

Queer/y/ing Pathways: Becoming, Being, Leaving LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness in Ireland

Aideen Quilty & Michelle Norris 2021

First qualitative study of LGBTQI + Youth Homelessness in Ireland (Quilty & Norris 2020)



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supported by BeLonG To

The First Dedicated Study of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness in Ireland

We need to hear from you.

If you are an LGBTQI+ Young person,

Aged between 18-26 years,

'Out' to at least one other person,

Can participate in the interview through English

AND you have experience of any one of the following:

1. Accessed emergency homeless services
2. Lived in hidden homelessness (including sofa surfing)
3. Recently exited homelessness.

Research will be based on 1:1 anonymous interviews.



FOCUS
Ireland



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WHY THIS RESAERCH PROJECT

- Insufficient understanding
- Insufficient Irish data
- Youth homelessness rising
- Overrepresentation of LGBTQI+

LGBTQI+ youth homeless
population: 8% and 37% of
the total youth homeless
population
(Ecker 2016)

OUR PARTICIPANTS – 1:1 INTERVIEWS



**22 Young
LGBTQI+ People**



**13 policymakers
key stakeholder
groups**

ETHOS TYPOLOGY (Homelessness/ Housing Exclusion)

1. Roofless
2. Homeless
3. Living in insecure housing
4. Living in inadequate housing



13 STAKEHOLDERS

Homeless Service
Provider

Advocacy Groups

Civil Servants

Local Authority

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

DATA: Little consensus re population size

TRAINING AND AWARENESS: Deficit

HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA: present/ variable

COMPLEXITY: LGBTQI+ youth and Frontline Services

LGBTQI+ Young People

22 young people

Ages 19 – 30 years

Identified cross the
LGBTQI+ spectrum

14 - Dublin

7 -Cork, Galway, Kerry,
Wicklow, Scotland

BECOMING

BEING

LEAVING

The First Dedicated Study of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness in Ireland

**The research aims to generate a report and recommendations
based on LGBTQI+ young people's:**

Research will be based on 1:1 anonymous interviews.

1

'Triggers' into homelessness

2

Experiences of front-line homelessness
including sofa surfing

3

Experience of support services

4

Obstacles to housing

5

Ideas for solutions



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ANALYSIS

Clapham's 'Housing Pathways'

- Defines these as 'the continually changing set of relationships and interactions that' a household 'experiences over time in its consumption of housing'
- Analytical framework is rooted in social constructivism and focussed on the meanings that housing has for individuals and households and the relationship between these meanings and personal and social identities.
- Acknowledges that housing pathways are also shaped by societal and policy discourses, social structures and inequalities and policies and social services.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Pathways

- Clapham's Housing Pathways framework is widely used in research on homelessness including youth homelessness
- Rates of homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people are significantly higher than among their straight and cis peers. Clapham's pathways framework sheds light on this phenomenon
- Evolving sexualities and gender identities mean that 'housing' has a distinctive meaning for LGBTQI+ young people increasing their risk of becoming homelessness and reducing their prospects of escaping homelessness.

The Meaning of Home/Homelessness - LGBTQI+ Youth

King (1996: 35) suggests that housing 'is a means of fulfilment that allows other human activities to take place'.

For the LGBTQI+ young people one of the most important features of housing is that it provides a safe space in which they can be themselves and explore their emerging identity, without the need to hide or censor this identity or deal with the poorly-informed, negative, homophobic and transphobic responses of others.

- This distinctive understanding of housing in turn shapes distinctive pathways through homelessness for LGBTQI+ youth.
- It increases LGBTQI+ young people's risk of becoming homeless and the challenges and barriers they must overcome in order to exit homeless
- Partially explains the higher levels of homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth identified in the research literature.

