion

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What was notable in the stories of participants was that there is a path to housing stability for these refugee families, but it is not a simple path and it is not a path that any of the participants were able to journey alone. It is also notable that the majority of our participants were refugee claimants, so conclusions may differ between those with official refugee status and those in the process of a claim. The meaning we propose from these findings is that, at a time where the sector

is seeking to use less shelter and have more diversion and prevention, the best outcomes for refugee claimant families may come from accessing emergency shelter. This was made possible particularly when shelter staff were provided the resources and knowledge to work with newcomers. In light of these needed supports, we note that through the process of conducting the study, we found that one of the two communities of study only had a single worker within the family shelter system who had specific expertise related to supporting refugees. This worker took on the role of a system navigator who knew all the pieces to successfully navigate the systems. This presents a problem as it means that the complex process of navigating refugee claimants through various systems is not necessarily common knowledge across the homeless serving sector. Therefore, a clear recommendation is that all communities increase training within the emergency shelter system related to the unique needs of refugee claimants, in a way paralleling the settlement services available to status refugees. In our study, it was noted by participants that some shelter workers are not familiar with immigration systems and could not provide particular guidance regarding steps for newcomers. More concerning, participants noted experiences of racism and discrimination directly from some shelter staff. Enhancing the ability of shelters to support refugee families can be improved by practical resources such as access to interpretation services and shelter resources in multiple languages. Organisations may also consider having flexible funds available to cover fees related to obtaining identification and other application fees. This starts to increase the number of access points that are the 'right door' for refugee families.

In the Canadian context as well as many other national contexts, the recommendation of facilitating rapid access into family shelters for refugee families creates a jurisdictional and funding challenge. Apart from the aforementioned issue that in some countries non-citizens have no access to social services, in countries such as Canada, refugees are considered under the shared jurisdiction of provincial and federal governments but federal governments set the bulk of policy directions on immigration. In this way, municipally delivered and provincially funded family shelters supporting refugees who are accepted in through federal policies becomes a frustration for these jurisdictions who feel they are shouldering funding needs created by the federal government. It would be a reasonable expectation that federal governments that allow entry of refugees would also provide funding to support their downstream shelter needs. This also opens a broader debate of what overall supports should be provided to refugees to prevent homelessness in the first place, which is beyond the focus of this paper.

It is important to note that these recommendations in no way negate the current focus on homelessness prevention and shelter diversion for families experiencing homelessness. What we are proposing is that while these approaches are promising

practices for families who have citizenship, for refugee families, the best outcomes may be achieved through rapidly guiding them into family shelters (apart from jurisdictions where refugees are not allowed access to such services). This is due to these families for the most part having no other resources to draw on while simultaneously facing multiple challenges such as language limitations, ID limitations, lack of knowledge of local systems, and barriers to accessing social services as non-citizens. As organizations that support multiple basic needs of individuals, emergency family shelters may be the best starting points for refugee claimant families. These findings are offered tentatively, given the small sample and the cross-sectional nature of the data collection. What we offer is that 'shelter diversion' may not be a one-size-fits-all approach to family homelessness as unique populations may have unique needs.

This study is limited in that the incredible diversity of national and regional approaches to refugees is not incorporated. For example, recommendations to support more shelter staff in becoming competent to support refugees is rendered moot in jurisdictions where individuals must prove citizenship to access a shelter. The Canadian context also includes access to social assistance income and pathways to affordable housing for those who are still in the claimant phase, increasing the services a shelter might support, which may not be relevant to many other jurisdictions. A second limitation is that the study did not follow participants longitudinally. While participants told a common narrative of improved well-being upon entry to shelter, it's unknown whether these improvements last over time. It is conceivable that there might be other negative effects of accessing shelter, such as further traumatisation or engagement of child welfare services leading to child apprehension. This could be mitigated by research that follows refugee families over a much longer trajectory, and per the preceding concern, could cover multiple jurisdictions. To ultimately address the question of diversion in the context of refugee families, future research could include particular diversion interventions. This might include direct access to permanent housing with supports, such as system navigation, geared to newcomers. Conceivably, this approach could balance the need for supports through the claimant process while also stabilising housing. Ultimately, the universal right to housing (Hoover, 2015) requires complex approaches that address the unique needs of particular populations.

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# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Discursive Representations of Begging and Homelessness on the London Overground

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➤ **Abstract\_** *This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse two sets of texts relating to begging on the London Overground rail network. One is a poster, which combines public information prohibiting begging with a charitable appeal, and the other is a small corpus of oral appeals for help made by people begging. The paper analyses the oral appeals as forms of resistance to the discourses evoked by the poster.*

➤ **Keywords\_** *Begging, London, Critical Discourse Analysis*

## Introduction

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Foucault wrote that in seeking to locate and understand power, one should begin by looking at where people are resisting it (1982, p.780). Anyone who has travelled on the London transport system in the last 20 or so years has borne witness to one such struggle, in that travellers are sometimes addressed in platform announcements as ‘passengers’ and sometimes as ‘customers’, the first embodying a discourse of public transport as a public good and the second an ideology of marketised and privatised service provision. This paper addresses another site of ideological struggle, analysing two types of text related to begging on the London Overground network. One of the texts is an official poster aimed at encouraging travellers to give to (a) charity rather than directly to beggars, while the other consists of the oral appeals of those asking for help. Drawing on Norman Fairclough’s 1989 framework (1989; 2001), I will subject these texts to sociocultural

contextualisation, interpretative analysis and textual analysis in order to identify how the two text types are interrelated in the ways they address, reproduce or seek to resist particular discourses around begging and homelessness.

As a regular user of London Overground, I have recently seen a marked increase in the number of people asking for help, usually on the basis of finding themselves homeless. This is not just a matter of individual perception: the Combined Homelessness and Information Network reported in October 2018 that there is now a record amount of people sleeping rough in London (quoted in Marsh, 2018). I have also seen and heard various campaigns in different parts of the TFL network (of which both London Overground and London Underground are part) advising and sometimes urging travellers not to 'encourage' begging by giving money or food to those asking for it. One way to better understand the power dynamics related to begging is to juxtapose these two types of representation, and to consider the manner and extent to which the oral appeals of those begging constitute a response and a form of resistance to the official notices and other such admonishments.

## Methodological Framework

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Critical Discourse Analysis aims to uncover "how discourse is related to power relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies" (Fairclough, 2001, p.5). There are several varieties of CDA (see Wodak and Meyer, 2009 for a survey) and the frameworks and methodologies used and espoused by Fairclough himself have changed considerably over the years (see for example Choulakiari and Fairclough, 1999 on genre, discourse and style or Fairclough, 2014 on 'critique-explanation-action'). What all CDA approaches have in common is a problem-oriented approach (Wodak and Meyer, 2009) and a belief that "discourse is language in its relations with other elements in the social process" (Fairclough, 2014). Discourse is "not only a product or reflection of unequal social processes, but is itself seen to contribute towards the production (or reproduction) of these processes" (Talbot *et al.*, 2003, p.36); texts embody social structure and discourse in a unity of 'context, interaction and text' (Janks, 1997). Critical analysis of discourse thus aims to raise questions about what and how particular assumptions representing particular interests are positioned and negated within a text in order to get at what power relations lie behind and structure it.

