

Housing First in Homelessness Pathways: Residents' Accounts of Housing Stability and Housing Satisfaction in the Finnish Housing First Model

Riikka Perälä, Dr.Soc.Sc.

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**Finland's largest
national non-profit
landlord**

(Total 18 550)

**Specialist
in homelessness
work**

**Housing for
special groups**

7 450

Home for all

**Economic
and social
well-being of
our tenants**

**Affordable
rental housing**

11 100

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Advocacy

Background

A two-year research project *"Fighting segregation and homelessness among the most vulnerable through housing social work (SEGRA)"* funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, started in 2022.

Investigating the role of social work in preventing and combating segregation and homelessness in Finnish cities.

The aim is to make visible and strengthen the role of social work in housing for vulnerable people and thereby contribute to building a socially sustainable city.

Research Group

Project leader: Professor Kirsi Juhila



Yhteiskuntatieteiden tiedekunta, sosiaalityö:
*Jenni Mäki, Mikko Ilmoniemi, Rosa Karjalainen,
Johanna Ranta ja Lotta Sippola*

Johtamisen ja talouden tiedekunta, hallintotieteet:
Päivikki Kuoppakangas, Antti Talonen ja Jari Stenvall



Sosiaalitieteiden laitos, sosiaalityö:
Veera Niemi ja Jarkko Rasinkangas

Turun kauppakorkeakoulu:
Päivikki Kuoppakangas



*Riikka Perälä ja
Saija Turunen*

Research Questions

1. What is the significance of Housing First policies for the housing pathways of people experiencing homelessness in Finland?
2. What factors of the Finnish Housing First model the resident's consider as important, particularly in terms of housing stability and housing satisfaction?

Data & Methods

Qualitative semi-structured interviews (N=17) with residents of two supportive housing units in Finland applying HF principles

Interview themes: interviewee's housing and homelessness history, current housing, received support and interviewee's thoughts on homelessness work and policies

Qualitative thematic analysis and coding of the interviews from the viewpoint of housing pathway theory

In-depth information on how HF policies are experienced from the point of view of the resident's, which contributes to the development of the policies

Housing Pathway Theory

Patterns of interactions (practices) concerning house and home over time and space (e.g. Clapham 2002; 2005)

Meanings and practices attached to housing by different actors (ibid.)

Has been used globally to analyze the pathways of different population groups, such as young people, migrants, female-led households and different vulnerable groups ()

Housing pathways do not necessarily follow a straightforward path and result from rational decision making.

The factors outside of housing, such as employment or family situation, might make it difficult to make ideal and considered choices on the pathway.

Housing Pathways of Low-Income and Other Vulnerable Groups

Typically characterized by lack of alternatives and frequent moves

Easily affected by changes in housing and welfare policies

Entail often elements of force, such as involuntary moves and displacement due to, for instance, evictions

Housing pathways reflect not so much increased well-being and economic prospects, but rather the erosion of social ties and rootlessness, as well as declining health

Some people are forced to “stay put” and live in inadequate housing or neighborhoods

Homelessness pathways are an extreme example of housing vulnerability, where people are forced to move in and out of different locations, hostels, friend’s places, streets. etc., due to an interplay of numbers of different personal and structural factors

Housing First and Housing Pathways

Housing First programs are shown to improve housing stability and reduce homelessness more effectively than Treatment First programs (e.g. Peng et al. 2020)

In addition, Housing First programs show health benefits and reduced health services use (ibid.)

Need for studies of a longer duration and also qualitative studies to understand the experiences of HF's residents (Aubry 2020)

Services which follow the core philosophy and operational principles of HF show similarly high levels of effectiveness in ending chronic homelessness than the original Pathways model (Pleace & Attherton 2013)

