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# **Women's experiences of homelessness**

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## **Abstract**

Despite homeless women being reported as one of the fastest growing homeless populations worldwide, their experiences remain underreported and underrepresented across data, research and literature. This qualitative research aimed to explore and understand women's experiences of homelessness, underpinned by contemporary theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and post-structuralist feminism. The limited evidence base suggests gendered patterns of homelessness. Women are categorised as the 'hidden homeless', motivated by strategies of safety which render them invisible to methods of homeless data collection, indicating the complexity, nuanced and inter-related nature of women's homelessness. Eight women who had previously been homeless were interviewed, recruited from a charity organisation for homeless women. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews which were analysed using reflexive Thematic Analysis, aligned with the critical realist social constructionist positioning of this research. Four master themes were generated from the analysis: Illusion of Choice; Intersecting Identities; Habituation to Trauma and Abuse and Shape Shifting which reflected some findings reported in the literature. However, unique findings were also generated from this research: At the Mercy of Luck, Flexing of Gender and Identity and Acts of Resistance, providing novel insights into women's experiences of homelessness which go beyond the existing knowledge base, to contribute alternative perspectives. The findings overall highlight paradoxical ways of living, the socio-historical-political constructs which inform and maintain women's homelessness and the ways homeless women are resisting, evolving and adapting to the

constraints placed on them. An evaluation of the research is offered including limitations, areas for future consideration, dissemination and implications for clinical practice.

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## Table of Contents

|                                                                                 |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Abstract .....                                                                  | 3   |
| Acknowledgements.....                                                           | 4   |
| Table of contents .....                                                         | 5-7 |
| List of Tables and Figures .....                                                | 8   |
| <b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> .....                                          | 9   |
| <b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b> .....                                     | 13  |
| 2.2 Introduction .....                                                          | 13  |
| 2.3 Search Strategy .....                                                       | 13  |
| 2.4 Epistemology and Positionality .....                                        | 14  |
| 2.5 Defining Homelessness .....                                                 | 15  |
| 2.6 Definitions .....                                                           | 17  |
| 2.6.1 Women .....                                                               | 18  |
| 2.6.2 Homelessness .....                                                        | 18  |
| 2.6.3 Multiple Exclusion Homelessness .....                                     | 20  |
| 2.7 Construction of Homelessness .....                                          | 21  |
| 2.7.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs .....                                         | 21  |
| 2.7.2 Intersectionality.....                                                    | 21  |
| 2.7.3 Post-Structuralist Feminism.....                                          | 23  |
| 2.7. Structural and Individual Views of Homelessness.....                       | 23  |
| 2.8 Why Women? .....                                                            | 24  |
| 2.9 The Invisibility of Women's Homelessness .....                              | 26  |
| 2.10 Women's Gender Roles .....                                                 | 29  |
| 2.11 Hidden Homelessness .....                                                  | 31  |
| 2.12 Domestic Violence and Abuse .....                                          | 33  |
| 2.13 Women's Resistance and Resilience .....                                    | 34  |
| 2.14 Women's Health .....                                                       | 36  |
| 2.15 Survival Sex .....                                                         | 38  |
| 2.16 Accessing Services .....                                                   | 39  |
| 2.17 Rationale and Research Question .....                                      | 40  |
| <b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b> .....                                         | 41  |
| 3.2 Introduction.....                                                           | 41  |
| 3.3 Theoretical Approach and Research Paradigms in Counselling Psychology ..... | 42  |
| 3.4 Epistemological Positioning .....                                           | 44  |
| 3.5 Thematic Analysis .....                                                     | 46  |

|                                                                                    |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.5.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis .....                                            | 46  |
| 3.5.3 Rationale for Thematic Analysis .....                                        | 47  |
| 3.5.4 Limitations of Thematic Analysis .....                                       | 50  |
| 3.6 Quality and Credibility of Research .....                                      | 51  |
| 3.6.2 <i>Sensitivity to context</i> .....                                          | 51  |
| 3.6.3 <i>Commitment and rigour</i> .....                                           | 51  |
| 3.6.4 <i>Transparency and coherence</i> .....                                      | 51  |
| 3.6.5 <i>Impact and importance</i> .....                                           | 52  |
| 3.7 Ethical Considerations .....                                                   | 52  |
| 3.8 Procedure .....                                                                | 54  |
| 3.8.2 Recruitment Process .....                                                    | 55  |
| 3.8.3 Sampling Criteria and Rationale .....                                        | 55  |
| 3.8.4 Data Collection .....                                                        | 56  |
| 3.8.5 Data Analysis .....                                                          | 57  |
| 3.9 Reflexivity.....                                                               | 60  |
| <b>Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion</b> .....                                 | 64  |
| 4.1 Illusion of choice.....                                                        | 65  |
| 4.1.2 At the Mercy of Luck.....                                                    | 65  |
| 4.1.3 Powerlessness .....                                                          | 70  |
| 4.1.2 Existing and Surviving Versus Enjoying and Living .....                      | 75  |
| 4.2 Intersecting Identities .....                                                  | 80  |
| 4.2.2 Levels of Othering .....                                                     | 82  |
| 4.2.3 Social Hierarchy .....                                                       | 86  |
| 4.3 Habituation to Trauma and Abuse .....                                          | 89  |
| 4.3.2 Unhelpful and Inaccurate Assumptions .....                                   | 90  |
| 4.3.3 Gender Roles and Social Norms .....                                          | 95  |
| 4.3.4 ‘The Same CD Keeps Playing’ .....                                            | 100 |
| 4.4 Shape Shifting .....                                                           | 104 |
| 4.4.2 Flexing Identity and Gender .....                                            | 105 |
| 4.4.3 Acts of Resistance .....                                                     | 110 |
| 4.5 Summary of Unique Findings .....                                               | 115 |
| 4.6 Relevance to Counselling Psychology .....                                      | 115 |
| 4.7 Implications for Clinical Practice .....                                       | 117 |
| 4.8 Quality Evaluation .....                                                       | 119 |
| 4.8.2 Sensitivity to Context .....                                                 | 119 |
| 4.8.3 Commitment and Rigour .....                                                  | 120 |
| 4.8.4 Transparency and Coherence .....                                             | 121 |
| 4.8.5 Impact and Importance .....                                                  | 121 |
| 4.9 Limitations .....                                                              | 122 |
| 4.10 Future Considerations .....                                                   | 123 |
| 4.11 Conclusion .....                                                              | 125 |
| 4.12 References .....                                                              | 128 |
| <b>Appendix A: Recruitment Brief Sheet for Organisation and Participants</b> ..... | 141 |

