



# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND HEALTH IN THE LIVES OF MOTHERS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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# BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

- Homeless mothers
- Homelessness and health
- Unique challenges
  - lack of affordable housing, poverty, intimate partner violence
  - least recognized groups, increasing prevalence
- Social exclusion



# LITERATURE

## ◉ EXISTING LITERATURE

- Social exclusion and health
- Homelessness and adverse health consequences
- Gender inequality and homelessness
- Unique challenges for mothers experiencing homelessness
- Strengths and Acts of Resistance

## ◉ GAPS IN LITERATURE

- Social exclusion and health: multidimensional
- Social exclusion and homelessness among mothers/women
- Policy analysis
- Resistance and health

# PURPOSE

The purposes of this study are to understand the socio-political context, health needs, exclusionary and inclusionary forces, and strategies of resistance demonstrated by mothers experiencing homelessness

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ◉ (1) What are the socio-political contexts of mother's experience of social exclusion?
- ◉ (2) How do the experiences of social exclusion and social inclusion shape their health?
- ◉ (3) What are the strengths and strategies of resistance employed by these women?
- ◉ (4) How do these strengths and strategies influence their health?
- ◉ (5) How can the health of mothers who are experiencing homelessness be promoted within the current socio-political context?

# RESEARCH DESIGN: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

- **Critical Paradigm**
  - Political, historical, cultural, and social contexts
  - Intent to reveal, critique and challenge
- **Intersectionality**
  - Mutually constructed and interactive forces of oppression and privilege
  - Problematizes structures of inequity

# RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY

- **Critical Narrative**
  - Emphasis on creating space
  - Reconstruct and provide meaning of their reality
  - “Moral force, healing power, and emancipatory thrust of stories” (Sandelowski, 1991, p.1).
  - Stories convey cultural themes and values and social, historical, cultural meanings

# RESEARCH METHODS: SAMPLE AND SAMPLING STRATEGIES

- Purposive sample, snowballing sampling techniques
- Inclusion criteria:
  - Self-identify as mothers, are experiencing homelessness and over the age of 18
  - Broad definition of homelessness
  - Women with and without physical custody of their children
  - Speak and understand spoken English
- Homeless shelters, drop-in centres in Southern Ontario
- Sample
  - 26 mothers
  - 15 service providers (as context, and for policy piece)



# SAMPLE

- Mother participants ranged from 18-58 years of age; avg age 27.4 years
- On avg women had 1.5 children; Majority of children were under 5 years of age
- Majority of women identified as having mental health issues (n=19)
- Majority of women were born in Canada (n=17)
- Variety of racial and ethnocultural identities
- Majority of women were receiving social assistance (n=19)
- Education: 1 women had elementary school; 11 women had some high school; 9 women completed high school, 5 had college training
- All service provider participants were women, working with women who have experienced homelessness in the last year, or who were currently homeless

# RESEARCH METHODS: DATA COLLECTION

- In-depth face-to-face interviews
- Individual, group interviews (based on choice)
- Semi-structured interview guide, photos
- Costs incurred and honorarium
- Follow-up interviews
- Took place between July 2012 and January 2013

# DATA ANALYSIS: CRITICAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

- Analysis of individual and group interviews
  - Critical narrative analysis (McCormack, 2001; Labov, 1972, & Reissman, 1993)
    - Life experience and meaning of events
    - (1) viewing the transcript through multiple narrative lenses
      - active listening, narrative processes, language, context, significant moments
    - (2) developing interpreting stories
      - story structure and boundaries
      - interpretations and reflections
  - Collective and contradictory meanings

# PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

- Ethics approval
- Consent
- Confidentiality
- Comfort and safety
- Referrals as necessary

# EMERGING THEMES

- Intersecting Patterns of Exclusion
- Regulation Turned Inward
- Contradictory Spaces of Support
- Pushing Back from the Margins