In this way, Fairclough (1989) argues that any spoken or written text is both an instance of a discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of text and a piece of social practice. The researcher should analyse the texts themselves ('description'), the processes of their production and interpretation (the 'interpretation' of 'discourse practice'), their social context ('explanation'), and the

relationship between all three aspects. Fairclough's distinction between interpretation and explanation has been criticised for failing to theorise just how it is that the critical discourse analyst comes to have more and better insight into the discursive event than its participants do. His term 'members' resources' (which are 'socially determined and ideologically shaped' (Fairclough, 2013, p.11)) implies that analysts, through recourse to social theory, have 'VIP resources' which supersede the constraints of the assumptions and expectations of 'lay' participants. Slembrouck (2001) is also concerned that CDA fails to include the 'voices' of participants and would better conduct its critique in dialogue with them. Fairclough (2014) argues that participants do not analyse the text in 'the same systematic way' as analysts do, but he has also adapted his method to take account of such criticisms. In my own discussion, there will be a good deal of overlap between what can be considered explanation, interpretation and description. Each aspect demands a specific type of analysis. Although he subsequently revised this procedure, the three-dimensional framework enables us to describe the social processes and structures behind a given piece of discourse, understand those that may have influenced its production and interpretation, and identify possible ways to revise discourse in order to emancipate discourse and thus social practices from their ideological constraints.

While Fairclough suggests that analysis should proceed from the descriptive to the interpretive to the explanatory, he also writes that it is not important which kind of analysis one begins with, as long as the analysis demonstrates the connections between them: as Janks (1997) argues, "[i]t is through seeking out the interconnections that one uncovers the patterns and disjunctions that are to be described, interpreted and explained" (p.329). For my purposes, given that I am dealing with very short texts, a top-down approach is most practical, focusing *in* rather than out, beginning with the socio-historical context, moving through the discursive practices and then analysing the texts themselves. But first, here are the texts that I shall be analysing.

### ***Setting and data collection***

The poster in Figure 1 appeared in early 2019 around the Overground network. It was initially prominently displayed at the entrance to stations, and then over the following weeks larger posters were installed on platforms, a smaller version was posted inside the carriages, and the text was also broadcast on the trains at irregular intervals.



Figure 1

I collected the oral appeals by discreetly noting down what I remembered of what people said once they'd moved on in a way that ensured that my observation was inconspicuous. The sample of texts thus gathered represents rather an ad-hoc selection of oral appeals, but I did endeavour to choose a representative variety of the two dozen or so I collected on London Overground between January and March 2019.

1. *Sorry to bother you, my name's... I recently became homeless, I'm sleeping in a park at the moment, trying to get some change to get into a hostel tonight*
2. *Hello, I'm homeless (UP), I'm collecting for something to eat and drink, if you could spare any pennies I'd be very grateful, thank you very much*
3. *Sorry to bother you I wonder if anyone can help me out for a bit of food and drink it's freezing cold*
4. *Sorry to bother you, my name's...., I hate asking but I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job and no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing.*
5. *Sorry guys, I'm homeless, I really am homeless, and I'm just trying to get some money for some socks or even a bed for the night, if anyone can help...*

## Sociohistorical Context

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While it is far beyond the scope of this study to investigate the demographics and economic and social circumstances of the people begging in the context of London in 2019, *The Guardian* reports that ‘immediate factors [such as the] rollout of universal credit and freezes to local housing allowance rates put even basic accommodation beyond the means of many’ (Doward *et al.*, 2018) Shelter estimated that as a result of this and the broader housing crisis, there were as of 2018 almost 170 000 homeless people in the capital (Shelter, 2018).

While ‘only a relatively small proportion of homeless persons beg’ (Tosi, 2007, p.226), they are reliant on public spaces to do so, and are thus ‘among those who suffer most under measures to control urban space’.<sup>1</sup> One strand in tackling homelessness attempts to make the homeless themselves disappear from public spaces, since among other things, ‘[t]he presence of street begging is a strong signal that our welfare institutions are failing to protect some people in dire need. If successful, anti-begging policies have the potential to eliminate that message’ (Adler *et al.*, 2000, p.1). In line with this, one member of the London Assembly recently called on the Mayor to ‘curtail this [begging] activity’, and in his response, Mayor Sadiq Khan stated that London Underground is ‘trailing new customer communications this year’ (London Assembly, 2018).

Figure 1 is an illustration of such a communication, and it involves a Diverted Giving Scheme (Pérez-Muñoz, 2018), which helps to finance NGOs that have better infrastructures and broader perspectives than individual donors when it comes to effectively helping beggars. This also means that money may be more evenly distributed, because as Moen argues (2014, p.74), ‘when you give money to a beggar, you are statistically likely to give the most money to the ones with the locations, looks, and tricks [sic] that prompt people to give’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In London and other cities, formerly public spaces are increasingly privatised (see e.g. Minton, 2009, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The scale, complexity and nature of the problem mean, however, that what charities can achieve is inevitably limited. Hostels are not necessarily the perfect answer to rough sleeping – Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin (2007) report that many such facilities are increasingly over-institutionalised, and can be ‘an organisational barrier rather than an instrument for remedying and reducing homelessness’. Pérez-Muñoz argues convincingly that many schemes which involve outlawing begging are ‘based on the assumption that beggars have real opportunities to stay out of the streets and go back to work. We should not assume without argument that this idea is sound’ (p.931). In an era of increasing homelessness, with few major state-level policy responses even up for discussion, there will inevitably be people who try to use begging in public places as a means of survival.

## Interpreting the Discourse Practices

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The interpretation of discourse practice is concerned with the way participants arrive at an understanding of the text and looks at the connections between the text, other texts and related discourses, i.e. with its intertextual and interdiscursive dimensions. Fairclough argues that texts are normally heterogeneous as they are 'constituted by combinations of diverse genres and discourses' (1995, p.134), and my analysis of the interpretive context will consider how the texts in question relate to statements by Transport for London itself and to previous campaigns, as well as to pre-existing discourses regarding begging.

### *Identifying the interpretive context*

Fairclough (1989, p.146) provides a series of questions designed to identify key elements of the interpretive context, and these can be taken in turn, focusing first on the poster and second on the oral appeals:

- **Contents: What's going on?**

*The poster:* An official notice giving information, displayed at London Overground stations and in carriages in East London encouraging people who are considering helping someone they see begging to give to a (named) charity instead.

*The oral appeals:* Produced by people in the act of asking for help (begging).

- **Subjects: Who's involved?**

*The poster:* This is part of a joint campaign between Transport for London, its subsidiary London Overground and the office of the Mayor of London. It is aimed at passengers on the network. The other participants are the charity identified in the poster and the beggars themselves, who are only mentioned fleetingly.

*The oral appeals:* These are addressed by the beggars to the passengers on the network, i.e. whoever was occupying a particular carriage at that moment.

- **Relations: In what relations?**

*The poster:* This represents the official voice of the institutions which run and, to an extent, police the transport network. It explicitly addresses the passengers. It's not clear from the poster whether the specified charity (the Whitechapel Mission) is party to the campaign, although in correspondence with the charity itself it transpired that the wording and design came from London Overground and is subject to change depending on the response of the public.

*The oral appeals:* The oral appeals can be seen as part of a three-way conversation, to which the poster also contributes. Although beggars are mentioned in the poster and can see that they are mentioned, they are not explicitly addressed.

Instead, both the official notice *and* the appeals of those begging are addressed directly to the passengers, whose actions in giving or not giving respond differentially to the two ‘parties’. With the spoken appeals, the passengers do not quite fit the definition of ratified participants provided in Goffman’s Participation Framework (1963), as they are neither overhearers/bystanders nor addressed or unaddressed recipients – individual passengers rarely pay explicit attention to the person begging, but often behave as if nothing is taking place, thus relegating the beggar to the status of a ‘non-person’. Partly thanks to the poster campaigns, most passengers will be aware that begging is actively discouraged on Overground trains, so some choose to ignore entirely an activity and appeal which they know to be considered illicit.

- **Connections: What’s the role of language?**

*The poster:* The genre is explicitly that of a public information campaign, but it also carries both an implicit message of prohibited behaviour and a charitable appeal. Unlike most fundraising appeals, it features no graphical elements such as photos, and no details of how to donate to the charity in question, reflecting the fact that it represents several distinct orders of discourse and serves a dual and therefore ambiguous purpose.