|                                                                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Appendix B: Ethics Review Decision Letter .....</b>                               | <b>143</b> |
| <b>Appendix C: Title Change Approval Form .....</b>                                  | <b>150</b> |
| <b>Appendix D: Interview Schedule .....</b>                                          | <b>153</b> |
| <b>Appendix E: Confirmation of Consent from Organisation (by supervisor) .....</b>   | <b>154</b> |
| <b>Appendix F: Participant Consent Form .....</b>                                    | <b>155</b> |
| <b>Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet .....</b>                               | <b>157</b> |
| <b>Appendix H: Participant Debrief Sheet .....</b>                                   | <b>161</b> |
| <b>Appendix I: Analysis Example of Phase Two Coding .....</b>                        | <b>164</b> |
| <b>Appendix J: Example of Phase Two Coding and Mapping .....</b>                     | <b>165</b> |
| <b>Appendix K: Example of Phase Three Thematic Map and Theme Formation.....</b>      | <b>166</b> |
| <b>Appendix L: Example of Phase Four and Five Reviewing and Defining Themes.....</b> | <b>167</b> |
| <b>Appendix M: Example of Excel Sheet with Quotes per Theme .....</b>                | <b>168</b> |
| <b>Appendix N: Data Management Plan .....</b>                                        | <b>169</b> |

### **List of Tables and Figures**

*Table 1.* Participant Demographics p.50

*Table 2* Themes and Sub-Themes p.57

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Over the last ten years, I have held various positions at a homelessness and mental health day centre supporting those who are homeless and/or precariously housed. I began by volunteering with the women's group, then became employed as a locum worker and following that, lead caseworker. Throughout this experience, I became aware of the prevalence of homeless men attending the project, with generally fewer women presenting to and attending the service. This informed my initial assumption that perhaps homelessness was less common in women - a widely accepted assumption reported in the literature said to maintain the underrepresentation and marginalisation of women's homelessness (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Phipps et al., 2021; Savage, 2016; Walsh et al., 2009).

As I embarked on exploring women's experiences of homelessness, I was struck by the lack of representation in this population across official statistics, data and literature, observing a discrepancy between accessible statistics which spoke to the existence and adversity faced by homeless women and the lack of research. Both my prior experience and this discrepancy piqued my interest in informing the topic of this research, which aimed to give voice to a marginalised population and understand more about this group, their needs and experiences. Reflecting on my own interactions and experiences with women at the day centre, I observed patterns in the attendance and behaviour of female service users, who were more likely to attend women only contexts (i.e. the women's group) or when accompanied by men, rarely presenting alone to the general service.

Women's homelessness is reported as a significant global issue, representing one-third of the total homeless population across Europe, with the UK being one of the countries with the highest female population (Pleace et al., 2021). In 2023, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in the UK reported 227,000 homeless households in England, with women representing 40% of the homeless population (MHCLG, 2023). This demonstrates the need for a distilled understanding of women's homelessness, making up nearly half of the homeless population. Homelessness in the UK encapsulates a vast tapestry of presentations including rough sleeping, precarious housing, temporary accommodation and unsafe conditions (Crisis, 2021). Rough sleeping is the most visible and therefore recognised form of homelessness in the UK, yet women are least likely to rough sleep due to safety issues which result in homeless women going unseen and unrecorded (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Despite such statistics, most of the research and literature is dominated by lone homeless men's experiences which are generalised to women, meaning that the extent of the problem is yet unknown (Pleace, 2016). As Watson (2006, p.61) stated, almost over a decade ago:

*“if homelessness is defined in terms of men's experiences and practices or men's subjectivities, then women's homelessness becomes invisible. If it is invisible it is not counted and therefore it is underestimated.”*

Women are reported to be one of the fastest growing homeless populations in the UK, yet the lack of gender-specific support and services presents a critical issue in response to this growing trend (Pleace & Bretheron, 2020). Homeless women are a vastly unresearched population, with the limited existing evidence base reporting a need for further research into the wider influences

of gender roles, stereotypes and assumptions on ineffective data collection and inaccurate reporting of women's experiences, which perpetuate a blindness to women's homelessness (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Savage, 2016; Phipps et al., 2021; Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Reeve, 2018; Walsh et al., 2009).

Homeless individuals are more likely to die by suicide and substance related issues, with mental health issues prevalent in 40-50% of the homeless population, compared to 15% in the general population (Crisis, 2021; NHS Digital, 2022; ONS, 2021). Marginalised vulnerable groups such as women represent those most likely to experience 'hidden homelessness' due to adopting strategies to stay invisible in response to gender-based violence and domestic abuse which they experience exponentially, with the average life expectancy of a homeless woman being 43 years old (Blackburn, 2019). These sobering figures testify to the discrimination, intersectionality and adversity faced by those experiencing homelessness and the multi-faceted impact this has on physical and psychological wellbeing. In relation to help-seeking and accessing services, only 25% of women were found to access housing, with 13% accessing day centres in the UK in 2018 (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018), raising additional questions around suitability of and access to support, suggesting deeper issues at play.

I was inspired to adopt a critical realist social constructionist approach to exploring women's experiences of homelessness. What is known about homelessness to date is largely comprised of positivist, quantitative research and findings which dominate the homeless literature, landscape and understandings, with generalisable data and evidence-based findings weighing heavily in

policy and service provision. A critical realist ontology allows me to acknowledge these one-dimensional ‘truths’ (i.e. definitions and data) as widely accepted generalised notions and phenomenon, which must be considered in the influence and application they hold. Whilst a social constructionist epistemology encourages homelessness, its associated assumptions and ‘realities’ to be understood through the socio-historical-cultural contexts and influences from which it arises, to include issues such as gender, stigma and power.

Qualitative studies in existence grounded in sound evidenced research into women’s experiences of homelessness are of great relevance to Counselling Psychology. The epistemological positioning held by this research allows for relevant theories and frameworks to be drawn from such as post-structural feminism and intersectionality theory to facilitate additional perspectives and constructions in wider understandings of women’s homelessness. This research has garnered unique findings and perspectives in answering the research question ‘*what are women’s experiences of homelessness?*’ which is intentionally broad due to the lack of knowledge around the subject. The unique findings of; at the mercy of luck; flexing identity and gender and acts of resistance represent novel findings which go beyond the existing knowledge base offering more contemporary understandings through the intersectional, nuanced and complex nature of women’s homelessness as well as the impact and implications of the research.



## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.2 Introduction**

This chapter aims to reflect and critically consider the literature relating to women's experiences of homelessness. The first section outlines the search strategy used to source the literature presented followed by the relevant definitions, understandings and contexts within which the topic of homelessness sits. The critical realist social constructionist positioning from which the literature is engaged with and presented is outlined, followed by the mainstream statistical landscape of homelessness within the UK. The debates and theories relevant to defining homelessness such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, intersectionality and post-structuralist feminism are outlined, followed by a rationale as to why women as a homogenous group have been focused on, alongside the reported gaps in the literature around women's homelessness. An overview of the key areas within the literature are then shared and evaluated: women's gender roles; hidden homelessness; domestic violence and abuse; resilience and resistance through homelessness; women's health; survival sex and access to services. The relevance of women's experiences of homelessness within the context of Counselling Psychology and social justice are then discussed. To conclude, the rationale for the research question is presented in relation to the critical literature review discussed.

### **2.3 Search Strategy**

The literature review was conducted across several databases including EBSCOhost, PsychINFO, PyschArticles and the University of East London's library search engine to specifically source research materials concerned with women's experiences of homelessness. A combination of search terms were used and combined including: homelessness, women's homelessness, gender and homelessness, gendered experiences of homelessness and women's representation in homelessness. A snowballing technique was enlisted to source further literature surrounding women's experiences of homelessness, with articles focusing on the UK favoured. However, due to the limited evidence base, literature from other countries, literature generalised across gender as well as literature looking at men's homelessness were drawn from and contextualised. By the same token, no date restrictions were applied to the selection of literature due to the scarcity of research available, with more recent studies favoured where relevant.

## **2.4 Epistemology and Positionality**

As aligned with the critical realist social constructionist position of this research, this is the lens through which the literature and research will be engaged with and presented. Homelessness is seen as a relative concept as its meaning changes over time, it is understood differently within each society and is not deemed a fixed state (Manzi et al., 1999). BuschGeertsema et al., (2010) appear aligned with this stance as they state that much of the debate in existence around homelessness is due to its socially constructed nature, rendering many different views and debates. A subjective experience approach is taken within this research to recognise that homelessness is experienced uniquely from one individual to the next, highlighting the challenges presented in defining homelessness, due to the disparity in lived experiences

(Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Reeve et al., 2007; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). ‘No two women move through the same accommodation sequence over the same timescale’ and therefore it is important to note that women’s voices are represented at large for the purpose of this review (Reeve et al., 2007, p.7). It is acknowledged that much of our understanding of knowledge originates within historical and cultural influence, situated and tied to human experience with realities understood and shaped by human practices (Gergen, 2015; Madill et al., 2000). Much of the (ungendered) homeless research is treated as objectifiable, coming from a positivist lens of social enquiry, with definitions moulded by dominant political policy driven perspectives (Manzi et al., 1999). Given the epistemological stance of this review, it is important to note that women’s homelessness does not exist in a vacuum outside of cultural, societal, and political narratives which frame a broader image of gender inequalities (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021; Reeve et al., 2006; Watson & Austerberry, 1986).

## **2.5 Defining Homelessness**

Arriving at a unanimous definition for homelessness amongst social scientists and researchers has long proved problematic due to the nuance of meaning and variety of experience which exists within ‘homelessness’. With definitions varying between countries, scholars and policy makers. Generally, within the UK, homelessness is understood as those without access to housing and shelter (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). According to statistics from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in England, in 2020-2021, 268,560 households were at risk of or experienced homelessness. This illustrates a 7.4% decrease from 2019-2020 when 288,470 households were identified, but a 16.2% increase from 2018-2019.

This fluctuation indicates important context as to how government policy responded to the Covid-19 pandemic which saw the ‘Everyone In’ scheme in the UK offer temporary and emergency accommodation to many experiencing homelessness, demonstrating how major policy intervention can impact our understanding of the homelessness landscape and the influence of political power (Homelesslink, 2022; MHCLG, 2021).

The lack of gendered breakdown in official homeless data highlights a tension reflected across the literature which reports that homeless women are one of the fastest growing homeless populations, justifying the purpose of this review and bringing to light questions around how homelessness is recorded and therefore understood (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Savage, 2016). Positivist data which dominates understandings of homelessness arguably deduces complex homeless experiences to numbers absent of individual narratives which inform statistics, projecting inaccurate representations (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021; Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Watson 1999; Watson & Austerberry, 1986).

For example, according to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, on a single night in Autumn 2021 in England, 2,080 men (85%) and 320 women (13%) were reported to be sleeping rough, with gender unknown for 2% (GOV.UK, 2021). Whilst statistics like this seemingly stand out through offering a gendered breakdown (where many do not), several researchers report the vast underrepresentation of women in statistics due to categorising homelessness using methods which reaffirm the underestimation of the problem (Bretherton & Mayock, 2020; Reeve, 2008). For example, methods of data collection ignore a widely reported

finding that women's homelessness has long existed in hidden ways; in domestic and public spaces, which calls into question how much we should rely on and apply such statistics in our understandings around homelessness (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Watson 1999; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). The idea that homelessness can occur in domestic spaces was only noted in UK homelessness legislation in 1977. According to much of the evidence base, domestic spaces are much more commonly frequented by women who are homeless, yet these spaces are excluded from data collection methods (Reeve et al., 2018). Women have been found to rely more on and utilise informal private networks, often within domestic spaces, such as staying with acquaintances, friends and family whilst homeless as temporary measures (Casey et al., 2008). Women are found to be much less likely to sleep rough on the streets and if doing so, tend only to do so when with a male counterpart or once they have exhausted all other options, suggesting that they avoid sleeping alone on the street at all costs (Smith, 2005). This raises the question, why do homeless women exist more in domestic spaces and what are the reasons for these reported differences in how they occupy the streets? There is a division in the literature which speaks to how gendered perceptions of place seem to reaffirm the association of women in domestic spaces. This will be discussed further in the subsection 'women's gender roles' (Casey et al., 2018).

## **2.6 Definitions**

There are many ways in which identities, definitions and experiences are constructed related to gender as well as homelessness, with those relevant to this review stated below:

### *2.6.1 Women:*

For the purposes of this review, I will be referring to ‘women’ as anyone who identifies as a ‘woman’. ‘Women’ have been categorised for this research, with that meaning including anyone who identifies as a woman regardless of biology or medicalisation. The male versus female medicalised discourse is of relevance within this context which many argue can serve to exclude individuals and how they choose to identify. Therefore, it is important to highlight that the medicalisation of gender can be weaponised by individuals. It is also important to acknowledge the essentialist and biological approach of using the definition of ‘women’ for this research, which includes anyone who identifies as a woman, noting alignment with the social constructionist view that gender is a social role.

