A Critical Examination of Homeless Youth Transitions to Independent Housing in Canada

New Perspectives for Practice, Policy, and Research

Naomi Thulien, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow|Centre for Urban Health Solutions
Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital
Toronto, Canada
Youth Homelessness: Canada and Toronto

35,000 – 40,000
Canadian youth (aged 13 – 24) homeless at some point during the year

6,000
Canadian youth on any given night

1,000 – 2,000
Toronto on any given night

CHANGING PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICES.
BARCELONA, September 22nd, 2017

Knowledge Gap

Margins

↓ Education
↓ Health
↓ Employment
↑ Trauma

Mainstream

↑ Child Welfare
↑ Racialized
↑ Poverty
↑ LGBTQ2S

Street Families ➔ Acquaintances
Youth ➔ Adulthood

## Transitioning off the Streets: Longitudinal Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Months Followed</th>
<th># Interviews</th>
<th>Housing Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brueckner et al.</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16 – 22</td>
<td>79% Female</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karabanow et al.</td>
<td>QT/QL</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17 – 25</td>
<td>53% Female</td>
<td>47% Caucasian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidd et al. (2016)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayock et al.</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15 – 24</td>
<td>53% Male</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayock et al.</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15 – 24</td>
<td>53% Male</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayock et al.</td>
<td>QL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15 – 24</td>
<td>53% Male</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milburn et al.</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>12 – 20</td>
<td>63% Female</td>
<td>47% Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy et al. (2014)</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
<td>79% Male</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy et al. (2016)</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>18 – 25</td>
<td>79% Male</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slesnick et al.</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>14 – 22</td>
<td>66% Male</td>
<td>41% Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slesnick et al.</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>14 – 22</td>
<td>66% Male</td>
<td>41% Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevendale et al.</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>14 – 24</td>
<td>65% Male</td>
<td>35% Black</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevendale et al.</td>
<td>QT</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>14 – 24</td>
<td>65% Male</td>
<td>35% Black</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Addressing the Gap

Produce an **insider** perspective on the experiences of formerly homeless youth as they transitioned into **independent** housing and attempted to achieve meaningful **social integration**.
Social Integration = Equity in Health and Well-Being

Holistic Concept
The ability for full societal participation across economic, political, cultural, and social domains

Relational Concept
Equal power relationships

Methodology and Methods

Critical ethnography
- Understand “choices” given socioeconomic context

Ten months
- Nine participants

Biweekly informal interviews
- Location chosen by participants
- No car
- 119 interviews
Baseline Demographics

Age

Sex

19-21
22-24

Male
Female
Baseline Demographics

Race

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Mixed

Education

- Less than high school
- High school upgrading
- Completed high school
- Post-secondary (not completed)
Baseline Demographics

Sexuality

Child Welfare
Baseline Demographics

Employment

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Cash

Welfare Subsidies
Key Findings

Precarity
Identity
Mastery and Control
I’m tired of the struggle...the struggle. I’m looking at my paycheck...this lady is telling me I’m only going to get $8.00 from welfare [because of claw backs related to employment income] and that stresses you out. I’m only getting $8.00 from welfare so now I’m already worrying about January and December. It’s just a stressful thing to wake up every day and you know...It blocks off me wanting to go to work, it blocks off me wanting to hang out with people. It’s not really a depression state...I just get very introverted. And it sucks because you can’t be like that. You have to be professional and go to work. It’s easier said than done.

~ Phoenix (Month Nine)
Chronic Precarity

Financial Inequities
- Most had income of $7,872.00/year (LICO $20,160)
- Dead end jobs
- Welfare claw backs

Social Inequities
- Inadequate mainstream connections (social capital)
- Limited knowledge re: “getting by” vs. “getting ahead”

Age-based Inequities
- 63% of Canadian youth (20 – 24 years) live at home

Identity Evolution

The thing is, adversity and poverty breed tremendous inner strength and maturity, and also a lot of creativity. But the outside world, they don’t understand what comes out of hardship. They don’t understand it’s surviving through hardship and developing resiliency, that’s really the part of it that’s interesting...that’s something that you should try to revive in your own life.

~ Phillip (Month Nine)
Identity Evolution

Shift in Place = Shift in Identity

- Home a marker of success
- Aware of societal discourse re: homeless people
- Supports embedded in homeless sector (old identities)

Emerging Adulthood

- Wanted to be seen as independent, responsible, and competent young adults
- Working through other identity-related issues (e.g., sexual orientation and race)
Identity Evolution

Fragile Identities

- Linked to tangibles (e.g., housing) – could lose at any time
- Limited intangible assets (e.g., sense of purpose and control, self-efficacy and self-esteem) – eroded over time
- Not confident in education (streamlined and poor grades)
Mastery and Control Undermined

I just live day to day. Now I live day to day. My situation doesn't make it possible to think far ahead...it doesn't work now...something always comes up that I need to pay for.

~ Ashley (Month Seven)
Mastery and Control Undermined

**Determination Not Enough**

- Stuck/spinning – lack of purpose
- Chronic precarity exhausting
- Limited *identity capital* (self-concept as currency)

Mastery and Control Undermined

**Poverty as Identity**
- Inadequate consumers

**Still the “Other”**
- Inequitable life chances magnified

**Life as a “Game of Chance”**
- Focus on short-term survival
- Less sense of control over long-term outcomes
Conceptual Framework and Implications

New Framework

Implications: Practice-Policy-Research
Social Integration Framework for Homeless Youth

Socioeconomic and Political Context
- Governance
  - Neoliberalism
- Macroeconomic Policies
  - Living wage
  - Basic income
- Social and Public Policies
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Education
- Culture and Societal Values
  - Homelessness
  - Youth

Socioeconomic Position
- Identity Capital
  - Self-Esteem
  - Locus of Control
  - Self-Efficacy
  - Purpose in Life
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Social Class
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Education
- Occupation
- Income
- Social Capital

Material Circumstances
- Housing Quality
- Housing Location
- Food Security

Behaviors and Biological Factors
- Mental Health

Psychological Factors
- Coping Skills

Health System

Intermediary Determinants of Health

Structural Determinants of Health Inequities

Meaningful Social Integration

Modified from Solar & Irwin, 2010
Implications: Practice

- Incorporate teaching re: identity capital into staff training
- Decentralize outreach services to less stigmatizing locations
- Develop programs that foster social capital
- Re-define success – much more than “no longer homeless”
- Be transparent with youth about likelihood of escaping poverty with limited education and/or skills training
Implications: Policy

- More affordable and better quality housing
- Consider providing a basic income for low-income youth living independently
- Provide free tuition plus living expenses for post-secondary education and training with no welfare “claw backs”
- Adopt a broader perspective to ending homelessness – the provision of a home alone will not end homelessness
Implications: Research

- Define and measure social integration holistically – include economic participation
- Implement more longitudinal studies – highlights “real world” challenges to social integration
- Conduct more qualitative studies so we can design youth-informed interventions and have youth-informed public policies
- Consider integration as a primary outcome measure in intervention studies with homeless youth (none to date)
European Research Conference
CHANGING PROFILES OF HOMELESSNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICES.
BARCELONA, September 22nd, 2017

naomi.thulien@utoronto.ca
References: Longitudinal Studies on Transition