*The oral appeals:* These are rhetorical appeals for help, usually in the form of money but also for the satisfaction of other basic needs. One striking feature of this particular activity type is that it involves a captive audience in that the passengers are not in a position to simply walk away.

### ***Intertextual context***

The poster campaign replaced an earlier set of announcements which took a very different approach to discouraging begging. These announcements were used all across the London transport network and were based on advice from British Transport Police. There were subsequent reports in at least two newspapers, one in *The Independent* (‘London Underground criticised over ‘heartless’ announcements telling passengers not to ‘encourage’ beggars’ (Bulman, 2018) and the other in *The Metro* (‘Anti-begging Tube announcements ‘encourage rich people to ignore the homeless’ (Roberts, 2018). One common criticism regarded the wording of the announcements, which warned passengers that beggars were ‘operating’ on the tube. Some critics observed that this choice of words framed those begging as criminals.

In both articles, the same spokesperson (TFL’s Director of Compliance and Policing) is quoted and gives much the same message: London Underground will be trialling new customer communications this year (see Mayor Sadiq Khan above), and the organisation is “already in the process of changing their announcements to

encourage people to give to charity...We encourage people to donate to the London Charities Homeless Group rather than to beggars travelling on the Tube or rail network, so that donations can directly help fund homeless services.”

### *Interdiscursive context*

It is probable that most passengers encountering these two sets of appeals will have heard and/or read about the earlier campaigns. Their expectations will also have been conditioned by a range of broader discourses likely to structure their understanding of begging and homelessness. Having looked at the sociohistorical and intertextual contexts, it is now worth identifying some common ways of talking about homelessness and begging, some of which we have already encountered and some of which emerge in the texts themselves when subjected to linguistic analysis.

- a) *Begging is a criminal activity so beggars should be treated as such.* This was mentioned earlier, in discussion of both the sociohistorical and intertextual contexts. It encompasses multiple sub-discourses (e.g. criminal gangs) and operates at the highest policy levels.
- b) *Beggars are not in genuine need.* This is a very common discourse in online forums, radio phone-ins, etc. According to one comment in an online discussion of attempts to reduce begging on the Overground, “You underestimate what those train beggars take in. You only need a couple of suckers per hour to give you folding money and you’re earning better money than half the subscribers here” (Reddit, 2019). Another sub-discourse identified by one of Adler *et al.*’s (2000, p.211) informants is that the existence of the Welfare State means that there is no excuse for begging as “no one in this country is that poor”.
- c) *Anyone begging is not competent to handle their own financial resources.* To quote one of the people interviewed in Hewitt (1994), it is pointless giving money directly to beggars as “they spend it on the wrong things” (ibid p.134). A sub-discourse is that they are all drug addicts. Partly as a result, it is also said that is that it is better to “give them food” (ibid, p.123).
- d) *It’s better to give to an organised charity than to a street beggar.* A Guardian article debating whether or not one should donate directly to the homeless (Johnson, 2018) reports that “UK homelessness charities are almost unanimous on the question of giving money [directly]: it is better not to...All of the institutions in question agree that money should instead be given directly to them rather than to beggars.”
- e) *Corporate Social Responsibility.* It is now widely accepted that corporations should hold themselves accountable for problems that occur within the ambit of their operations. As we have seen, TFL has made statements about begging but



does not appear to have an officially stated policy. There is a rail by-law which states “Except with written permission from the Operator no person on the railway shall tout for or solicit money, reward, custom or employment of any kind” (Cross Country Trains, 2019), but that is a general prohibition that does not specifically apply to TFL. Insofar as public statements are concerned, the only stated policies related to collecting money relate solely to charity collections (Transport for London, 2019). In the Metro article the spokesperson talks of “signpost[ing] commuters towards these positive ways to make a difference” and states that “If buskers and beggars are disrupting customer journeys then TFL has every right to tackle the issue”. It is noteworthy that this statement addresses corporate rights rather than responsibilities.

- f) *Humanising discourse, respecting the dignity and circumstances of those begging.* The petition against TFL’s previous advertising campaigns (referred to in the Metro article) embodies this discourse: ‘The announcements currently running on the underground are deeply dehumanising, encouraging wealthy commuters to see those forced to beg on trains as a nuisance to be ignored – rather than people who have been badly let down by the system, and who deserve support and compassion.’ (change.org, 2019).
- g) *Just give them some money.* The notion that donations to individuals are purely a question of personal choice is widely shared. A *New Statesman* article in October 2017 was entitled ‘Why you should give money directly and unconditionally to homeless people: Who are you to judge what to do with their cash?’ (Broomfield, 2017).
- h) *Society, rather than individual failings, is to blame for poverty.* The last thirty or so years of neoliberal hegemony have been marked by an increasing tendency to prefer individual failings (such as laziness or a lack of willpower) rather than social factors as an explanation for poverty (natcen.ac.uk, 2013). Nevertheless, explanations that place much of the blame for (e.g.) increasing homelessness still circulate widely.

## Text Analysis

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In CDA, analysing the linguistic features of the text involves reading against the grain of its particular logics, in order to discover which discourses the text makes available to its audiences and how its authors “establish hypotheses about discourses at work in society” (Janks, 1997, p.331). This analysis will allow us to identify salient characteristics that may either connect the text to the contexts and

discourses we have been discussing or serve to point us in other directions. The fact that the two types of text are (very) brief means that my analysis can try to cover a broader variety of features rather than limiting itself to one or two specific aspects.

### ***Text analysis of the poster***

The first clause ('If you want to help someone you see begging...') takes for granted that there are people begging on the Overground network and assumes that not everyone may be inclined to help them. Thus the poster does not constitute a straightforward charitable appeal. It gives no further reason for the presence of people begging, presenting the reader with a choice and suggesting a course of action on the condition that they may wish to contribute. The fact that the poster provides no means of giving in the form of a QR code or number to text suggests that its purpose is more about reducing begging than raising money. Although it uses the imperative form ('donate...') it does not use the word 'please', which would carry a normative implication that people *should* give. This ambiguity in its appeal also derives from the lack of any explicit admonition *not* to give to beggars. In Fairclough's terms, it embodies at least three orders of discourse: an information poster (as signalled by the 'information' logo), an official proscription of certain forms of behaviour, and an appeal to people's charitable impulses. The sparseness of its visual design suggests it may be a trial poster.

The style of the text is institutional, devoid of personalisation, occluding the person writing the notice. This is achieved not just via the presence of the three official logos but also by the absence of any first person pronouns in the text. In the final clause, however, the phrase 'Any donations will be...' has the form of a commissive speech act, or more specifically a promise, but it is not clear whose voice is providing the assurance. Is it TFL or the 'Whitechapel Mission'? The inverted commas around the name of the charity perhaps suggests that it is TFL, thus the poster serves to distance its producers from the benefitting institution.

Another striking feature is the shift within the first sentence, in that the beneficiary of the first clause ('someone you see begging') is not the same as the beneficiary in the second one (the 'Whitechapel Mission'). This shift presupposes that 'it is better to give to a charitable institution than directly to a beggar' and reminds us of the statement from TFL about *signposting* commuters to where they can make a positive difference and, by implication, not make the situation worse. The subsequent use of the passive voice ('Any donations will be used carefully and your generosity will be welcomed') also serves to syntactically occlude the agency of the 'someone' begging. After the very first clause, they make no further appearance in the text. The choice of language thus positions them as objects of intervention rather than subjects with their own agency.