Additionally, as poststructuralist feminist theorists note, it is important to acknowledge that deducing women to a homogenous group has its limitations due to diversity of experience (Crinall, 1995; Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Neale 1997). However, due to the minimal evidence base on women’s homelessness, this review will not examine experiences across gender, instead concentrating solely on women as a homogenous group due to most of the literature representing the experiences of lone homeless men (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Phipps et al., 2021; Reeve, 2018; Savage, 2016; Walsh et al., 2009). However, due to the lack of research in existence looking specifically at women’s experiences – research from further afield will be contextualised for this purpose.

### *2.6.2 Homelessness:*

Most commonly understood and recognised in the UK are ‘rough sleepers’ or ‘street homeless’, i.e., those without any residential space (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021). ‘Homelessness’ is typically defined by place and occupation, or lack thereof, specific types of space (Bretherton, 2020). The most widely accepted legal definition of homelessness in England is derived from The Housing Act 1996, which states that a person is legally homeless if: they have no accommodation available in the UK or abroad; no legal right to occupy the accommodation; have a split household; cannot occupy their accommodation due to it being unreasonable, or live in a moveable structure but have no place for it. In addition, those who are unable to secure entry to their accommodation, or those at risk of violence are deemed at risk of homelessness. However, the Act does not encompass within its definition, for example, those staying in night shelters, hostels and refuge’s which can often pose difficulties in accessing services for such people (Parsell, 2023).

The terms ‘homelessness’ and/or ‘homeless’ rather than other phrases such as ‘unhoused’ have been chosen for the purpose of this research due to these terms being most prevalent, used and widely known within UK society. Noting how these specific terms affect public perception, financial planning, funding and eligibility to resources. However, it is important to acknowledge and engage with the semantics of such words and their implications which are becoming increasingly contested. For example, being ‘home-less’, what this language evokes in those in this position and how this serves to impact psychological wellbeing, sense of self, retain social hierarchies and reinforce structures which prevent, exclude and discriminate.

Foucault critically engages with the term ‘homeless’, noting how the label serves to maintain and reduce individuals into categories associated with negative assumptions and stereotypes which pathologise. With this school of thought questioning who this term benefits, minimises and what alternative language reconceptualisations could offer to reduce negative assumptions and associations, i.e. ‘people experiencing homelessness’. Feminist theorists believe that the term serves to maintain the hidden nature of women’s homelessness by centering visibility which reduces an intersectional lens to the problem. Whilst arguments from Marxist theorists suggest that terms such as ‘displaced’ or ‘houseless’ encourage people to think about systemic causes, collective and social responsibility towards homelessness.

#### *Homelessness & Immigration:*

Those who are homeless and are deemed ‘immigrants’ have limited rights, access to support and resources in the UK, with their immigration status dictating their entitlement to help and therefore their livelihoods and experience within the UK. Individuals with ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) are unable to access the majority of public benefits, for example, Universal Credit monthly payments, including housing benefits and are denied access to homeless support from councils and emergency accommodation due to their immigration status. Those with NRPF status include those without visas, many asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.

#### *2.6.3 Multiple-exclusion homelessness:*



Multiple exclusion homelessness refers to those who have experienced homelessness as well as ‘deep’ social exclusion through substance misuse issues, institutionalised care (i.e. prison or mental health care), or engaging in certain types of activities such as begging, street drinking, sex work or shoplifting (Bowpitt et al., 2011; Fitzpatrick et al., 2009).

## **2.7 Constructions of homelessness:**

There are many theories drawn from to see how homelessness is framed and constructed, with those of most relevance to this research and review outlined below.

**2.7.1 Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs** (Maslow, 1943) theory has been linked by many to homeless contexts through the concept of meeting people’s basic needs. With the theory emphasising the hierarchy of needs and the necessity for basic needs such as shelter, food, water and warmth to be fulfilled before other needs can be met, such as love, belonging, psychological needs, esteem and self-actualisation. This theory is applied due to the majority of the research supporting the idea that homeless individuals are stuck in a cycle of trying to meet their basic needs in order to survive.

## **2.7.2 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality theory provides a theoretical framework through which the application of positivist data can be situated and the marginalisation of women’s homelessness and discrimination can be understood and experienced as a result of certain identities (i.e. homeless women). An intersectionality lens offers a more contemporary approach which welcomes the

inclusion of social environments to understand women's homelessness as socially and relationally embedded (Crenshaw, 1989). As aligned with the ethos of Counselling Psychology and the topic of this research, intersectionality provides an analytical tool in researching issues of social justice to offer a critical lens which addresses the complexity of socio-historical-political influences and intersectional difference. The more layers of difference someone holds, the more compounded their oppression is likely to be societally supporting the idea that those experiencing homelessness experience multiple intersections of discrimination (Turner, 2021). Intersectional difference informs how individuals are perceived and treated by others and a process of 'othering' can occur as a result, with privileged versus oppressed characteristics mediating the level of othering experienced (Turner, 2021). For example, intersectionality can be used to understand multiple-exclusion homelessness and the multiple forms of discrimination homeless people experience as a result of their issues, care and experiences (Bowpitt et al., 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Giannini, 2017). An intersectional approach focuses on the role of power to understand how difference is constructed, situated and responded to, with discrimination recognised by many as occurring at an institutional, environmental and systemic level, with prejudice against homeless individuals reportedly experienced through social exclusion, profiling and stigma stemming from those in positions of power (i.e. the mainstream) (Toft, 2014). These experiences arguably result in 'homeless' identity encompassing more than being without stable accommodation, extending to an 'all-encompassing social identity or social label' through social constructions around power and hierarchies (Giannini, 2017, p.37). In turn, this contemporary approach looks beyond the status quo and provides a more holistic understanding of why

marginalised groups with intersectional identities tend to be prevalent in the homeless population.

### **2.7.3 Post-Structuralist Feminism**

The last decade has seen an increase in research looking at homelessness through a gendered lens and feminist perspective. Sparked by criticisms of a gender-neutral approach to women's homelessness, more research has been conducted which interrogates gendered views of women's homelessness as it becomes more visible, facilitated by research which seeks to find and understand women's experiences. Poststructuralist feminism provides a critical framework through which to view women's homelessness, concerned with the social constructions of gendered subjectivities and identities, power-relations and patriarchal assumptions, structurally and individualistically. The theory, which challenges traditional binary understandings of homelessness that maintain oppressive societal norms and codes of conduct, also compliments an intersectionality lens to highlight structures of oppression (Romero, 2017).

