

Seminar 17: (zoom link) Role of Networks and Social Capital

Chair: Mike Allen, IE

Nia Ffion Rees, UK: "It started at home": Prevention of Youth Homelessness, An Exploration of Mediation in Networks of Care and Place Attachment



Nia's areas of interest broadly lie within housing insecurity, homelessness, youth studies and inequality. Her PhD examines the dominant responses to tackling youth homelessness – mediation, aiming to offer a rare critique of this intervention mechanism. Nia has undertaken research at a global level, including exploring the housing pathways of young people, Peru; informal trade and child labour, Tanzania. As Research Consultant for The Wallich and Policy and Research Manager for Llamau, Nia has undertaken research which has impacted on service provision for homelessness young people in Wales. Nia appreciates the contributions of service users and peer researchers and aims to ensure their voices are heard through participatory research.

"It all started at home... arguing didn't stop, I didn't know how it was going to end" (Young Person, 2021). This paper is part of a wider study which critically examines a highly dominant, yet under-researched approach to the prevention of youth homelessness – mediation, a political priority in Wales and the global north. Dominant service responses have received little academic scrutiny within international literatures. This study will begin to address this fundamental gap by critically examining mediation as an approach to youth homelessness prevention. Mediation services seek to support young people and their families to bridge differences that risk unplanned exits from the home. Fundamental to the approach is the maintenance/re-establishment of ties with family, ultimately aiming to prevent homelessness.

This paper draws upon preliminary findings from participatory research undertaken in the case study country of Wales, addressing this fundamental gap in understanding. It focuses upon in-depth biographical interviews and network activities, undertaken with young people at risk of homelessness, who have experienced family mediation. Semi-structured interviews undertaken with mediation workers and key informants are also drawn upon. Peer researchers are involved throughout the research from fieldwork to conclusions. Focusing upon the themes of conflict, care, networks, home and place-attachment, this paper offers a rare critique of the merging homelessness prevention paradigm - challenging the conceptualisation of prevention by considering the importance of the extent to which interventions enable ontological security and the feeling of 'home'. It fills a gap in research within housing and youth studies by critiquing this intervention, innovatively drawing upon the concepts mentioned. By critiquing the dominant intervention mechanism of mediation, this research has direct implications for service provisions in Wales and internationally. There is policy interest from both governmental and non-governmental bodies including End Youth Homelessness Cymru and international youth homelessness agencies.

Nadia Ayed, UK: Exploring experiences of homelessness through a social capital lens: Qualitative interviews with people experiencing homelessness

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Nadia Ayed is a PhD student at Queen Mary University of London. Her PhD explores experiences of homelessness through a social capital and Foucauldian power lens. She is interested in understanding what may be afforded by social relationships, connections with services and institutes of power, and whether this is sufficient in leveraging individuals out of homelessness. She has a particular interest in interdisciplinary research within the realm of social science and the humanities. Previous to her PhD, she completed her undergraduate in Sociology, Politics and Psychology at the University of Cambridge and her MSc in Mental Health Studies at King's College London.

Homelessness – understood as a range of precarious living arrangements - can have profound and diverse consequences on an individual's life. As such, attempts to redress its impact often involve a multitude of stakeholders. This non-exhaustively may include: local councils and governments (UK Parliament, 2017), the housing sector (Pleace, 2019), the charity sector (Downie et al., 2018) and peer-support networks (Groundswell, 2017). Due to the numerous stakeholders involved, it can be difficult at times, to discern the role and the support provided by each. Social capital may be a helpful lens to navigate this complex terrain and interrogate the resources and support available to people experiencing homelessness. In a broad sense, social capital can be understood as “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.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119). Specifically in the context of homelessness, social capital has primarily been conceptualised across three dimensions: social relationships, services and support (Ayed et al., 2020). I hope to present results from a chapter of my PhD, comprising interviews ($n=30$) with people experiencing homelessness. The interviews focus on journeys of homelessness, support and social relationships. Analysis critically explores experiences, with a particular focus on discerning what is afforded by social relationships and connectedness with services, and how this may (or may not) be leveraged in order to exit homelessness. Through thematic analysis six themes have been identified: *conceptualisations of homelessness, pervasive precarity, conditionality of care, rendering individuals objects of care, humanisation and experiences of social relationships*. The themes provide insight regarding the construction and lived experience of homelessness, as well as the manner in which support is frequently provided to those experiencing homelessness.

References:

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