BECOMING HOMELESS

BECOMING HOMELESS

Dual Trigger Factors

All Youth Factors:

Familial & Interpersonal &
Intrapersonal

Structural triggers (inc
private rental market and
housing crisis)

LGBTQI+ Specific Factors:

Coming Out

Transitioning

Aggravated Structural
Triggers

Coming Out and Family Rejection

‘The reason she kicked me out at that time, was because I had come home wearing makeup, after going out on a date with a guy and she went crazy that night. Went upstairs. When I came back down the next day, she basically just told me to leave’

(Participant 5)

It was always at a level where it was really bad, I would have to leave eventually. But when I came out...she'd always say that she was very positive about the whole thing, but from my experience she was disgusted by it and horrified by it. Everything got worse... So, I had to leave'

(Participant 8)



Structural Triggers and LGBTQI+ Lives

‘I lost my job. My partner lost their job around the same time. We couldn’t afford to stay in Dublin. But being away from Dublin has been so difficult and so isolating for us as a queer couple’
(Participants 19 and 20)

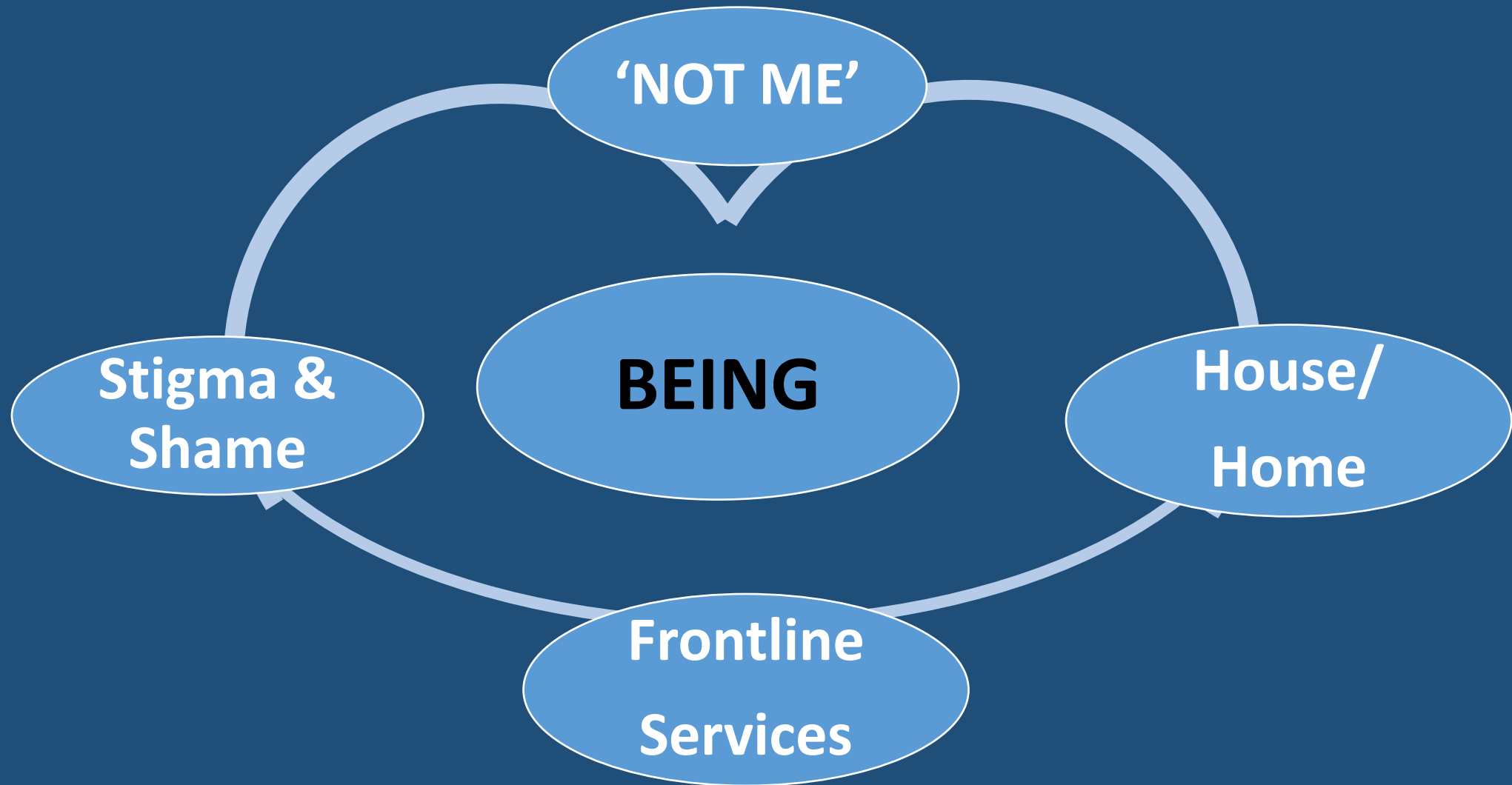
Encountering Transphobia and Homophobia

Yeah, renting was a lot harder as a trans person. Or as a visibly queer person. So like one instance, there was this place that was perfect for me... I could afford the rent and the people seemed nice, and it was nice place... But they say that, oh what was it? That I wouldn't fit their culture. That was how they worded it.