### **2.7.4 Structural and Individual Views of Homelessness**

Views of homelessness can be understood through structural and individual constructs which represent more traditional conceptualisations of homelessness in the UK. Individualistic approaches locate the experience of homelessness within the individual, centering personal issues of substance abuse, health issues or poverty at an individual level – absent of the environments and contexts homelessness is situated within (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Pleace, 2016). This view lends itself to categorising and ring fencing certain understandings which can then be

placed into a positivist, outcome-based format which lend themselves to measurement and progress. This approach then filters down into ideas around ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ homelessness often seen in the way the law refers to and categorises the homeless. For example, if a homeless person is housed and leaves their tenancy due to poor conditions, they can be deemed ‘intentionally homeless’, which arguably reflects this ‘deserving’ homeless stance and the top down influence of these semantics and narratives (Johnson et al., 1991).

Realist views of homelessness arguably generalise individual’s experiences of homelessness to factors which are to be understood, rather than engaging in a structural view which looks to socio-political-cultural influences at play, such as how government policy dictates funding and housing provision (i.e. the COVID-19 ‘Everyone In’ scheme), and how cultural and social elements dictate how homelessness is experienced. A critical realist approach argues that this generalised view of homelessness (as understood by factors) is not to be taken at face value, instead interrogating this understanding and why this is. As both intersectionality and post-structuralist theory champion, structural contexts at play are of key importance - to be interrogated, challenge how structures of power construct meanings of ‘homelessness’ and how these filter through to how women occupy and behave in homelessness contexts.

## **2.8 Why Women?**

In 1963, homeless women represented only 3% of the homeless population in the UK, with this estimated at 30% in 2024 (Bogue, 1963; Crisis, 2024). However, based on women being one of the fastest growing homeless populations (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Phipps et al., 2021;

Savage, 2016; Walsh et al., 2009) it is paramount to acknowledge that these statistics are accepted as a likely underestimation of the reality due to what is known about women's homelessness going largely unrecorded and unrepresented. This highlights a disparity between official statistics and the real representative picture of women's homelessness.

In the most recent research into homelessness, many conclude it remains a male phenomenon, with the holistic experience of women's homelessness yet to be understood (Baptista, 2010). Much of the evidence base purports that women represent one of the fastest growing groups, alongside families, in the homeless population and that they have different needs and experiences to men within a homelessness context (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Phipps et al., 2021; Savage, 2016; Walsh et al., 2009). This indicates the demand to assess women's needs and raises questions around the need for a gendered view and response to homelessness. Pleace (2016) highlights a misconception that homelessness amongst women is deemed a subcategory and minor societal problem, akin to youth or LGBTQ homelessness, despite the literature reporting that women's homelessness can often present in ways which are hidden or out of sight. Whilst Pleace's (2016) research is located to women's experiences of homelessness in Europe, the similarities in societal and housing systems between Europe and the UK, and the limited evidence base mean that such European findings have been drawn from. However, cross-cultural differences in how homelessness as a cultural phenomenon is perceived and responded to must be kept in mind.

In 2013, St. Mungo's published The *Rebuilding Shattered Lives* report which shone a light on the number of interrelated challenges women face whilst going through the process of losing their homes and experiencing homelessness. The report indicates that women have distinctively different experiences of homelessness to men and that only a small percentage of women access services due to gender-based issues, resulting in a lack of representation in official data (Hutchinson et al., 2013). Bretherton & Pleace (2018) claim that the last 30 years of research into women's homelessness has deduced 3 themes; that women are indeed sleeping rough, that they sleep rough less than men do and that they are increasing in numbers. In their study exploring gender as a variable in multiple exclusion homelessness in England, Bowpitt et al., (2011) found that whilst men and women may share similarities in their experiences of homelessness, these occur in the context of a society whereby the reality of vulnerability and opportunity are gendered, with women's trajectories through homelessness, their susceptibility, and experiences of homelessness mediated by the intersectionality of gender. In line with a social constructionist approach, Bretherton's (2020) study on women's experiences and trajectories through homelessness takes the stance that gender is not a constant and thus differences will evolve and vary, but that gender represents a significant enough point of difference in understanding themes within homelessness to be considered. The characteristics, experiences, perceptions, and options available to homeless women mean that their trajectories and the support available to them to exit homelessness are argued to differ to men's, with these discussed in further detail in the subsections women's gender roles, hidden homelessness and access to services (Bretherton, 2017).

## **2.9 The Invisibility of Women's Homelessness**

The existing evidence base focuses mainly on lone men's experiences of homelessness, with little research regarding women's experiences of homelessness in understanding their needs (Baptista, 2010; Löfstrand & Thörn, 2004; Löfstrand & Quilgars, 2016; Reeve et al., 2006; Reeve, 2018). Regarding the literature that does exist, the evidence base can be inconsistent, in the sense that studies are scarce and tend to consist of smaller scale qualitative studies carried out by criminologists, sociologists, feminist theorists and ethnographers (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018). For example, Bretherton (2020) carried out one of the more in-depth longitudinal qualitative studies within the UK which looked at women's trajectories through homelessness by carrying out 136 in-depth interviews with 47 homeless women over a 2-year period. Although this timeframe demonstrates credibility through prolonged engagement, participants were sampled through an employment programme and offered cash incentives, raising questions about the representation of the general population of homeless women (i.e. those more hidden) and the validity of the results. Bretherton (2020) and Reeve (2018) note that although more studies are looking into gender differences in homelessness, this momentum tends to be led by a more niche group of academic scholars which means this does not filter through to policy debate or development and rarely converts into informing services. Limited (ungendered) understandings of rough sleeping amongst homeless women provide a good example of how data collection methods work to reinforce current misconceptions (Reeve, 2018). For example, we expect homeless people to sleep in obvious places where they will be seen – an assumption that is based more on lone men rather than women (Reeve, 2018). A concentration of understanding seems to exist based on visibility, with the field of vision around homelessness encompassing those who

are quite literally seen, with responses then shaped around this visible group -lone homeless men (Bullen, 2021).

Bretherton & Mayock (2021) who carried out a European evidence review on women's homelessness deduced three areas: spatial; administrative and methodological of intersecting causation and error for the lack of research in existence, reaffirming the invisibility of women's homelessness. Firstly, spatial: looking in areas where homeless women are unlikely to present results in unrepresentative statistics. Secondly, administrative: concealing women's homelessness through categorising homelessness in ways that work to underplay the extent of the problem and thirdly, methodological: distorting the gendered picture of homelessness through the lack of data collection methods in place that give voice to women. As is aligned with the social constructionist epistemology of this review, Bretherton & Mayock (2021) recognise that the cultural construction of homelessness as a phenomenon primarily experienced by lone men has warped European debates about homelessness, as is most likely the case in the UK. Although their review is focused solely within Europe, the conclusions can be contextualised in their relevance to the UK in part due to the similarities in social and housing systems between the two, and until as of recently, the UK's inclusion in the EU, with much of the literature existing within this timeframe.

