

Seminar 14: Qualitative Research Methods: Peer Research (Floor -1, Room 10)

Chair: **Masa Filipovic-Hrast, SI**

Daniel Hoey, Paul Haughan, Kathleena Twomey, IE: Peer Research in Housing and Homelessness: The Value and the Practical Issues



Daniel Hoey is the Research Manager in Focus Ireland, an organisation working to end homelessness in Ireland. He holds a MSc in Applied Social Research from Trinity College in Dublin. His research work to date has mainly related to marginalised populations, including a study on the health and social needs of older methadone users. Daniel has led a programme of peer research in Focus Ireland since 2016.

Paul Haughan is a Peer Researcher in Focus Ireland since 2014. He has worked on research projects as part of Focus Ireland's Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, including evaluations of tenancy sustainment and satisfaction levels of tenants in long-term housing. Paul is also involved in a research project in partnership with the Health Service Executive in Ireland investigating the support needs of people with experience of homelessness to engage in volunteering.



Kathleena Twomey is a Peer Researcher in Focus Ireland since 2014. Kathleena has worked on research projects as part of Focus Ireland's Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, including evaluations of tenancy sustainment and satisfaction levels of tenants in long-term housing. She was also involved in the Irish aspect of the European RE-inVEST project, an initiative that addressed social inequality and poverty by researching the experiences of vulnerable people most impacted by the financial crisis.

Peer research has emerged as a popular method of participatory social research. Broadly speaking, it is research that is guided and conducted by people with lived experience of the issue being studied, produced in collaboration with professional researchers. Peer research has several advantages as a methodology. Peer researchers bring extensive 'insider knowledge' to a research project and about the research participants. They understand the community being researched, the concerns in that community, the language of that community, and how to engage that community. Involving peer researchers at the research design stage can help to decide what questions will be addressed, which provides context for the research framework. Furthermore, the shared lived experience of homelessness and/or housing instability can help to build trust and can encourage and empower individuals to participate in research. However, the value of peer research is debated and the validity of findings from research adopting non-traditional methods may be questioned in terms of its added impact. In addition, there is a reasonable reluctance to adopt a peer research methodology because of significant resourcing and time requirements. Since 2014, Focus Ireland, a homeless NGO based in Ireland, has employed a small team of peer researchers with lived experience of homelessness to work on specific research projects. This paper, co-produced between the Focus Ireland Research Manager and the peer researchers themselves, seeks to contribute to the peer research debate by reflecting on eight years of peer research work to explore the value of and the practical issues in undertaking a participatory peer research methodology in the housing and homelessness sector. This paper is linked to a guidebook on peer research which will be of interest to researchers considering adopting this methodology in housing and homelessness research.

Monika Conti, Amanda Kirby, UK: Exploring Youth Homelessness through the Lens of Neurodiversity: A Peer Research Project



Monika Conti is a Policy and Research Officer at End Youth Homelessness Cymru. Her research interests lie in the areas of homelessness, youth disadvantage and participatory research methods. She graduated with an MSc in International Social and Public Policy from London School of Economics in 2021 and she previously studied Economics at Lancaster University.

Professor Amanda Kirby is an emeritus professor at the University of South Wales and an honorary professor at Cardiff University. She has clinical and research experience and founded and ran a transdisciplinary clinical and research team for 20 years relating to neurodiversity. She is a qualified GP and has a Ph.D. relating to emerging adulthood and neurodiversity.

Neurodivergent young people (such as those with ADHD, Autism, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Tourette's Syndrome/Tic Disorders and other forms of neurodivergence) are at a particular risk of youth homelessness due to risk factors such increased likelihood of family breakdowns, social and systemic barriers and lack of support for their diagnosis. Upon becoming homeless they experience further disadvantages in accessing support, as youth homelessness services are usually built with the neurotypical brain in mind and thus fail to meet the needs of neurodivergent young people.

Given the specific challenges and disadvantages experienced by neurodivergent young people there is a need to look at youth homelessness through the lens of neurodiversity. However, limited research has been so far carried out in this area. To address this knowledge gap and the needs of neurodivergent homeless youth, End Youth Homelessness Cymru has been working on a research project which explores homelessness experiences of neurodivergent youth.

The research has the following aims:

- 1) to identify ways in which youth homelessness can be prevented for neurodivergent young people
- 2) to improve the accessibility of youth homelessness services for all young people
- 3) to amplify youth voice

The research takes on a collaborative and youth participatory approach which emphasises the value of lived experience and the agency of young people. To fulfil the aims of this approach, neurodivergent young people with lived experiences of youth homelessness have been recruited to collaborate on the research as peer researchers. As part of their role, they have been trained in research methods and have co-developed the research design and data collection tools. In the subsequent stages of the research, the peer researchers will conduct interviews, co-analyse collected data, contribute to writing the report and co-create practical recommendations for practitioners and the Welsh Government.