# INTERSECTING PATTERNS OF EXCLUSION

- Repeating patterns; Intergenerational experiences; Added layer of mothering as vulnerability
- “Homeless from age 13 on... I just had my luggage, I always, I had one secure place where I always had all my stuff and I knew it was safe and stuff so I'd just go back, get clothes, and like I always had a bag with me and my purse, and I was like, carried a big purse so I just fit whatever I needed and just... I haven't moved from friend to friend since I was 17, right, so its just like living in and out, one person, that person, this person, that couch, this couch, so...and like I'm completely alone in Canada right now, cause I don't speak with my dad or anybody. Sometimes I speak with my brother but its not really often so, my last resort from a friends house was to go to a shelter, so, it was scary and like, you have to line up to eat food and you always get used to that, you have to share a room, I have to collect a towel when I want to go shower, you can have your own stuff, whatever it is. It was very traumatizing in the beginning, but they do help a lot with a lot of things, like they motivate you to get a job and to like get on track, go to school, do chores and all that stuff, so...I just moved here a couple of months ago, and I was pregnant when I was living with a friend, so I went from a friend to a friend being pregnant, right, and it was actually kind of scary because I know my baby father has a lot of problems with people, so, wherever I went now, like it was just like, is your door going to get kicked off, am I going to get hurt? Like, am I safe here, I was always scared so I just picked up and went other places and stuff, so...It's just too much to deal with sometimes...it just happened overnight and it was like right back to where I started as a kid, you know. I feel like because I went through it as a kid I knew how to handle it, but when you have a kid involved in the situation, it's ten times harder”

# REGULATION TURNED INWARD

- Internalized gender norms, always an internalized hierarchy of dominant discourse/belief
- “Moving from place to place, my cousin’s house, friend’s house, not knowing where we are going to live next week. He has changed schools 3 times already and he just started! it makes me feel like a bad mom. It makes me want to give up. I hit a really big low this past winter, I just couldn’t do it anymore. I’m not like the other moms on welfare. I refuse to go on welfare...the case workers will watch me...treat me like a child...I’m working for living...I mean at least I’m not prostituting myself... It doesn’t matter he takes all my money (crying). What am I doing here? My son deserves better. “
- “Well why is (name) in here she wasn’t being abused, she has a boyfriend, she constantly saying how’s she’s going out with her boyfriend to hang out with him or spend the night with him. I don’t know if other women do but I do, but I definitely sense it. I know that I’m not supposed to be...But it is difficult because I know people are asking themselves or amongst each other. And I felt it. I did feel strains in here and at (name of shelter) amongst other residents. Like, Oh her boyfriend pulls up in a brand new truck, and they take off. She’s always got a little bit of extra money, going and getting her coffee, So yeah and I did feel that, but nobody knew what I had gone through and why I was there.”

# CONTRADICTORY SPACES OF SUPPORT

- positive and negative experiences: system as participant
- “I absolutely despise that and I don’t want my kids to be in the CAS system at all, I don’t even want his name, nothing, I don’t want him to be any part of it at all, and its just, its crappy because he’s going to have to have a worker and she’s gonna be coming around from... I guess for two months or a month or so, she’s in the babies life just seeing how I’m doing with the baby and stuff. I understand, you know, I’m not fighting it at all, I do know, like you know, you gotta see if I can parent or not, you have the right to do that, I’ve been in the CAS system for a long time. It’s all the same right; don’t put me in the same category. I’m not fighting CAS, I don’t like, I would never do that, but just, it terrifies me that they’re going to be in my life and just going to be judgmental, cause that’s all I ever knew CAS as, is judgmental. I really don’t understand were they’re coming from with that, because my baby has nothing to do with what I went through. It’s completely different. Basically it’s not his fault. He’s innocent. He’s not doing anything, he doesn’t even know what’s going on, so for a worker to be in the system it scares me, because later on ... not to say if he does ... not to say if he ever gets in trouble or anything happens, he’s just gonna be known, already known in the CAS system, and it’s scary, I don’t want that.”
- “until you hit rock bottom there’s no support”



# PUSHING BACK FROM THE MARGINS

- a) Questioning injustice of circumstance
- b) Seeking/providing support and help
- c) Communal space of support
- d) Act of mothering as added strength
- e) Service providers pushing with them

# NEXT STEPS: DATA ANALYSIS

- Continue with preliminary analysis
- Analysis of policy
  - Context element of narrative
  - Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; 2010)
  - Fairclough's approach has great emphasis on power, social structures and its relationship with discourse

# THANK YOU!

◎ Questions?