The literature considered above helps to contextualise the structural and individualistic constructs within which homelessness sits and its importance as a social justice issue. This next section explores seven main areas and themes of relevance in the literature in relation to



women's experiences of homelessness. The themes of women's gender roles; hidden homelessness; women's resilience and resistance to homelessness; domestic abuse; women's health; survival sex and access to services will be discussed and evaluated in the following section to look further at the reasons behind these gendered differences in homelessness. The relevance of the topic to Counselling Psychology is then explored, concluding with the research question and rationale.

## **2.10 Women's Gender Roles**

The concept of 'home' is multidimensional and complex, largely within a Westernised contextualisation it is associated with individuals' private space and ownership, however, women's associations with 'home' have long been conceptualised differently to men's in how they relate and are situated within 'home' contexts through their roles (Hill & Eriksson, 2019; Wardaugh, 1999). Public outdoor space has historically been defined as 'masculine', with women's homelessness framed by expected gender roles of women in society as domestic homemakers, mothers, carers, and matriarchs, reflected in social, welfare and housing systems (Reeve, 2018). Feminist poststructuralist theorists suggest that women's homelessness has existed under the radar for so long, in part, due to the stigma associated with the 'unaccommodated woman' and the challenges this poses to the status quo of the feminine body by breaking down the boundaries of feminine domesticity (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020; Watson 1999; Wardhaugh, 1999; Watson & Austerberry, 1986).

When women are seen to defy these traditional social norms and gender roles through their homeless identity, they are defined as deviant, non-feminine or unhomey – assumptions which have influenced the negative conceptualisations of homeless women (Neale, 1997; O’Sullivan, 2016; Reeve, 2018). This perceived deviance and therefore stigmatisation is said to lead to victimisation, distress, vulnerability and violent attacks on homeless women (Huey & Berndt, 2008). In their study on the complex survival strategies homeless women adopt to avoid victimisation, Huey & Berndt (2008) found that women adopted masculine gender performance tools, characteristics and personas of toughness, fearlessness and assertiveness to disguise elements that draw attention to their female gender, in order to stay safe. Gender roles which arguably inform women’s relationships to ‘home’ may partially explain why women rely more on informal networks of accommodation within an existing home, to recreate a figment of home and avoid existing in spaces (i.e. the streets) which render them deviant. Highlighting how gender roles influence hidden homelessness, leading to women remaining absent to the methods used to record homelessness (Mayock et al., 2015).

Post structuralist feminist theorists argue that views and assumptions around deviance are implicit and widespread and need to be understood in relation to society’s assumptions that women do not belong on the street (Mayock & Bretheron 2020). This has called for questions to be raised around how much these assumptions and undercurrents influence the systems used to record homelessness and to what extent they account for the reported underrepresentation of women’s homelessness in statistics.

Fitzpatrick (2005) and Neale (1997) have critiqued such feminist literature for its gender-centric reductionist lens, arguing that deducing women's experiences to patriarchal and gender inequalities is too simplistic and denies the advantages women are afforded in housing and welfare policy. For example, circumstances of prioritisation for women who have experienced domestic abuse or whose housing benefits reflect having dependents are worthy of consideration. Whilst Fitzpatrick (2005) and Neale (1997) do not discount the gendered differences, they call for a more intersectional approach to how women experience homelessness and how identities mediate privilege or oppression, highlighting their critical realist lens. Though the last decade has seen an increase in research looking at homelessness through a gendered lens from a feminist perspective, the evidence base is still scarce and needs further inquiry to better understand how women's gender roles may mediate experiences of homelessness.

## **2.11 Hidden Homelessness**

'Hidden homelessness' is a phrase and categorisation used frequently around women's experiences of homelessness throughout the evidence base, both in the UK and abroad. Women have been found to occupy public space differently to men, suggesting gender influences how homelessness presents amongst women (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; May et al., 2007; Phipps et al., 2021; Reeve, 2018; Reeves et al., 2006). 'Hidden homelessness' refers to those 'hidden' from view, from services and therefore from homelessness statistics. Women and other marginalised groups have been found to dominate this 'hidden' category, often motivated by strategies of safety. As discussed, women experience social stigma and gendered expectations which likely inform the added risks women face on the streets, of sexual assault, gender-based violence and

harassment due to their intersectionality (homeless identity and gender) (Baker, 2020). Engaging in strategies of safety such as using informal accommodation networks, avoiding shelters and hiding in public spaces to reduce harm also mean women are hidden from methods used to record them. There is research to suggest that the breadth and presentation of women's homelessness may be misunderstood as we have not placed enough emphasis on the prevalence of hidden homelessness among lone adult women, illustrating this as a core area for future research (Mayock et al., 2006).

Reeves et al., (2006) who have been conducting research into women's homelessness for over 20 years, report a recurrent theme of invisibility as a key strategy of safety in hidden homelessness, with women hiding *from* view, hiding *within* view, and hiding their gender. Public toilets, car parks and bin areas are some of the regularly reported locations where women are unlikely to be seen in aim of ensuring their safety and protection. Additionally, Reeves et al., (2006) found that homeless women were hiding through disguise, by covering elements of their gender, hiding belongings (e.g., sleeping bags) and changing the way they interacted in places such as airports, office buildings and shopping centres to allow them to hide *within* view, in areas with higher footfall, security and lighting. In terms of behaviour, women are deemed less likely than men to sleep rough and participate in visible activities that draw attention to their homeless status, such as begging or busking which constitute multiple exclusion homelessness and represent further layers of oppression (May et al., 2007). They make three principal areas of recommendation for further exploration: firstly, evidence is needed to show that women tend to avoid emergency shelters for rough sleepers; secondly, that women rough sleeping make concerted attempts to

hide their gender and location; and thirdly, women are more likely to utilise informal accommodation arrangements than men, such as staying with relatives, friends, or acquaintances, resulting in their homelessness being less visible.

