

# NEW FAMILY FORMATIONS:

## YOUNG ADULT PARENTS IN HOMELESSNESS

Dr Sharon Lambert

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

SCHOOL OF  
APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY



**UCC**

University College Cork, Ireland  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

# Background & Context

- ▣ Increase in homelessness in Ireland
- ▣ Young parents aged 18 – 24 yrs particularly marginalised
- ▣ 26% of the family homelessness sample in 2016 (Sheridan & Hoey, 2017)

# Aims & Objectives

- ▣ **Aim:** explore the experiences of young adult parents experiencing homelessness

The **objectives** of the study were:

- ▣ Provide insight into how young parents come into contact, and interact, with statutory housing and homeless services.
- ▣ Collate perceptions of both young parents and front-line workers
- ▣ Investigate impact of homelessness on the families
- ▣ Information on the pathways into homelessness for young adult parents.
- ▣ Explore whether young people face specific barriers in exiting homelessness

# Method

1. Interviews with 18 young adult parents who;
  - (single or in a couple) living with their children in emergency accommodation
  - Aged 18-24 years old
  - Little or no experience of living in independent accommodation
2. Interviews with front line service workers

# Profile of Young Adult Parents

- ▣ 18 young parents aged 18-23 years
- ▣ 50% parenting as a couple & 50% parenting alone
- ▣ None currently involved in education (33% homelessness & parenting had caused education & work dropout)
- ▣ 23 children of various ages, but none exceeded the age of five

# Housing History

Type of Housing; (family of origin)	N
Foster Care	2
Private Rented	1
Private Owned	1
Homelessness	1
Local Authority Housing	12
Nomadic (Caravan)	1

# Findings from Young Adults

Themes	Sub-Themes
<b>Dynamics of the Family Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Parental Relationships in the Family Home</li><li>- The “Tipping Point” and Overcrowding</li><li>- Mental Health, Physical Illness and Substance Misuse of Family Members</li></ul>
<b>Navigating the Housing System</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Circumstantial Barriers to Securing Alternative Accommodation</li><li>- Competition in the Housing Market</li><li>- Discrimination in the Housing Market</li></ul>
<b>Perceived Housing Options</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Artificial Stability &amp; Perceived Housing Options</li><li>- Policy Influence</li><li>- Interaction with Services</li></ul>



# Dynamics of the Family Home

- ▣ *“She’d obviously be stressed out and then I’d be stressed out as well and then I just had so much going on like so I just couldn’t live there and then she just said get out like you know what I mean like we had a big huge fight then and, I had to leave”. – Niamh, 24*
- ▣ *“It wasn’t stable for me daughter and wife, and eventually ended up having to go homeless over it... When I lost me job and I was getting abuse over it and he was throwing us out I decided that, we, we had en-, had enough so we signed onto homeless”. – John, 22*



# Navigating the Housing System

- ▣ *“Like when you’re going into viewings like, there’s like six other people there, and like you know they’re all walking in you know with their briefcases and everything and there’s me with him [child], is there even a point of me being here?” – Niamh, 24*
- ▣ *“He just wanted to know everything, you know you’re so young and you’ve a child, kind of discriminating against me because of me age you know and because I had a child and everything else...Oh I don’t want parties...Like I might have been young but I’m responsible. I’m not like that”. – Patricia, 24*

# Perceptions of Housing Policies

- ▣ *“It’s not working. And even some of them that I know some of the people that I know that been into HAP\* and they just tell me three months they stay there for like six of seven months then the landlord would just tell them “I want to sell the house” or, you need to move out. Well normally they will say they need to sell the house. It’s not secure.” –*

Lisa. 20

\*HAP – Housing Assistance Payment

# Front Line Worker Interviews

- ▣ 3 members of a homeless NGO/Charity
- ▣ 2 staff working in local authorities (one management; one front-line)
- ▣ 1 member of an NGO agency which supports young parents
- ▣ 1 member of a child-support NGO/Charity

# Front Line Worker Interviews

Themes	Sub-Themes
Young Families Entering Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Dynamics of the Family Home</li><li>- How Young Parents Navigate the Housing System</li><li>- Support Policy and Implications for Parents Entering Homelessness</li></ul>
Housing Options from the Service Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Family Home</li><li>- HAP Scheme</li><li>- Implementation of Supported Housing</li></ul>
Support Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Education &amp; Awareness</li><li>- Maturity, Expectations of Young Parents</li></ul>

# Front Line Workers

- ▣ *“HAP scheme would be perfect for the group, if it worked. The trouble is people can be HAP approved but there is no housing”. – Caroline, Agency Supporting Young Parents*
- ▣ *“It is impossible to believe that from all the notices of termination that have been received, that all of those landlords moved in relatives. Many landlords do try to simply get a higher rate”. – Dee, Dublin City Council*

# Front Line Workers

- ▣ *“Often, these young parents leave accommodation to stay with friends and disengage with services, and therefore lose support”. – Caroline, Agency Supporting Young Parents*
- ▣ *“Some younger families can have a sense of entitlement than the older generation. At times, they can be quite demanding on staff time and other services. They want someone to support them through a crisis because they may not have the life skills to deal with it”. – Edie, Homeless NGO*

# Summary of Findings

- ▣ A specific sub group with distinct needs
- ▣ Experiencing discrimination in the housing market due to age & socio-economic factors
- ▣ Homelessness impacting on young adult and child well being and opportunities



# Recommendations

## ▣ **Overarching Recommendation**

Adoption of 'developmentally informed' approach to homeless young adults, a distinct subgroup with specific needs arising from their age and experience,  
Tailored policy and practice to meet these needs.  
This should be adopted across all sectors (statutory & voluntary)

## Prevention:

- ▣ Consider provision of a 'family mediator' may function to assist those families that can stay at home to do so.
- ▣ Information campaign directed at young adults who are living at home and at risk of leaving home, highlighting the reality of the system and the preventative supports that exist.
- ▣ Greater security in the private rented sector would alleviate the concerns of young adult parents.

## Homeless Services

- ▣ Intensive consistent key-working through the process
- ▣ Exploration of a 'transitional accommodation with supports' model of emergency accommodations
- ▣ Up skilling was identified as a key theme to reduce socio-economic disadvantage.

## ▣ Exits from homelessness

- ▣ Broad reform of tenure security in the private rented sector, or, in a more targeted approach, by recruiting a cohort of landlords willing to make a longer term commitment to young families.
- ▣ Explore systems in emergency accommodation that create a tenancy history e.g. rent paying & references.
- ▣ Create more social housing

# Conclusion

- ▣ A need for young adult specific services/policies
- ▣ Reform of private rented sector
- ▣ Increased social housing
- ▣ Intensive key working

# Thank You

Dr Sharon Lambert

School of Applied Psychology, University College  
Cork, Ireland

[Email: Sharon.lambert@ucc.ie](mailto:Sharon.lambert@ucc.ie)

Twitter: Slambert\_cork