Yeah, and I was also looking for places with [named friend]... I don't know, I would always be afraid to go to the viewings because, there would be a lot of people, and we both look really queer. They don't show when it's that, it's kind of like, oh, we look young, and we look not traditional, young, working people. So, we're not going to get this place so after a while we kind of gave up. (Participant 4)

BEING HOMELESS

BEING HOMELESS



Perceptions and Minimising Experience

‘I never saw myself as homeless...up until I was living in a van and found some old link to a music video that featured someone that was living in a van and they put a content warning for homelessness. And then I was like oh, this person sees that as homelessness. And that made me realise that I was homeless which was helpful because it allowed me to start accessing services’ (Participant 6)

‘Even before I got homeless, I thought the same. Sleeping bags, most on drugs or whatever. It’s so different’ (Participant 1)

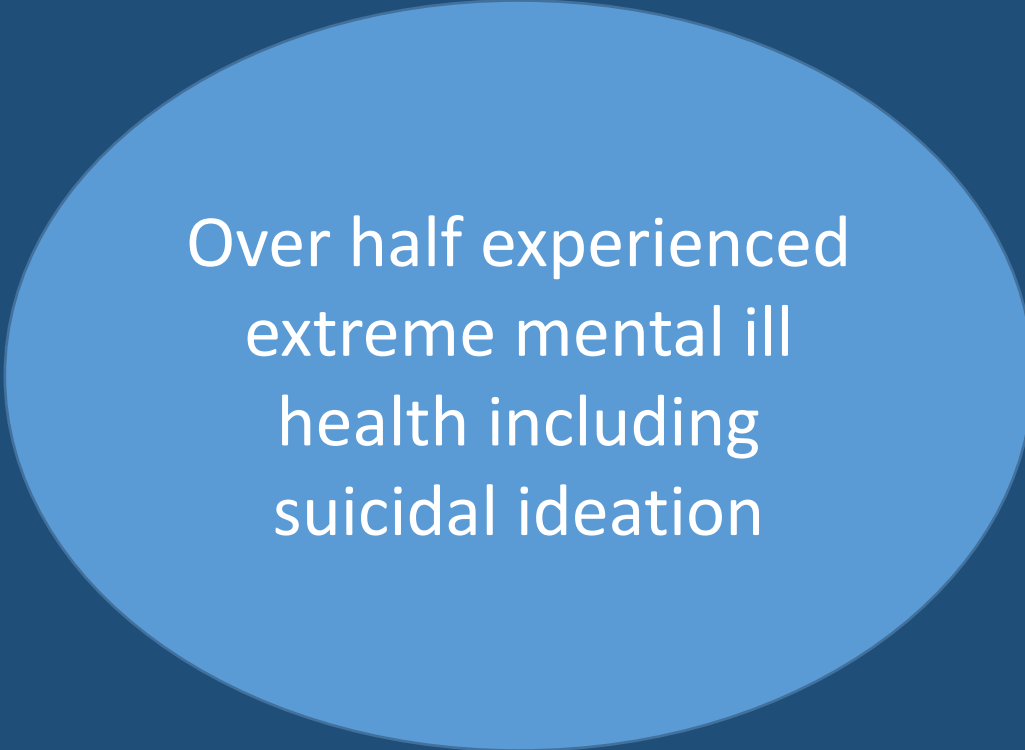
Homelessness - Stigma and Shame

‘It was horrible. It was terrible. I felt like nothing. Yeah, I was drinking a lot. I was just in the middle of this gigantic spiral of shame’ (Participant 18)