Other research suggests that women presenting with enduring and recurrent homelessness are more likely to go between hidden homelessness, rough sleeping, and use of services at a higher rotation than men (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018). This highlights the complexity of the presentation, situation and a need to consider the individual stories of women's experiences, to move away from a one-size-fits-all response generalised to the homeless population as a whole. It appears likely that more women sleep rough than are recorded, and whilst rough sleeping is arguably understood and measured as the picture of homelessness due to its visibility, women are likely to remain invisible to the face of homelessness and the systems used to record them (Reeve, 2018).

## **2.12 Domestic Violence and Abuse**

Domestic violence and abuse are reported as causes of female homelessness, with women's homelessness linked to domestic violence at a much higher rate than experienced by men (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018; Mayock et al., 2016; Reeve et al., 2007). Hutchinson et al., (2013) report extensive international evidence on the interrelationship between poverty and domestic violence and the causation this has for homelessness amongst women. At a European level, evidence for the causation of women's homelessness is partial, but robust evidence exists of a mutually reinforced relationship between women's homelessness and domestic abuse, with more

risk of abuse for women experiencing hidden homelessness whilst in domestic set-ups with friends, relatives or someone known to them (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021). Mayock et al., (2016) whose research focused exclusively on the relationship between domestic violence and women's homelessness put forward a determined argument that every study in the last 30 years or more suggest domestic violence and abuse are expected amongst homeless women.

As is reportedly often the case, when help is sought due to domestic violence, a woman's homeless status may not be considered or recorded by administrative systems, as those who seek help from domestic violence services are likely to be categorised first and foremost by their domestic abuse. A more contemporary intersectionality lens would be helpful here in considering the complex issues at play in women's homelessness associated with identity, categorisation and subsequent structures of oppression (Mayock & Bretherton, 2016). Issues with data collection alongside the heavily reported co-occurrence of domestic violence and women's homelessness justifies Savage's (2016) suggestion that the statutory definition of homelessness be reconsidered. To encompass gender-specific experiences of homelessness for women, such as domestic violence and motherhood, experienced exclusively, or at a much higher rate, by women.

### **Women's Resistance and Resilience**

Savage's (2016) questioning of outdated definitions is supported by more contemporary alternative views of women's homelessness which challenge conceptualisations argued to maintain the oppression of women in homelessness contexts. For example, Casey et al., (2008)

look at how homeless women occupy public spaces through acts of resilience and strategies of resistance, asserting their right to be in public spaces, challenging the ‘deviancy’ associated with their homeless identities. This highlights a perspective which suggests women’s homelessness is changing, with women increasingly frequenting spaces they have historically been absent from, in visible ways, to meet their needs. This illustrates a shift in the lens from invisibility to visibility of women’s homelessness, identifying perhaps a more strengths-based approach to women’s occupation of the streets. If we are to compare this to Wardhaugh’s (1999, p.104) picture of street homelessness as existing as a ‘quintessentially male space in which homeless women appear only in a shadowy way, if at all’ then perhaps we can start to see the distance travelled, in time and understanding to new perspectives. Neale (1997) argues that feminist theorists can paint women as passive vulnerable victims who lack autonomy, whereby homogenising their experiences serves to re-victimise them and minimise the intersectionality of their experiences. Research rarely explores gendered experiences, but with a rising number of homeless women occupying space and using services in ways which render them visible, a category of women are emerging who are challenging this through their physical presence, conceptualising the shift to visibility which is of importance (May et al., 2007).

Research has been criticised for adopting a pathologising deficit approach to women’s homelessness with many studies undertaken from an experimental approach which view subjects as passive recipients in need of service intervention (Phipps et al., 2021). Phipps et al., (2021) advocate for a gendered view of homelessness based on a sociological approach to incorporate understandings of how issues of safety are socialised and how agency is socially mediated,

noting their intersectionality lens (Parsell, 2018; Parsell et al., 2017). Phipps et al., (2021) conducted their research from Australia but provide methodological credibility by championing a lived-experience qualitative interpretative method of auto-driven photo-elicitation to encourage self-expression in the construction of participants' experiences. The dehumanising experience of homelessness was named by participants, alongside their rejection of the assumptions and stereotypes placed on them societally. In seeing themselves as survivors', participants' autonomy and competence improved, demonstrating a pro-resilience approach to challenging victimisation. This demonstrates how power can be harnessed by those who are experts-by-experience (homeless women) by using their autonomy and lived experience to inform understandings and wider perspectives about homeless women's needs.

## **2.14 Women's Health**

Little is known specifically about women's health and homelessness, despite aspects of this presenting unique challenges to homeless women. A common trend prevails whereby literature relating to health is generalised across gender in homelessness, resulting in a lack of data on women-specific health issues (Mayock et al., 2015; Wolf et al., 2016). "Homeless women face an additional burden by virtue of their sexual and reproductive health needs" and are said to hold special circumstances in terms of women's health due to this. Homeless women face higher rates of unintended pregnancy due to barriers facing family planning, sexual assault and contraception (Wolf et al., 2016). Poor health both across mental and physical health in homeless women is prevalent in the research which has been done, with STI's, STD's, respiratory, cardiovascular and skeletal problems, noting an intersectional link between ill-health and homelessness.



A collective of researchers argue that homeless women's health needs and experiences require explicit consideration separately from men for issues around pregnancy, motherhood, menstruation, domestic violence and contraception (Gelberg et al., 2004; Mayock & Sheridan, 2012). Following the start of COVID-19, the UN noted in a policy briefing that 'the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex' (p.2). Women in homeless shelters report feeling infantilised by being in the homelessness system (Mayock et al., 2015) due to bodily and safety aspects of their female identity going ignored. The Scottish Parliament recently introduced The Homelessness Task Force (2002) to address homeless health care and respond to homeless people's exclusion from mainstream health care, highlighting homeless identity as an oppressive characteristic mediating access to healthcare.

Structurally, the healthcare system and way it is set-up carry a level of discrimination towards homeless individuals, with this found to affect how homeless women engage with and experience healthcare due to perceived biases (Kneck et al., 2021: p.5). Researchers such as Wolf et al., (2016) have looked at women's health in relation to homelessness across the EU and due to the limited evidence, this will be contextualised to this review. Barriers to healthcare access often result from societal and geographical constructs which influence how healthcare is conceptualised, administered and to whom (Kneck et al., 2021). 'Homeless' identity has been found to mediate how homeless people experience the welfare system, noting another intersectional layer of marginalisation (Kneck et al., 2021). For example, many report barriers in accessing healthcare due to having no fixed address or recourse to public funds, demonstrating

how immigration and homeless identities represent oppressive characteristics and additional experiences of exclusion (Cuthill, 2019). Homeless individuals report experiencing discrimination, stigma and prejudice from healthcare workers and the public, whereby professionals assume individuals have substance misuse issues due to the stereotypes associated with their homeless identity, noting the structural oppression within healthcare settings (Kneck et al., 2021).

