

Coming Together: Homeless Women, Housing and Social Support A CBR Project Using Staged Photography

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Rationale

- Women who are homeless/marginally housed are often invisible.
- Homeless women are often portrayed as “victims” and managed in the charity model of social services; their strengths not often recognized.
- 50% of women that had lived in supportive housing return to shelters because they felt unsafe in a co-ed environment (Novac, 1996).
- The need to focus on the women's experiences in networking among people who are homeless/marginally housed.

Research Questions

1. How do women who are homeless build networks for survival and support?
2. In what ways do women support each other through these networks?
3. How can social service agencies support women's networks?

Methods

Community-Based Participatory Research
Research team partnership of U of Toronto, Regent Park Community Health Centre, and Sistering – A Woman's Place

Grounded theory & Arts-Based Research

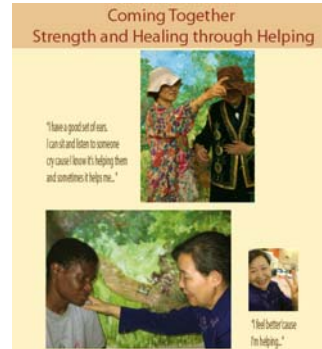
Phase I

Literature review (over 100 articles/reports reviewed)
Key Informant Interviews (12 Social service providers + 1 researcher)
In-depth Interviews (20 women/transwomen who are homeless or marginally housed)

Phase II

Arts-based research- *Staged Photography*
Participatory action research (advisory board)
Dissemination efforts (on-going)
Theorization (on-going)

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Dissemination Efforts

Public dissemination: Public shows with presentations (e.g., Metro Hall); Distribution of posters and booklet to policy makers and social service agencies; Website at University of Toronto

Academic dissemination: Presentations at national/international conferences (e.g., American Psychological Association) & universities



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Phase I: Qualitative Research Participant Demographics

Gender		Places staying/living	
Biological women:	14 (70%)	Shelter/hostel:	7 (35%)
Transwomen:	6 (30%)	On the street:	5 (25%)
		Private housing:	4 (20%)
		Subsidized housing:	2 (10%)
		Relatives/friends:	2 (10%)
Age		Duration of homelessness/ Marginalized housing	
25-39:	11 (55%)	Up to 1 year:	7 (35%)
40-59:	9 (45%)	1-5 years:	6 (30%)
		5-10 years:	2 (10%)
		10+ years:	5 (25%)
Ethnicity/Race			
Aboriginal/Métis:	9 (45%)		
Women of colour	4 (20%)		
White/European-heritage	7 (35%)		

Themes Emerged From Phase I Data

- Structures of Women's Networks
- Functions of Networks for Women
- Violence and Trauma in Women's Lives
- Importance of Safe Space and Housing
- Needed Changes to Social Services and Policies



Phase II: Arts-Based Research

- Explored and elaborated the themes from Phase I. Advisory Board - discussions around issues raised by research and acted as peer researchers.
- Used *staged photography*, which is an art form that combines photography, theatre, dance, sculpture, painting and literature.
- Art-making sessions in 4 drop-in centres across Toronto:
Themes emerged at each site:
 - Focused on expressing how they supported each other on an individual and community level with respect to issues of poverty, isolation and accessing social services.
 - Expressed the pain and trauma of violence against women, the tragedy of addictions, and problems of language in accessing support and preventing social isolation.
 - Expressed problems of support and inclusion based on transphobia, homophobia, gender discrimination, poverty and isolation. Issues of employment and housing discrimination.
 - Focused on expressing issues related to housing and homelessness by creating their ideal homes and places where they received comfort, feel included and empowered.

Implications: Multi-level Empowerment

- “Coming together” and creating art as feedback
- A sense of ownership for participants
- Ability/space to dream about their own future
- Empowerment through knowledge that their voices will be heard at higher levels (public recognition)