The poster does not address the person begging. There is no suggestion of 'if you are begging' or 'if you are caught begging'. Beggars are likely to see the poster but are not included in the 'you' of its addressee. The use of the second person 'you', along with the presentation of a choice, evokes a marketing order of discourse, also indexed by the use of nominalisation in the phrase 'your generosity', and culminating in a promise ('will be used carefully and gratefully received'). There seems to be an implicit contrast in the final sentence ('Any donations will...') which relates back to the first choice. Just as the promise of marketing discourses is always dependent on the 'consumer' making the right choice and often operationalises the prospective consumer's 'fear of missing out', the promise that the giver's donation 'will be generously received and carefully used' suggest that if they make the wrong choice and give directly to the beggar, the donation will *not* be welcomed and may instead be wasted. Thus the poster evokes the paternalistic discourse of incompetence – those begging are positioned as not being able to manage their own needs.

The status of the poster, which is signalled as an official product of the institutions which manage the Overground network, also seems to embody a discourse of corporate social responsibility. Thus it marks a shift from the previous campaign. Negative discourses certainly are evoked, but it is not implied that beggars are not in genuine need or that they are engaged in criminal activity, as in the TL campaigns advised by the police.

### ***Text analysis of the oral appeals***

The very fact of making individual appeals for help in public can be read as a form of resisting the discourse that the public should only give to charities and ignore individual beggars entirely. Thus we might expect that in the oral appeals made by those begging, there would be an explicit focus on individual goals and circumstances, presenting individual cases of injustice and inequality in opposition to the impersonal prohibition.

In terms of the overall structure of the appeals, we can see that there is a script structure at work, which broadly has the following form:

Text 1: *Sorry to bother you, my name's... I recently became homeless, I'm sleeping in a park at the moment, trying to get some change to get into a hostel tonight.*

Apology – introduction – circumstances – purpose or goal

Text 2: *Hello, I'm homeless (UP), I'm collecting for something to eat and drink, if you could spare any pennies I'd be very grateful, thank you very much*

Introduction – purpose or goal – request – thanks

Text 3: *Sorry to bother you I wonder if anyone can help me out for a bit of food and drink it's freezing cold*

Apology – request – purpose or goal – circumstances

Text 4: *Sorry to bother you, my name's...., I hate asking but I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job and no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing.*

Apology – introduction – circumstances

Text 5: *Sorry guys, I'm homeless, I really am homeless, and I'm just trying to get some money for some socks or even a bed for the night, if anyone can help...*

Apology – introduction – purpose or goal – request

One of the first things we notice upon looking closely at the language used is that by introducing themselves with their names almost all of those begging seek to assert their identity in the face of the anonymity imposed on them by the official discourses. In rhetorical terms, they also present a rhetorical ethos, i.e. an assertion of the credibility of the speaker (Leith, 2011). One of the appeals also seeks to narrativise their specific circumstances: *'I got thrown out of my flat by bailiffs when I lost my job'*.

The fact of addressing an audience which is physically present may help to determine the use of the declarative mood, and there are very few clauses which are not in the first or second person along with a mixture of what Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) call relational verbs (*to be, to become*) and material ones (*lose, get into, sleep, get, spare*). While the poster employs the passive voice ('to be' + past participle) to occlude the agency of the beggars, the oral appeals employ the active voice in almost every clause.

Numerous subordinate clauses also explain 'why' someone has found themselves in such a situation: *'When you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing'*. This provides some insight into the specific experience of being homeless. In some cases, the appeals evoke the discourse of 'society is to blame', referencing social inequality and injustice. In the course of narrativising his circumstances one appeal reports that *'I got thrown out of my flat'*, where the choice of the passive voice emphasises the role that wider society rather than personal failings have played in this misfortune. In a similar vein, in the choice of the phrase *'I lost my job'* it does not specify why. This connects it to the humanising discourses, with appeals for empathy (*'it's freezing cold'*) and is echoed in the use of rhetorical devices evoking pathos, such as the parallelism of *no one's, nobody, nothing* (*'no one's helping me, when you're homeless you go to the social and nobody listens, you're in the private sector and you're just, you know, nothing'*).

The choice of grammatical aspect is significant. The use of the present continuous stresses the contingency of their current circumstances (*'at the moment, '*); whether or not they will be able to change them is presented as conditional on their receiving help; thus they do not present themselves as inherently helpless or incompetent.

In all cases, it is not clear whether the speaker is addressing an individual or a collective audience – the 'you' could address both. In Text 4 the speaker employs a universal 'you' to appeal for empathy. The choice of this device attempts to include the audience, or rather to be included, and thus seeks to reposition the listener in relation to the speaker, as if to fill in the absence in the official discourses which tend to erase the needs and identity of the person begging.

With regard to the mood of the text, there is an absence of imperatives (e.g. 'Donate to...'), with all the clauses in the declarative mood. There is an instance of an intensifying adverb in Text 5 when the speaker insists that they are *'really homeless'*. This can be read as resisting those discourses which construct an identity for those begging as *not* genuinely homeless.

All contain apologies, polite forms, mostly in the form of subordinate clauses, e.g.: *if anyone can help... I hate asking but...* In addition to asserting their specific circumstances, most appeals also express goals or purposes: *some change to get into a hostel* (Text 1); *something to eat and drink* (Text 2); *a bit of food and drink* (Text 3); *some money for some socks or even a bed for the night* (Text 5). This could be read as a means of resisting interpretations which draw on discourses around drugs and the assumption that those begging waste whatever money they are given. In the process several of the appeals make use of hedging to downplay their needs and the nature for the help they are asking for, for example *'a bit of'* *'some change'* or the euphemism *'spare some pennies'*. The use of *'just'* in the phrase *'I'm just trying'* can be understood as merely, simply, to emphasise that they are not asking for anything outlandish or making unreasonable requests. This contributes an informal, conversational tone, as if in dialogue with someone, and can be interpreted as an attempt to confront discourses that depict those begging as troublesome and disruptive.

## Conclusion

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This analysis has inevitably been limited by the brevity of the texts. A more effective analysis would use a wider range of lengthier texts and draw on other critical discourse frameworks in a more systematic way. Nonetheless, close study allows some general conclusions about how power operates in and through these texts.

Blommaert (2005, p.1) and Foucault (1982) both specify that there is nothing inherently wrong or bad about the existence or exercise of power *per se*. However, both begging and prohibitions on begging and the social circumstances that force people into it are *problems* of power, and I have dealt here with two instances of discourse which involve manipulation, which makes the tools of CDA particularly useful given that ‘manipulation is one of the crucial notions of Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2006).

The authorities use certain discursive strategies to try to tackle the phenomenon of begging on their networks, in an attempt to respond to (their audience’s presumed knowledge of) the prohibition on begging on the Overground and the subsequent positioning of those begging as either criminals or incompetents; in response, those begging appear to employ a range of persuasive tools.

My analysis of the interpretive and the textual content of the poster has illustrated a clear shift in discourse from criminalising approach to one in which their agency is syntactically erased. In response, those begging seek to make themselves audible and visible – *intelligible*, in Judith Butler’s terms (Butler, 2011). Anti-begging policies have the potential to address the symptom of deeper inequalities that begging represents without tackling the underlying malaise which involves unequal access to housing and its policy treatment as a private rather than public good. The language in which such measures are enacted can, as we have seen, have the effect of syntactically erasing their visibility. Any attempt to address the ‘problem’ of ‘begging’ should involve the beggars themselves, rather than constructing an identity for them as non-persons. It could even seek, in line with the proposal made by Johnsen *et al.* (2020), to include the normative perspectives of all stakeholders in a rational, rhetoric-free and non-paternalistic debate on the ethics of exclusion-based responses to street homelessness; this would allow for those begging to narrativise their situations and to explain their circumstances and goals. Transport for London should seek to include and talk *to* those Londoners who don’t have homes, extending that inclusivity to the language it uses to talk *about* them. Clearly this latest campaign represents an advance from previous ones which have sought to criminalise the activity of begging on public transport, but further consideration of these issues should consider how a future poster campaign might incorporate rather than exclude the voices and agencies of those forced into begging in a way that (as Johnsen *et al.* (*ibid*) also argue) acknowledges the moral ambivalences and sometimes intractably conflicting commitments involved.

