

Seminar 24: Creating Transition Options (Room: 00.07)

Chair: Eoin O'Sullivan, IE

Naomi Thulien, CA: Impact of Portable Rent Subsidies and Mentorship on Socioeconomic Inclusion for Youth Exiting Homelessness in Canada: A Mixed Method Pilot Randomised Controlled Trial



Dr. Naomi Thulien is a nurse practitioner and researcher committed to working with the community – including young people with lived expertise – to tackle the social and structural inequities that cause and perpetuate youth homelessness. Dr. Thulien is based in Toronto, Canada, where she is a scientist at MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, a hospital-based research institute focused on health equity. In 2021, Dr. Thulien and her husband created Breakwater Foundation – a non-profit organisation that provides rent subsidies, education bursaries, and primary health care to young women who have experienced homelessness.

Do youth exiting homelessness with two years of portable rent subsidies and adult mentorship experience more socioeconomic inclusion relative to youth who receive only two years of portable rent subsidies? That was the overarching question we set out to answer in this 2.5-year mixed method pilot study conducted in Ontario, Canada.

We began enrolling participants in March 2019 and followed them until March 2022. All participants (n = 24) received portable rent subsidies (subsidy not tied to a specific location) for two years. Participants were randomly assigned adult mentors (n = 13) who had been recruited and screened by community partners. We met with participants every six months to conduct quantitative (n = 24) and qualitative (n = 12) interviews over a 2.5-year period.

Quantitative objectives examined whether proxy indicators of socioeconomic inclusion signalled improvement in the intervention group (rent subsidies + mentorship) compared to the control group (rent subsidies only). Qualitative objectives evolved from a primary focus on exploring how study mentorship was working as a facilitator of socioeconomic inclusion, to focusing on how participants – regardless of group assignment – navigated the hazy, liminal space between socioeconomic exclusion and inclusion.

Quantitative analysis revealed no significant improvements in proxy indicators of socioeconomic inclusion in the intervention group relative to the control group. Qualitative analysis exposed the tremendous inner strength and momentum needed to navigate the liminal space between socioeconomic exclusion and inclusion. Overall, we found that the experience of socioeconomic inclusion was more strongly associated with factors such as informal mentorship (naturally occurring “coach-like” mentorship) and identity capital (sense of purpose, control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem), rather than formal study mentorship. We discuss implications for practice and future research.

Erin Dej, Carrie Sanders, CA: Mid-size cities, NIMBYism, and the Search for Solutions to Homelessness in Canada



Dr. Erin Dej is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University. She brings over 10 years of research and advocacy experience on homelessness, having been led by the lived experts she works with. She previously held a Postdoctoral Fellowship with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. She studies and advocates against the social exclusion of unhoused people, including the criminalisation of homelessness. She is the co-principal investigator on the *From NIMBY to Neighbour* project. She is the author of *A Complex Exile: Homelessness and Social Exclusion in Canada*, with UBC Press.

Dr. Carrie Sanders is Director of the Centre for Research on Security Practices (CRSP) and Professor of Criminology at Wilfrid Laurier University. Carrie is the co-principal investigator on the *From NIMBY to Neighbour* project. Recently she has been conducting research with various cities to explore perceptions of homelessness, crime, community safety and community resilience. Her research has been published in high impact, international journals such as: *Gender & Society*; *British Journal of Criminology*; and *Policing & Society* and has received national funding by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Councils of Canada.

This presentation offers initial insights from our research project, *From NIMBY to Neighbour: Brokering a Dialogue about Homelessness Among People Experiencing Homelessness, Law Enforcement, and the Community*, which explores community perceptions of, and responses to, homelessness in three midsize Ontario cities. While homelessness has always been present across different types of communities, its visibility and the subsequent pressure for mid-sized cities to act quickly has come up against their ability to adapt to the changing needs of the community and to respond in a way that leads to long-term stability and equity for everyone. At the core of these contentions is NIMBYism, which is deeply rooted in the idea that people who are homeless ought to be removed from public spaces. Mid-sized cities are especially fraught with these debates their access to resources and funding are not consistent with major urban centres, yet the visibility of homelessness has become more prevalent.

In this presentation we discuss the preliminary findings from this research, which consists of 86 interviews with people with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, community members, business owners, and first responders. Specifically, we consider how public space is used, managed, and experienced by people who are homeless, and how community complaints drive these experiences. Instances of dehumanisation, judgement, criminalisation, and in some cases violence, make clear that there is a “dark side” to communities generally perceived to be small, tight-knit, and amicable. The presentation also includes a participatory-action based art project designed and led by the Lived Expert Advisory Group.