

Seminar 5: Women's Homelessness I (Room: TBD) - Chair: Isabel Baptista, PT

Dora Welker, HU: Shared Domestic Abuse Refuge in the Age of Housing First

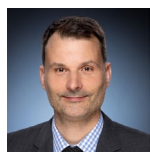
Refuge represents the most iconic housing response to domestic abuse-driven homelessness. The model emerged in response to the need for a safe space for women seeking immediate escape from abusive partners. The original provision largely involved different households sharing accommodation and facilities due to both necessity and ethos, and much of this shared provision remains today in the UK and elsewhere. In other areas of homelessness services, the effectiveness and appropriateness of shared forms of accommodation has increasingly been discredited. Refuges for domestic abuse survivors have to date largely escaped this critical interrogation and have instead been supported as a beneficial therapeutic model. Based on qualitative data gathered via key informant interviews and focus groups with service users in England and Scotland, this paper examines the merits and demerits of this kind of shared accommodation and reflects on whether the housing needs of domestic abuse survivors are as different from those of other groups facing homelessness as the domestic abuse sector appears to hold. We conclude that the critiques of shared and congregate living that are so persuasive as regards hostels apply with at least equal weight to refuges. Domestic abuse survivors have similar requirements for privacy, autonomy, choice, and control over their living environments as other populations experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Our contention is that, while domestic abuse survivors may have specific needs for intensive, gender-informed professional and peer support, this can be achieved without utilising outdated shared models of accommodation, though there may well be a continuing need for 'cluster' type provision of self-contained units for high-risk groups.



Dora Welker is a Project Officer at FEANTSA, working on the Equal House project analysing the scale and dynamics of housing inequality across European countries. She completed her PhD in Urban Studies at Heriot Watt University's Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research (United Kingdom) with a research focus on gender-based violence and homelessness.

Timo Weishaupt, DE: Female, Homeless, without a Safety Net? A Critical Perspective on How the Welfare State Protects Homeless Women

The number of homeless women in Germany has been growing over the past few years. There is a substantial amount of literature on homeless women and the struggles they face. These publications not only show that these women's biographies are characterized by violence and traumata, but that they mainly seek private solutions to solve their problems. These solutions typically involve one-sided dependencies and a need to accept and adapt to unwelcome circumstances. There is a gap in the literature, however, on the question why the assistance offered by the welfare state does not reach these women. Relying on a case study of a medium-sized university town in western Germany, this article offers a critical, gender-specific analysis of the (municipal) welfare state and homelessness assistance system and systematically makes visible various uncertainties and ambiguities, barriers to access, gaps in service provision, legitimized exclusions, unsecured transitions and unintended consequences, which allow us to explain why assistance services for women are simply lacking, why existing services fail to reach women, or why women cannot accept these services due to their gender-insensitive design. This 'gender myopia' of the German homelessness assistance system can be partly explained by a lack of financial resources, but must also take an unwillingness on the part of political decision-makers to accept women's special situations into account. The empirical basis of the argument is based on 90 interviews conducted with people affected by homelessness and experts from the support system between 2021 and 2024.



Professor Weishaupt holds a Chair in Sociology with a focus on Social Policy at the University of Göttingen, Germany. He received his award-winning Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2008. Since his doctoral studies, he has conducted research at the work-welfare nexus with a focus on European active labour market policy (ALMP), unemployment insurance, and public employment services (PES). In 2020, he commenced a three-year research project, funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG), in which he seeks to illuminate the role of the welfare state in causing (or prolonging) homelessness and housing exclusion in three German cities (2020-2023).