Housing First in Finland

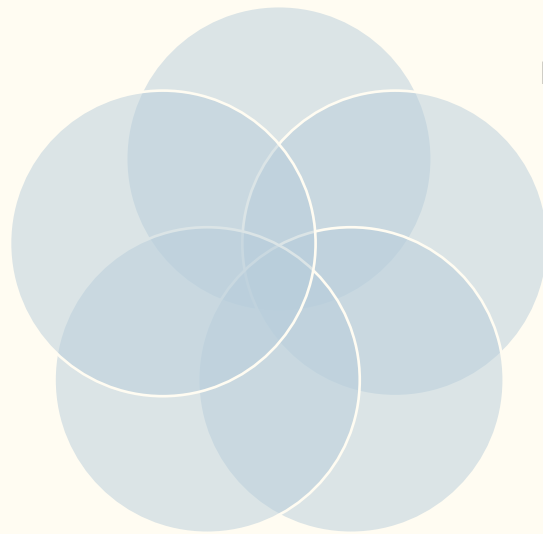
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Housing First In Finland

Housing as a **basic human and social right**

Normality



Adequate **support** if needed and wanted

Own **independent** rental apartment either in scattered housing or in a supported housing unit

Finding a common political will



Housing options for Homeless persons in Helsinki

Year	Supported housing	Independent rental apartments	Hostels and shelters	Social housing apartments
1985	127	65	2.121	35.404
2008	552	2.033	558	68.881
2021	1.309	2.433	200	76.616

Alppikatu 25

Opened in 1936:

As a shelter with 250 bed places

Since 2012:

Supported housing

81 independent rental apartments

88 residents

Apartment size 19–36 m²

On site personnel by Salvation Army

22 employees



Väinölä -Congragte Housing

Supported housing

33 apartments (35 tenants)

Opened 2014

Built by Y-Foundation

Leased to City of Espoo

Support provided by Salvation
Army (11 co-workers)



Previous Investigation on Housing First in Finland

Systemic change in the Finnish homelessness policies towards HF has proven successful (Juhila ym. 2022, Turunen & Kaakinen 2021; Pleace et al. 2016)

Homelessness in Finland has decreased continuously since 2013

At the moment the national level aim is to eradicate homelessness by 2027

HF is also shown to contribute to housing stability, reduced health care costs and sense of security of the residents (e.g. Sunikka 2016; Sillanpää 2013; Turunen & Granfelt 2021)

Critical perspectives have highlighted shortcomings of supported housing units, such as institutionalisation or insecurity (e.g. Perälä & Jurvansuu 2016)

However, there is still relatively little research on the views of residents

Results

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Results

1. Supported HF Unit as a Juncture on the Housing Pathway -
Better Than the Street
2. Housing Stability and Housing Satisfaction
The Freedom to Control One's Time and Space
Professional Support and Meeting Needs
Location & Atmosphere
3. Future Pathways

Results I

Supported HF Unit as a Juncture on the Housing Pathway - Better Than the Street

The housing history of the interviewed residents were characterized by frequent moves and living in multiple and unconventional housing solutions

All interviewees had a background in homelessness, which for most had meant staying in shelters or other temporary accommodations, but for some also rough sleeping

The typical situation before moving into the Housing First unit was often described as a kind of low point, where an already chaotic life situation had culminated in an unfortunate event

Results I

Supported HF Unit as a Juncture on the Housing Pathway - Better Than the Street

Moving to a supported HF housing unit had not necessarily been a personal choice of the interviewees but was nevertheless described as an important juncture on the housing pathway.

The importance of Housing First was constructed in the views of the interviewees particularly in relation to their previous housing and homelessness pathways, against which living in a supported housing unit was compared.

Most importantly, moving into the HF housing unit had broken the cycle of homelessness and the various disadvantages associated with it, which culminated in several interviewees describing it as "better than the street".

Example 1: Better Than the Street

What do you think about the fact that you got an apartment there? Do you think it was a good thing anyway? A: In that situation without a doubt, because anything is better than a street. (Interviewee 12)"

Results II

Housing Stability and Housing Satisfaction: The Freedom to Manage One's Own Life and Space

Housing stability and housing satisfaction emerged as key themes, particularly in the text sections where residents described their current housing.

A typical feature of the interviews was, firstly, to compare the current housing unit with previous temporary housing, which lacked both the freedom and independence of living associated with current rental housing and, therefore, for example, the possibility to control one's own space and environment.