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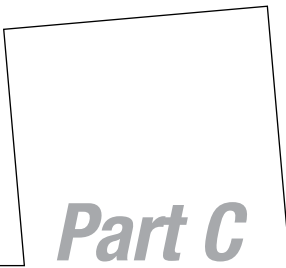
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# Response Piece



***Part C***





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# Person First, Fidelity Second

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## Introduction

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Housing First (HF) is considered a “state of the art” programme in addressing homelessness and housing exclusion. It has been successfully scaled out and the research devoted to it has grown substantially (Aubry, 2020). Housing First programmes operate in Poland, but here it is seen as “a western thing”, which means better quality but unobtainable due to historical divisions such as the “iron curtain”. Regardless of the curtain, which is long gone, there are factors in the local context that should be considered while discussing the introduction of this sophisticated method and its fidelity to the western model.

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## Interest in Housing First among Activists

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In Poland, as early as 2012, two programmes have been launched that are described as Housing First (Kwaśnik and Browarczyk, 2012). There was an advocacy project based on research aiming at setting the grounds for the implementation of Housing First (Wygnańska, 2016) and there was a research project aimed at comparing Housing First and traditional staircase services in eight European countries with Poland included (Gaboardi *et al.*, 2019). None of the projects resulted in actual implementation of a programme that met at least the core principles of Housing First. Currently, two partnerships, of local authorities and non-governmental organizations, have received European funding for transferring Housing First to Poland in cooperation with foreign partners. One of these partnerships is led by the established national network of the homelessness service provider Saint Brother Albert Society in three municipalities, in partnership with the local authorities and the national federation of homelessness service providers (National Federation for Managing the Problem of Homelessness, OFRPB). The second project is led by a non-homelessness foundation (The Cooperation Fund Foundation) in partnership with the housing policy office of one municipality, and the newly established Housing First Poland Foundation, a HF think tank. In total, both projects plan to support 70 clients.

It is clear that there are stakeholders who are keen to see the implementation of a Housing First programme. So far, they have gained some trust from local decision makers who decided to join NGO-led partnerships financed entirely through European funding. While not necessarily evidence of political momentum or favourable governmental policy, which are systemic facilitators of Housing First programmes (Bernad, 2018), there is definitely an opening for such to develop.

## **Domination of the Staircase and Coercive Methods**

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Yet the opening appears in the context of Poland's solid staircase based system for people experiencing homelessness. It has been seen as a staircase historically (Fitzpatrick and Wygnańska, 2007), which seems reinforced by new developments such as new standards of services co-produced by the homelessness service providers in 2007-2013 (Browarczyk *et al.*, 2014), and the way these standards are transformed in national legislation (MRPiPS, 2018) and implemented by the local authorities. The new standards determine the kinds of services that local governments are obliged to provide and the internal standard of each service. For example, the provision of warming up rooms, night shelters (up to 100 places), shelters (up to 80 places) and specialist shelters for people with nursing needs. Strikingly, standards for training or supported apartments, outreach support teams for people who live outside of institutions, and other non-institutional forms of support have not been included in the new standards, although there is some advocacy in favour of these (Wilczek, 2017; Muzioł-Węclawowicz, 2019) and some single implementations by service providers who run shelters and want their clients to move on from a big institution to smaller congregate apartments (see Wilczek, 2017).

Coercive methods, which are characteristic of the staircase philosophy, are firmly embedded in the models of supporting individual homeless clients in institutions. Social work is still based on signed social contracts or individual programmes for exiting homelessness; a major "motivating" incentive is the withdrawal of the shelter and being sober/clean is a major rule. Graduating step by step through standardized homelessness institutions is promoted as good practice in the book on practices "with innovative potential" published by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the OFRPB in 2018 (Wilczek, 2018). One example of such good practice is described as follows:

A homeless person must pass through various stages of getting out of the situation she/he is in. The warming up room, night shelter, shelter, supported apartment and total independence are all links of one chain. A person staying in a night shelter receives a place to sleep and a meal, sometimes food stamps, but if he/she decides to make some effort, for example, take on addiction

therapy, gather missing documents, submit an application for a municipal apartment, etc., he/she can count on a place in a shelter. After successful completion, persons implementing individual programs for exiting homelessness can be placed in an adaptation apartment. If it may happen that he/she grossly violates the discipline, or gives up further cooperation, then he/she might return to the basic forms of assistance, namely a night shelter or a warming up room. (Wilczek, 2018)

### **Challenge of Cost Benefit Reasoning**

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As we hear at conferences devoted to homelessness and housing exclusion, cost and benefit reasoning made HF possible in many places. This line of argumentation does not work, however, in Poland. In the Polish public sector, the full cost of policies is not considered (such as cost of the effect of the policy or cost of policies per person); the only cost that counts is the cost of one particular institution in a particular budgetary year. So, when a local decision maker, interested in HF, approached me about convincing his local colleagues to implement the programme, I proposed to calculate the cost of the current support to chronically homeless people in his town which included night shelters, shelters, the police, the municipal police, emergency wards, hospitals, psychiatric treatment, etc. I was instructed that it would be useful, but only if the calculated cost of the municipal hospitals, municipal police and municipal shelters was high.

### **Stakeholder Resistance**

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To the majority of stakeholders in Poland, Housing First is somewhat superfluous – expensive and good, but not necessary. What is seen by most as needed – and “state of the art” – are training apartments (Čaputová, 2016). By some, Housing First is considered a luxury, as was verbalized by a participant of Warsaw Council for the Homeless, a director of a local shelter: “I would like to be homeless myself as [in the Housing First program] the homeless are served apartments, meals, etc.” (September 2019). Others say: “Yes, it is great, let’s do it!”, though it is not clear whether they know what this means in practice. For example, Housing First requires a harm reduction approach in dealing with dependency on alcohol. It means that as a support worker, one has to be able to show the client the practical everyday consequences of their drinking, instead of just saying that it is bad because it breaks the contract for the shelter. It means accepting the choices of the client, which may in the view of the support worker be harming them. It means that as a support worker, you have to resign from considering yourself as an educated specialist who knows what is good and bad for the client, in exchange for under-

standing that you and the client are at least equal in competence and only the client is competent in doing anything with their own life. You need humility. And you need to understand that sometimes your current way of working is not good for the client, regardless of your compassion and sacrifice. It is possible that when HF supporters realize what working with the HF method really means, many of them would not be so much in favour anymore, and those in favour might end up realizing they have no competence to do it.

## Potential HF Clients

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Nevertheless, on the top of all the gaps and challenges aforementioned, there are clients for whom Housing First might be the only chance of finding and retaining a home after years of homelessness and mistreatment (Wygnańska, 2016). The latest national data on the numbers experiencing homelessness shows a drop in the overall scale (MRPiPS, 2019), but the proportion and number of people experiencing long term homelessness has increased from 49% (15 401) in 2017 to 54% (15 621) in 2019 (i.e. declared homeless longer than 5 years). The Ministerial count has been criticized by service providers and researchers (Mostowska, 2019) and even by the national Commissioner on Human Rights (Bodnar, 2016; Bodnar, 2018). Homelessness field workers regularly report of clients whom, using currently available programmes, they are unable to help and find that clients with mental health problems are the most difficult to help. Certainly some activists want to implement a programme for such clients; the system that exists is crying out for change and there are clients who desperately need it to. However, some stakeholders are wary and there is a scarcity of means to convince them, given their disregard on the need to prove cost effectiveness and the view that the staircase philosophy is indeed innovative.

