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### ***Young People's Homeless Pathways***

Dublin: The Homeless Agency, 178pp. (available from [www.homelessagency.ie](http://www.homelessagency.ie))

This is the second volume of a report on a qualitative longitudinal study of forty young homeless people in Dublin. Volume 1 (reviewed in *European Journal of Homelessness* 2, 2008) covered their routes into homelessness and their experiences of being homeless. Volume 2 reports on the pathways through homelessness of the young people interviewed at the second sweep. The initial study was conducted in 2004/5, follow-up interviews were held in 2005/6.

The first chapter presents a review of the literature on homeless careers and pathways drawing on US, Australian and UK studies. In the US Piliavin et al. (1993) identified the importance of institutional support in exiting homelessness and this is the major theme of this second volume, which develops the distinction between 'dependent' and 'independent' exits based on Sosin et al. (1990) and Piliavin et al. (1996). From their review of US literature the authors also draw the conclusion that the majority of people exit homelessness relatively quickly, particularly those who have access to affordable housing (whereas transitional housing schemes are relatively ineffective).

Chapter 2 describes the initial recruitment of the sample of forty young people aged between fourteen and twenty-two including twenty-five young people staying in short-term hostel accommodation for those under eighteen years of age. Chapter 3 presents the circumstances of the thirty young people interviewed in the second sweep and of a further seven young people on whom some information was collected. At the time of the second study young men were more likely than young women to be staying in adult hostels, on the streets or in prison (ten of 20 men; two of 17 women); young women were more likely to be living in residential care or foster care. Five young people had returned home (2 men, 3 women), one young man was private renting and one young woman had died.

The authors used cross-sectional analysis and case profiling to analyse both first and second sweep interviews for this volume. From this analysis the authors identify three homeless pathways of young people in relation to the use or non-use of

housing support and services to exit homelessness. Pathway 1 (Chapter 4) is titled the independent exit from homelessness but these exits are only independent of housing, social and welfare services support as the majority of young people (six of seven) returned to their family home. In three cases of family returners parents intervened directly to support their daughter or son undergoing detoxification or in prison, whilst in two cases family reconciliation was mediated by services. Young people involved in returning home also distanced themselves from their previous circles of drug users and/or criminals. The sixth case involved a young person who returned to an abusive family home against service advice. The seventh case was the only young person to exit to the private rented sector.

Dependent exits from homelessness (Pathway 2, Chapter 5) included ten exits into transitional or supported accommodation and three into residential long-term care (all young women). Young people moving to supported housing reported some contact with their families and, whilst some were still involved with drugs and alcohol, most were also seeking to distance themselves from their previous friendship networks or to contain those friendships to outside their accommodation. The authors report that an important aid to this transition was involvement in education or training whereas the personal support they received from their key worker was less valuable. Most young people in this study identified their transitional housing as a 'home' for them, comparing it with the uncertainty of not having a bed when they were 'homeless'. Of the three young women who entered residential care, two had experienced physical abuse at home and considerable disruption in their care placements but were more settled at the time of the second interview.

Pathway 3, continued homelessness (Chapter 6), describes the experience of thirteen young people (11 men, 2 women) the majority of whom reported short-term multiple living situations including sleeping rough, periods in prison (11, including one young woman), failed attempts to return home (6) and temporary stays with friends (8). One young woman had temporarily entered the private rental market but lost her accommodation.

In the final chapter the authors identify five issues in relation to services that are shared with many other European societies. First, the transition from child welfare to adult homeless services at the age of eighteen prevented a speedy exit from homelessness and therefore more fluid models of provision are required. Second, young people leaving substitute care are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and aftercare provision requires further improvement. Third, the criminal justice system plays a particular role for young men in perpetuating homelessness. Fourth, services for young homeless people are based on ideas of 'responsibilisation' but create institutions that break young people's links with their previous social networks. Fifth, the expansion of the private rental sector and 2004 legislation

controlling tenancies and extending rent allowances have allowed more young people, particularly young women, to access the private rented sector; however, agencies have been reluctant to encourage such moves, preferring social housing for their clients.

Overall this study presents a particular view of pathways out of and through services but leaves many other themes reported but unexamined. Some of these themes may well be addressed after the third sweep interviews have been analysed. Themes of particular importance that are embedded within the report include the dynamic of family relationships, the importance of welfare support in relation to the restoration of family relationships, gender differences, service provision, friendship networks, drug and alcohol dependency, criminalisation and young men, and parenthood.

#### › References

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