‘But there is a very grim fucking feeling about, and particularly the first experience ... And it’s just the kind of sense of, ‘God, this is a disaster. Like I have massively messed up’ (Participant 12)

Mental Health Aggravations

- Physical health challenges
- 'Being on alert' and 'hypervigilant'
- Fear and Exhaustion
- 'Night walking'
- Couch-surfing - stress and guilt
- Anxiety about the future



Over half experienced
extreme mental ill
health including
suicidal ideation

Frontline Services – Complex Relationships

‘My life would have been so much worse if I didn’t enter homeless services. And that’s something that I know now, it would have been so much worse... it’s just I wish there wasn’t so much stigma around it’
(Participant 8)

‘Not having access to queer homeless services means that I have to hide’
(Participant 11)

‘Like my sexuality, a relief to tell [keyworker], it was. It’s just sitting on your chest all the time...I built up a relationship with her, so I knew I could trust her. But with other key workers, I think they don’t understand it because they haven’t worked with people who have told them that they’re gay’ (Participant 1)

Hostel/Hostile Complexities

‘I’m just really happy that I’m not in hostels and stuff, like as in the free phone and everything because I know a lot of people in there, and it’s not good’
(Participant 4)

They're dangerous and they're cold and unreliable and dirty and depressing. It's horrible for anybody, for anybody who has to stay at one of those hostels. You can't sleep. You have to sleep with one eye open because your clothes might get stolen or your phone or your shoes or your jacket or your coat or your bag, you know. (Participant 1)

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Housing as 'Private' 'Safe' Space

It's [couch-surfing] incredibly exhausting. So much worse than squatting ever has been for me. Just not having any space that's your own. The impact of not having your own space, like a space that you can exist alone and not have to deal with anyone or be expected to perform in any way ... The effect that has on you, on every part of you, is really exhausting (Participant 22).

... like staying on the couch, I don't have kind of a physical environment where I can separate myself from potential causes of anxiety. If I'm staying in someone's living room, or as well, I'm standing in an environment that I haven't created, I don't feel as comfortable as at home, as safe there. (Participant 12).

LEAVING HOMELESSNESS

LEAVING HOMELESSNESS



More than a place to sleep!

‘I just think it will be a home for people that just don’t have it, and not a home where you have to go and pretend that you’re straight and you’re not trans, where you have to hide your body or your voice or your partners...just a place to exist at any point they need to do that at’ (Participant 5)

Queer Kinships and Community

‘...The LGBT community are really good at making families very quickly because we’re really good at being disowned by our natural ones’ (Participant 5)

‘Yeah. When it comes to gender and sexuality-related stuff, I’m actually... I have developed like good skills, and I’ve been really lucky there like at [name of LGBTQI+ youth organisation] because I was in a majority with my friends’ (Participant 4)

‘I think that’s [role models] very important. If you see someone else be brave, you’re going to be brave as well. It’s similar too, I suppose, in Ireland before when there weren’t much LGBT people, or many people out. And when more and more people have come out, other people follow (Participant 14).

Permanence

‘It’s amazing. It feels like you can just live. I just felt like my life was on hold, until I found a permanent place. It’s just a weight lifted off my shoulders... I didn’t know how bad it was until I found a place. I’m so lucky that I got it. I was so lucky. It’s mad. After everything, I am so blessed. But like so many other people aren’t, it’s horrible’

(Participant 8)

Some Concluding Insights

The distinctive meanings of 'house' and 'home' impact young LGBTQI+ peoples navigation of homelessness

Key Transitions (Beer et al 2001) in young LGBTQI+ people's pathways highlight opportunities for dynamic and agentic interventions:

- Supports for parents and families around coming out
- LGBTQI+ foster parents
- Training for homeless service staff so they 'get it'
- LGBTQI+ specific homeless accommodation

THANK YOU

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