## The Issue to Fidelity

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Before discussing the issue of fidelity, the broader question of Housing First in general is more pressing. Should we advocate for providing people experiencing homelessness with independent scattered apartments, where they decide on their life, without a detailed contract signed with an institution with potential sanction of removal of the shelter? Would it be good for people to live outside of an institution? Is it worth investing significant resources in intensive support for a small group of deeply excluded people, while the same resources could be used to support much bigger or less demanding groups with tools accepted by the general public (training apartments for “promising” clients)? To those of us in the field, however, fidelity is an issue worthy of further consideration.



### ***Fidelity to what?***

As I understand it, the core idea of the HF programme is to approach the client, build a ground for truthful talk, ask the question “How can I help you?”, hear the answer out, support the client in self-achieving it and to continue the process of asking and helping for as long as the client wants supporters around them. So it happened that most of Tsemberis’s clients in New York and then across the U.S. mentioned apartments, and their answers to repeatedly asked questions shaped the programme as we know it now. Parallel to this general instruction, there is a detailed Housing First Self-Assessment Survey<sup>1</sup> referred to further as ‘the Housing First fidelity scale’ or just ‘the scale’. It was created based on an analysis of multiple programmes, control group studies and client outcomes. It is assumed that the higher the fidelity, as measured by the scale, the greater the likelihood that the clients will achieve the same results as the clients of the original HF programme.

While the core idea, the general instruction, is universal, as it relates to how people communicate and position themselves to each other in their roles as a person in need of support and a person who claims to be able to provide the support, we do not know about the sum of the answers of clients who experience long term homelessness and mental health crises in different national/cultural contexts. If in Poland we continued to ask the core question to enough clients, and implemented the programme for enough people and then researched the results and created the scale, would the results be the same? Would the majority of people answer that they need an independent place to live? So far, there is neither a HF programme nor research to verify this hypothesis, so we do not know.

### ***Contextual elements of the fidelity scale***

Some elements of the scale seem to be contextual and tied to the country from which they come. Therefore, some elements might not be applicable or even be misleading in other countries, as adhering to the context-dependent elements of the fidelity scale might prevent the implementation of potentially beneficial programmes that follow the core idea. Some attention has been given to the availability of housing subsidies and private versus publicly owned housing stock as indicators of fidelity (e.g. Buxant, 2018). From the Polish perspective, I suggest two contextual elements also require further consideration: firstly, allowing the restriction of client choice regarding neighbourhood while declaring that free choice is sacred in any other aspect, and secondly, the use of psychiatric hospitalization as an indicator of the client’s background.

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<sup>1</sup> The scale has been translated into Polish and reviewed by experts on homelessness and community psychiatry and Polish language: <http://www.czynajpierwmieszkanie.pl/skala-wiarnosci-nm-housing-first-fidelity/>.

On the one hand, choice is proclaimed as paramount in Housing First. “Practice values based on consumer choice should guide service delivery” as Greenwood *et al.* (2018) cite after Tsemberis (2010). And yet in the scale, the most Housing First-like option for the neighbourhood question (Q2) is that the “Participant chooses the neighborhood they want to live in, given what they can afford”. So, client choice is constricted by their financial options. Why in this case is the limitation of choice permitted? Wouldn't it be important for the future wellbeing of the client for them to really be able to choose freely the neighbourhood in which they wish to live? To see for themselves how it feels to live among wealthy people and spend most of their money on housing? To learn from that, and based on their own experience, move out to a more affordable neighborhood in the future?

This constriction excuses stakeholders who want HF results for their clients in the U.S. from fundraising for apartments in the most expensive neighbourhoods, and from convincing public officials and donors to allocate money into what may be considered a luxury, but is necessary because the programme has to respect consumer choice. This limitation makes the programme financially feasible and reasonable in the public eye. And I totally agree. The cost argument is legitimate, but why is it legitimate only in the case of neighbourhood choice? Without applying the affordability constriction to client choice in Warsaw, for example, no neighbourhood would be available and therefore no scattered independent apartments could be offered at all. Outside of the U.S., we must be conscious of the fact that when advocating for something like HF without choice restrictions based on the availability of resources, it will be perceived as utterly expensive and incomprehensible to the general public to be providing to long term homeless people, with multiple mental health problems including alcohol dependency, independent studio apartments located in decent, well-connected districts in buildings alongside well-functioning inhabitants.

Does it mean that the clients in Poland and countries with similar levels of availability of privately rented housing stock and benefits will never have the chance to achieve the same effectiveness as in the U.S.? What if this part of the scale reflected overall housing options for the general population? In order to achieve Housing First effectiveness, does the programme have to provide clients with a U.S.-like choice of housing type or rather the same choice as other members of the local population? Can choice be constricted to options that are in place for other inhabitants from the same social strata but who do not share the discriminatory features such as mental health problems, disability, developmental trauma, being a migrant, or having experienced homelessness for longer periods of time? Does limiting client choice to housing options available in the local country, as opposed to offering all housing options such as those in one of the biggest and richest countries in the world, violate effectiveness? I am not sure.

The second element of the scale which seems contextual is the use of psychiatric hospitalization as one of the indicators of the client's background (Questions 30 and 31). Access to psychiatric treatment and hospitalization differs across countries. In Poland, it has been assessed that while about 6 to 7.5 million people aged 18-64 suffer from mental health problems (23% of the population), only 1.5 million people are registered as patients in psychiatric institutions (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 2012). It means that only 20 to 25% of people in need of psychiatric treatment have actually used it. The point is that the clients with the same symptoms might experience different levels of hospitalizations due to differences in access to psychiatric care across countries. Should the percentage of clients with actual psychiatric hospitalizations influence the judgment of HF fidelity? The answer is or should be "no".

### ***Promise of effectiveness for the clients (or activists?)***

The idea of caring about fidelity with regard to the original Housing First programme is explained by the willingness to sustain and enable Housing First-like results for the clients. Implementing the programme with high fidelity should therefore ensure that 70 to 80% of those people who are supported will stay housed after the intervention ends. In the context of Poland, however, research on client outcomes is lacking. Evaluations tend to concentrate on the programme's performance, such as the number of clients served, the scale of services provided, etc. and the assessment provided by the implementers themselves is widely accepted. None of thirty two practices promoted as good practice in a ministerial book in 2018 were assessed by an independent evaluation; only a few cited results for the clients (Wilczek, 2018). The effectiveness of Housing First for the clients, may well be exaggerated, or it might be seen as more prestigious to do something with fidelity rather than just resembling the acclaimed original.

The notion of fidelity being more important for activists than for clients might be somewhat related to the numeric character of the fidelity scale and the scoring tool (Gilmer *et al.*, 2013). "Scoring" ignites a competition, like in a classroom. We all want to get the best score. Our teachers tell us that what really counts is what we did in the qualitative sense and the progress we made, but just as they sum up our achievement in terms of grades, we tend to compare ourselves to the rest of the class and see who ranked the highest. Who has not turned to numbers first while reading the EJH Special Issue on HF Fidelity (Greenwood *et al.*, 2018), in which ten housing programmes were assessed? I certainly have. But what happened to be really interesting – from the implementer's point of view – was the qualitative description of the facilitators, and the barriers, as well as the comments on particular elements of the programme made by those who implemented it.

But yes, fidelity is essential.

Once it is clear that the goal of fidelity is to warranty results for the clients, and the fidelity scale is deprived of contextual elements, which probably requires implementations of Housing First in various contexts followed by research, the fidelity as a goal and the scale as a tool that supports its achievement, is essential from the perspective of a stakeholder acting to implement the programme in an environment as described above. There are two reasons for this.

### ***Prevention of blurring the programme***

Once it is clear that in the community there are people whose situation is a violation of their inherent human dignity, who have been unsuccessfully approached by local practices, and can be characterized by the features that are the same as the features of the clients of some support programme which is proven to effectively reduce the violation for about 70 to 80% of the group, it is quite obvious that the programme should be tried. Since no local solution has been worked out, why should the structure already worked out and tested elsewhere be changed by local stakeholders? Everyone is free to run any programme for people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion, but if you think that your clients can be supported by the Housing First method, you should do Housing First.