Freedom to manage one's own life and space was in fact the most common positive aspect that the interviewees associated with Housing First based living

Example 2: An apartment with own fridge, stove and oven

You can have visitors here, you can bring beer from the store (...) But in temporary housing, they raid your backpack and you can't have visitors (...) There's these booths, you are hardly able to turn (....) Now I have my own fridge and stove and oven. (Interviewee 3)

Results II

Housing Stability and Housing Satisfaction: Professional Help and Meeting Needs

The second most common category included citations in which the interviewees expressed the importance of the professional support and other help they received from the supported housing unit for their housing and lives in general

This included helping with rent monitoring and payment, support in applying for different types of benefits and other help from the service system, work activities and various community activities and regular meals.

In Finland this kind of work has been referred to as housing social work, which is done with people affected by homelessness, addressing the economic, social and health problems that jeopardize their housing (e.g. Granfelt & Turunen 2021)

Example 3: Good atmosphere

Q: How about the settling in, did it happen quickly?

A: The atmosphere here is good.

Q: What helped you the most here? If you can...A:

Probably the work activities and a few neighbours. I was “taken control of” fairly quickly. (Interviewee 3)

Example 3: Work activities and lunch

I've agreed to clean up the surrounding area (staircase). And, so I'll do it. It's good for my routine and my day, it's a reason to get up. And then there's also food, breakfast, and so on. That kind of thing. (Interviewee 2)

Example 4: Safe Haven

Q: Did you feel that it was somehow safer there (in the supported housing unit) than in your own home?

A: Yes, because there were lot of substance abuse problems and also mental health problems.(...) In my own building there where, you know, these nasty neighborhood gatherings....I was blamed of everything....It was unpleasant

Q: In the housing unit there was then..

A: Yes, yes. I've taken this as therapy...people know me here (....) Sometimes I feel like "burning up", but this is a good option now.

Example: 5 Gym, Ping-Pong and Pool Tables

Q: What is important to you in housing, is it the location, having good transport connections, or is it that it's comfortable?

A: It's nice to have a little forest like this.

Q: Yes, that's important. (....)

A: Yes. And then there is still space in the backyard.

Q: Ok, so, it goes on...

: Then there is the gym and all the ping pong tables and pool tables and everything (Interviewee 13)

Results III

Housing Stability and Housing Satisfaction: Location & Atmosphere

Finally, the third category of factors related to housing stability and satisfaction in the interviews included interview sections in which residents commented on their apartment or its location.

The appreciation of location and housing was reflected in comments complimenting the comfortable apartment, the view, and the apartment's centrality and location.

For example, good location made it easy to reach central places and services, which is why living in an apartment further away from the city centre was less valued than living in the supported housing units.

Example 6: Sounds from the Park

A: At least I can see the green from the window, the tree is right here. I have three windows. So it's not like you see only a cement wall. Then you can hear all the sounds from the nearby park, like "yayy". A clear sign of summer, there's a people in the park. (Interviewee 3)

Results IV Future Pathways

For some, the supportive housing unit was seen as the final and permanent stage of the housing pathway.

Others wished to move to a scattered housing, but this wasn't happening in the near future and none of the interviewees were actively looking for a new apartment

For all interviewees, the main priority with respect to future was to avoid the recurrence of homelessness, which influenced the future plans of the interviewees

For example, fear of a recurrence of homelessness made them prefer to stay in their current accommodation rather than move, even if it was not considered the best option.

Conclusions

The data shows the importance of HF solutions in housing pathways for people with a homeless background

Despite of their chaotic housing history, all interviewees had been living permanently at the same address for several years after obtaining housing on a HF based supported housing unit and were at least reasonably satisfied with their housing.

The most important factors related to housing stability and housing satisfaction were the freedom to manage one's own time and space, the professional help and support associated with housing and the location of housing

Conclusions II

The Finnish Model of Housing First and the supported housing units set up under it have sometimes been criticised for being too institutionalised.

In this analysis, institutional features of housing, such as professional support and living in a congrate housing unit, were seen as factors supporting housing and housing satisfaction, which did not disturb residents if they did not affect their freedom to come and go as they pleased.

From the perspective of housing pathway theory, the Finnish HF model appears as a junction in the housing pathway, which is more organised and planned than previous transitions.

This seems to produce housing solutions that are better suited to the needs of residents than previous solutions.

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Riikka Perälä

Researcher, Dr. Soc. Sc.

+358503044086

riikka.perala@ysaatio.fi