

Seminar 12: (ROOM TBC) Women and homelessness (1)

Chair: **Mike Allen, IE**

Boróka Fehér, HU: Homeless Women in Hungary – Gendered Service Provision Failures



Boróka Fehér has worked with homeless people in Hungary since 1999. She is currently a policy officer of the Policy Department of the Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy (BMSZKI), the homeless service provider of the City of Budapest, as well as a senior lecturer at the Institute of Social Work and Deaconry, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. She is a member of the February 3rd research team, carrying out the only annual survey among homeless people in Hungary. Her field of special interest within the field of homelessness and housing policy is the situation and services available for homeless women, empowering and participative ways of working. She is a member of FEANTSA's Women's Cluster. She holds a PhD in Social Work and Social Policy.

The presentation summarizes the findings of qualitative research about the life stories of homeless women. It is based on an analysis of 100 entry interviews with women who have moved into a temporary hostel in Budapest (mixed or single sex, with a partner or alone). The age of the women is between 18 and 80 years old, with more young women included than their real proportion to gather more information on their relationships with their minor children. Although the interviews focused on a generic, non-gendered needs assessment (addressing housing, employment and financial needs), in most cases women also told their key worker about their past experiences from childhood, intimate relationships, children etc... Do we pose the right questions to women using our services? Do the questions we ask play a major influence on the structuring of the care plan of users? If so, might care plans address some of the vital issues homeless women face? Based on the findings of these interviews, policy recommendations shall be formulated.

Paula Mayock and Sarah Sheridan, IE: Women Negotiating Power and Control as the 'Journey' through Homelessness



Dr Paula Mayock is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Her research focuses primarily on marginalised youth and adult populations, with a strong focus on homelessness. She is founder and Co-director of the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN www.womenshomelessness.org) and author of numerous articles, book chapters and commissioned research reports.

Dr Sarah Sheridan is Research Coordinator for Focus Ireland – an organisation which works directly with those experiencing homelessness. Her PhD was a qualitative longitudinal study of women's homelessness in Ireland. Prior to this, she was researcher on a biographical and ethnographic study of women experiencing homelessness, led by Dr Paula Mayock, Trinity College Dublin.



While gender is increasingly recognised as influencing the ways in which homelessness is experienced, the research base on women's homelessness remains significantly underdeveloped. Little is known about women's trajectories through homelessness and even less about their interactions with homelessness services and other systems of intervention. This paper examines homeless women's service interactions based on a biographical longitudinal study of women's homelessness in Ireland. Sixty women were recruited and interviewed at baseline and 'tracked' over a three-year period between 2010 and 2013. At the point of follow-up, forty women were re-interviewed and reliable information was attained on the whereabouts of an additional nine participants. Over the course of the study, ethnographic observation was conducted in a number of strategically chosen service sites. Informed by poststructuralist theory, we present findings that reveal the complex way in which women engaged with the individuals and structures they encountered as they moved through the service system, very often along trajectories of unresolved homelessness. Their narratives uncover the loss of control experienced by a large number, particularly with the passing of time,



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and the manner in which they responded to these 'techniques' of control. The themes of infantilisation, surveillance and objectification are examined as are the actions taken by women in their efforts to resist stigma and negative stereotyping. The paper concludes by reflecting on dominant constructions of the 'unaccommodated woman' and considers the extent to which responses to women experiencing homelessness are underpinned by the notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' women.