Allowing diversions from fidelity may have negative consequences if it allows implementers an excuse to introduce elements they claim are necessary to overcome contextual difficulties, and put requirements on clients such as needing to be “promising” in terms of getting out of homelessness, sharing apartments with other clients, or being supported by the social worker rather than a psychiatrist. In this way, the proclaimed Housing First programmes end up as supported apartment programmes (e.g. Local Partnership “From street to home” in Kielce, (Kwaśnik and Browarczyk 2012)) and people are picked up to meet the criteria of the programme (e.g. Housing First by Local partnership in Nowe, (Kwaśnik and Browarczyk 2012)) while in Housing First it should be client centered – which is exactly the opposite.

### ***The Fidelity Scale as the operationalization of a paradigm that is difficult to grasp***

Although a lot has been written about Housing First, the principles are well summarized in quite a few publications, such as Pathways Guidebook (Tsemberis, 2010), Canadian Housing First Toolkit<sup>2</sup>, and Housing First Europe Guide (Pleace, 2016), and there are other resources available including short movies, etc., the fidelity scale combined with the scoring tool (Gilmer *et al.*, 2013) provides a condensed operationalization of what Housing First means in practice and, in particular, which practices are not Housing First. In the Polish context, stakeholders can easily identify the latter practices as assigning participants to the first available housing

<sup>2</sup> <http://housingfirsttoolkit.ca/>

unit (or rather beds in shelters) or requiring participants to abstain from alcohol and/or drugs at all times and/or imposing negative consequences for the use of such substances (e.g. removing the person from the shelter). At the same time, the understanding of “consumer choice” and “housing as a right” is rather vague.

All things considered, Housing First in Poland is much needed. The way fidelity is assessed by the fidelity scale confirms it is a western concept and fidelity itself bears some risks of diverting the focus from clients to activists, but still it is essential to aspire to in order to avoid pitfalls and finally provide long term homeless people with mental health problems with the real opportunity to work their problems out.

The bottom line is to support the client and to me it is most accurate to say the person first, fidelity second.

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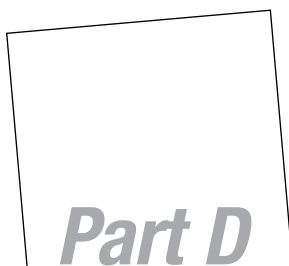
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# Book Reviews



***Part D***





Yvonne Vissing, Christopher G. Hudson and Diane Nilan (2020)

## ***Changing the Paradigm of Homelessness***

New York: Routledge.

The central thesis of *Changing the Paradigm of Homelessness* is that ending homelessness requires a change in hearts and minds: “We need to start viewing and treating poverty and homelessness as what they are: human and civil rights issues” (p.182). The authors identify the basic problem as the current “dominant paradigm – that there is really something fundamentally flawed about people who become homeless” (p.3) and set out to replace this paradigm with one based on human dignity and human rights. *Changing the paradigm* is organised into two halves: Background, and Homeless Paradigms. In the first two chapters in the background section, the authors state their thesis and review definitions and numbers. Then they turn to a comprehensive survey of formal theories and how each might shed light on homelessness. These include stratification, social drift, functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interaction/labelling, the “new orthodoxy”, systems theories, chaos theory, and a social forecast approach. This focus on multiple theories, mostly repurposed from other fields, is unique in books about homelessness. The authors proceed to a history of homeless policy in the United States and, in the final chapter in the background section, describe inequality, social stratification, and economic distress in the United States today.

The second half of the book describes alternative paradigms for thinking about homelessness. An initial chapter describes and condemns the current paradigm as based on acceptance of social stratification, blame and stigmatisation of individuals for their homelessness, and readiness to curb rather than eliminate poverty and homelessness.

The next four chapters describe alternative paradigms in increasing order of utility, from the authors’ perspective. The “let others fix it” paradigm focuses on criminalisation and philanthropy as inadequate approaches to homelessness. A chapter on the housing paradigm is dismissive of current housing efforts and criticises the “shelter-industrial complex” for profiting from keeping people homeless. The authors include as an appendix a business plan, obtained from the web, for starting a shelter to show how some seek to profit from others’ suffering.

The next paradigm is money, and the authors advocate for investing more in education, food, health care, jobs, childcare, transportation, cell phones and income. Their goal is to provide a firm foundation for children so that they do not become homeless adults. The authors suggest various strategies from raising the minimum wage to a universal basic income that would enable people to live with dignity.

The final chapter is devoted to the human dignity paradigm. It advocates a new “ethical, moral, and just” social contract (p.172) to “put people before profits” (p.171). One goal is the prevention of trauma, which may both cause homelessness and follow from it. The authors embrace a human rights approach, drawing on Franklin Roosevelt’s 1944 proposal for a second Bill of Rights in the United States and multiple international covenants. They point out that the U.S., alone or almost alone among nations, has declined to sign these covenants.

I share the authors’ values, but believe that policy makers need better guidance about how to instantiate them. Vissing *et al.* do not evaluate evidence about what programmes work. Rather they argue that “the programs that we have in place aren’t working because their fundamental assumptions make it impossible for them to work.... Public programs have in the past and could today if we truly invested in them” (p.182). I think this choice is a strategic mistake. If people believe a problem is solvable, they are more likely to invest in solutions rather than turn away. Further, some of the research evidence the authors ignore, for example the success of housing vouchers for families and of a Housing First approach to supported housing for people with long histories of homelessness and mental illness, would bolster the authors’ argument that the problem is lack of resources rather than fundamental flaws in the people who are denied them. (Full disclosure – I have co-authored a book with Jill Khadduri that marshals that evidence.)

In the absence of evidence, the authors make some curious choices. For example, in the housing chapter, they write off the Bipartisan Policy Center’s recommendation to give permanent rental assistance to everyone whose income is below 30% of the median for their area as “unlikely” because budgets have been flat for years (p.117). Then they speak favourably of a far more expensive plan to build 10 million units of social housing at \$150 000 to \$220 000 per unit (p.131). The longest section of the money chapter is devoted to blockchain and cryptocurrencies as tools for helping people who experience homelessness to “get their lives back on track” (p.167).

At times the argument seems internally inconsistent. The authors criticise the Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD’s] narrow definition of homelessness: “One could say HUD, the NEAH [National Alliance to End Homelessness], and other HUD financially supported agencies have an intertwined, vested interest” in a definition “designed to undercount children and families” and “designed to keep people out, not let people in” (p.23). But then they criticise San Francisco for

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spending two-thirds of its homeless assistance budget on rental subsidies and prevention for “people who aren’t homeless at all” (p.122) – although much of that money probably went to people who experienced the broader forms of housing insecurity the authors want to incorporate in the definition. (Full disclosure again – I serve on the research advisory council for NAEH).

It is not clear to whom the book is addressed. It is written in an accessible style, sprinkled with anecdotes (are these real people, composites, or constructed examples?). Over half of the references are to newspaper and magazine articles rather than scholarly or even advocacy reports. Thus, it seems largely focused on a popular audience – the citizenry whose understandings need to change. On the other hand, there is an occasional unexplained reference to autoregressive moving average (ARIMA) models or to vague “multivariate mathematical models” (p.56) that, along with a change of heart can put an end to homelessness. There is no doubt in my mind that the change of heart is needed, and to the extent that the authors can convince policy makers and the citizenry, I applaud them. Their condemnation of our current system is powerful. But I think that change is more likely if there is evidence that alternatives work. Researchers have provided that evidence, but their findings are not reflected here.

**Marybeth Shinn**  
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## Grand Challenges for Social Work (2020)

### ***Social Work's Grand Challenge to End Homelessness: Policy Proposals for the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election***

New York: USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work and NYU Silver School of Social Work, pp.64.

The paper presented is a collection of essays by 17 authors from NGOs and universities, interest groups and umbrella organisations in the fields of social policy, health care, politics, urban economics, and psychology. It is initiated by the 'Grand Challenge to End Homelessness' as part of the social work initiative 'Grand Challenges for Social Work'. Deborah Padgett and Benjamin F. Henwood, both co-chairs of the initiative, "believe the time has come to focus our efforts on what works and how to scale it up" to end homelessness in the USA (Padgett and Henwood, p.3). For this reason, the authors in this anthology briefly describe the problems from their special perspectives and then suggest solutions to solve them. They all emphasise "the need for political will" (ibid.).

In this review, I will start with the overall problem descriptions and proposals given in the essays. This is followed by a short overview of the 10 essays and will be finished by an assessment of the relevance of the collection in the European context of homelessness.

#### **Problem Descriptions**

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In two essays, increased rents with parallel stagnating wages, i.e. a lack of financial security, are described as the reason for increasing homelessness in the USA. In another, gentrification is seen as a motor for homelessness. In one of the essays, the author on the one hand sees a lack of social capital among homeless clients and on the other hand criticises the system of assistance.

Almost every author identifies specific vulnerable groups in relation to homelessness, namely groups at risk and/or groups with special needs. Three essays focus on people of colour by referring to racial inequalities as a reason for homelessness. Two essays describe homeless veterans as vulnerable. Naming the rising costs of health care due to the aging adult homeless population and, on the other hand, the

increasing homelessness among older adults, put older homeless people at the centre of attention in two essays. In other papers, young homeless people, homeless families, people with mental illness, tribal homelessness and LGBTIQ\* are described as vulnerable groups.

## How to Solve the Problems

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A “brief overview of their collective recommendations” (Padgett and Henwood, p.4) is given in the introduction:

1. Expand investment in affordable housing through existing and new revenue sources;
2. Shift funds from transitional emergency programmes to lasting solutions such as rental vouchers and permanent supportive housing for those with disabilities;
3. Prevent homelessness or ensure its brevity by supporting rapid re-housing and time-limited rental assistance. For the majority of homeless (or near-homeless) families this is all that is needed; and
4. Ensure that the guiding principles of housing first (low barriers to housing, harm reduction, client-centred services) form the cornerstone of homeless services for adults, families and youths.

In the individual essays there are further, repeatedly made suggestions for the solution to the described problems:

- A need for a national affordable housing strategy (e.g. Tsemberis, p.45) with a Housing First approach as the cornerstone of a centrepiece of homeless policy (ibid. p.47);
- Evaluation and research (Morton and Horwitz, p.30; Andere, p.34);
- Strengthening social networks (Kushel, p.24) and restoration of social capital (Mangano, p.54); and
- User participation in the sense of decision-making (Morton and Horwitz, p.28; Andere, p.35; Mangano, p.51).



## Short Overview of the Essays

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### ***1. Progress and Poverty: Homelessness in Rich Cities (Dan O'Flaherty)***

Problem: Expanding industries in richer cities lead to gentrification. The “filtering” does not work (anymore) because there are too few middle-class households.

Recommendations: E.g. deregulation for more flexibility in the use of existing housing, and land value taxes instead of levying water and property taxes on the poor.

### ***2. Addressing Homelessness with Unconditional Income (Jack Tsai)***

Problem: Lack of financial security in the sense of a regular, stable income.

Recommendations: Tsai proposes a countrywide system of unconditional income.

### ***3. The Opportunity Cost of the Aging Adult Homeless Population (Dennis P. Culhane, Daniel Treglia, Kelly Doran)***

Problem: The increase of health costs due to aging of the adult homeless population.

Recommendations: E.g. shifting spending from health and shelter systems to housing solutions, a re-envisioning of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) programme, ‘Rapid Re-housing’ and ‘Critical Time Intervention’ if prevention is not possible anymore.

### ***4. Homelessness Among Older Adults: An Emerging Crisis (Margot Kushel)***

Problem: The heterogeneity among older homeless adults: significant disabling behavioural conditions in people who become homeless before the age of 50 and dramatic life courses when people become homeless after the age of 50.

Recommendation: Different solutions due to different causes/target groups (Permanent Supportive Housing or Housing First versus affordable housing).

### ***5. Ending Youth Homelessness (Matthew H Morton, Beth Horwitz)***

Problem: Hidden and fluid youth homelessness due to structural inequality (e.g. race, LGBTIQ\*) and family adversity. Various programmes set up and funded by the government, but in which far too little money has been invested.

Recommendations: Youth-centred, coordinated response systems, addressing inequalities related to race and LGBTIQ\* identity, research and evaluation.

### ***6. Ending Homelessness by Addressing Racial Inequities (Amanda Andere)***

Problem: Homelessness is a symptom of failing systems and people of colour are most affected due to structural racism.

Recommendations: Racial equity has to be centred in policies and practices to end homelessness; data about homelessness have to be disaggregated to make visible features like race.

### ***7. Homelessness is a Housing Problem (Marybeth Shinn, Jill Khadduri)***

Problem: Lack of housing, but also discrimination in income and employment, wealth, imprisonment and housing on the basis of race or mental illness.

Recommendation: Anti-discrimination legislation in the areas of housing and employment (e.g. in the context of race and disability), promoting fair housing conditions by increasing income and reducing housing costs.

### ***8. Three Housing Strategies to End Homelessness: Is There Political Leadership to Get There? (Nan Roman, Diane Yentel)***

Problem: A lack of affordable housing due to increased rents and stagnating wages, but also the lack of political will.

Recommendations: E.g. the provision of state rent subsidies, the expansion of the supply of affordable housing, the creation of a “National Housing Stabilisation Fund” to prevent the imminent loss of housing for people in short-term housing crises.

### ***9. We Can End Homelessness, If We Choose To: Policy Recommendations For 2020 (Sam Tsemberis)***

Problem: No national affordable housing strategy.

Recommendations: E.g. more investment in affordable housing by a millionaires’ tax or a real estate tax; use of existing approaches like Permanent Supportive Housing, Housing First, and HUD-VASH for homeless veterans.

### ***10. Replenishing Social Capital in the Lives of Homeless People: Overcoming Stigma through Housing and Employment (Philip F. Mangano)***

Problem: The lack of a home and a job in connection with a lack social capital leaves homeless people isolated. Helping programmes are focused on sustaining the programme and don’t consider enough the interests of the clients.

Recommendations: A consumer-centric approach, a restoration of social capital, approaches like Housing First and HUD-VASH (for homeless veterans), but also employment initiatives addressed specifically to homeless people.

## Conclusion and Evaluation

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All of the essays focus on the connection between structural and individual problems as causes of homelessness. The recommendations therefore point in both directions. First: Homelessness is ended by the provision of housing! If this is not available or accessible and affordable for all, the state must provide access to housing through housing construction and individual financial support for homeless people. In addition, the multiple discrimination of many homeless people (race/class/gender) is evident, which must be overcome by appropriate anti-discrimination laws. But also, the system of assistance is often criticised because it does not take sufficient account of the needs of those affected. Morton and Horwitz (p.35) therefore described very aptly what they consider to be the right approach: "Those who are closest to the problem are the ones who are closest to the solution". In this respect, the collection of essays can also be used in Europe, as a call to examine the transferability of causes and solution strategies described in the essays. Because of the many programmes mentioned, some of which are specific to the USA, the essays are somewhat useless in themselves – individual research is needed to find out what is hidden behind the many abbreviations of the programmes (not everything is so familiar like the Housing First approach). But this seems to be a worthwhile endeavour.

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European Observatory on Homelessness

# European Journal of Homelessness

The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal will also assess the lessons for Europe which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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