### **2.15 Survival Sex**

Traditionally, as the 'streets' have been constructed as male spaces, the profitable monetary opportunities available to those who are homeless are likely to be structured suitably, to favour those in charge (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004: p.401). Whilst the risk of sexual abuse exists for both genders experiencing homelessness, the literature suggests that this is likely to be greater for women (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021). As Reeve et al., (2006) report from their study, unwanted sexual arrangements between homeless women and men presented at an alarmingly frequent rate in the homeless women interviewed. Taking the gender roles aforementioned into account, one of the key associations with women's homelessness has been sex work, used as a tool to meet their needs in terms of survival and shelter, with sex used as a currency (Harding & Hamilton, 2009). Löfstrand & Thörn (2004) raise questions to challenge this association, stating that in cultures with higher levels of gender equality, such as Sweden, assumptions linking homeless women, sex work and deviation from expected roles as mothers and wives, are not based on suffice clear evidence.

As aligned with post-structuralist feminism this illustrates the problematic nature of undesirable, erroneous stereotypes of homeless women based on patriarchal assumptions, demonstrating a need for further research into homeless women's experiences (Löfstrand & Quilgars, 2016). The notion that all transactional relationships on the streets are exploitative is challenged by a posts-structuralist feminist lens, whereby acts of resistance to homeless contexts and environments can occur in ways whereby female gender is used in a visible and performative way, such as negotiating sex in order to survive or meet needs. For example, transactional sex may provide shelter or food for the night. As Braidotti (2002) states, such negotiations can serve to resist gendered violence, additional risk and provide access to resources whilst exercising agency and control. As Huey & Berndt (2008) state, homeless women often develop complex survival strategies in the pursuit of safety and survival in response to the individual and structural constraints they exist within.

## **2.16 Accessing Services**

Women are found to access support services at a later stage in their homelessness journey than men, once their issues become less manageable (Hutchinson et al., 2014). Service avoidance amongst women often comes down to their awareness of services as male-dominated spaces, coupled with a fear of victimisation within services that are populated mainly by lone homeless men (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018). Homelessness services can lack safe, appropriate facilities that ensure privacy and support for women, as their design is informed by their statistics, which are based on men's needs (Bretherton, 2017). Bretherton & Mayock (2021) suggest that there may also be more complex and inter-related reasons for the avoidance of services, such as stigma and

shame, suggesting links with the gender roles and assumptions aforementioned. Far fewer women-only homelessness services exist in England, suggesting that women's needs may be going unmet by a lack of services or as those which do exist being designed to support the needs of lone homeless men (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018).

Recent literature on homelessness has emphasised the need to consider more gender-sensitive policy responses when considering women's homelessness (Savage, 2016). A stronger evidence base founded on sound research is needed to better understand the factors which affect women's engagement with services and their likelihood of accessing or remaining in services. With this, a more rigorous understanding into how women's engagement and navigation of services impacts their trajectories through and out of homelessness can be gained (Bretherton, 2020). Only by building an evidence base can we assess the extent to which gender is recognised and used to inform services and policy. Understanding women's experiences of homelessness services are key if homeless systems of support are to implement effective services that include women's perspectives and respond to their needs.

### **2.17 Rationale and Research Question:**

Much of the existing evidence base points to gendered patterns, however there are many debates that challenge the nuance of these patterns, alongside a small evidence base (Johnson et al., 2017). Women's needs and experiences of homelessness appear to be complex, nuanced and inter-related, however, the small evidence base suggests that we do not yet understand these or have enough literature to know what the gaps are in this domain, indicating the need to

understand women's experiences of homelessness better as one of the fastest growing homeless populations. Assumptions that women's homelessness will not exist on a large scale mean that methods are not in existence to look for them and this results in a cycle of underreporting. As Bretherton & Pleace (2018) state, questioning our assumptions is needed as preparatory work to inform the rest. For example, questioning our assumptions around whether the current methods are providing an accurate picture of gender amongst rough sleepers, what we deem the face of homelessness to be and how this is constructed.

A qualitative research project to look at 'women's experiences of homelessness' will allow for exploration of individuals' stories and lived experiences first-hand, a lens of inquiry scarce in the literature. The research topic is intentionally broad due to the limited evidence base, informing a lack of understanding as to what the gaps in the literature are. In line with the social constructionist epistemology, I propose using thematic analysis to gain an in-depth exploration of a homogenous groups lived experiences and include the influences of socio-cultural-historical contexts, for which few studies exist. This research seeks to add to the existing evidence base, address the reported increase in homeless women, challenge misconceptions and seek to give voice to homeless women experiencing vulnerability, pathologisation and stigma, in line with my values of Counselling Psychology and social justice. Therefore, the following question was proposed for this research:

*'What are women's experiences of homelessness?'*

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.2 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the philosophical research paradigms and orientation of the ontology and epistemology in the positioning of this research. The research paradigms in relation to Counselling Psychology are discussed alongside those which are located within homelessness research. The researcher's ontology and epistemology are stated followed by the analytical framework which includes a critical review of the methodology chosen for the research, alongside alternative approaches which were considered. Yardley's (2000) framework for quality in research is then defined, followed by an outline of the research design, along with the recruitment strategy, sample, participants, data collection and analysis. The ethical considerations and ethically driven approach to the research is outlined and discussed. This chapter is concluded with a personal reflexivity section whereby the researcher provides reflections on-action (Schon, 1983).

### **3.3 Theoretical Approach and Research Paradigms in Counselling Psychology**

Counselling Psychology champions researcher self-reflexivity and encourages consideration of the researcher's role and impact on the research, as informed by the humanistic values the discipline holds. As Counselling Psychologists, it is important to acknowledge how we influence and are influenced by research paradigms, and to have an awareness of our responsibility as researchers in constructing meaning (Cooper, 2009; Ponterotto, 2005; Willig, 2012). The belief that there is one fixed reality that can be researched and understood through scientific based intervention is critiqued for placing little focus on the subjective input of the researcher, as in

reality, the researcher cannot remain 'objective and detached' from influence within the research (Rafalin, 2010). Willig (2013) encapsulates three main research paradigms - realism, phenomenology and social constructionism. Typically and historically, psychology and therefore Counselling Psychology has been influenced by the medical model, positivist and post-positivist paradigms which carry ontological realism. However, the orientation of Counselling Psychology leans more towards a humanistic phenomenological stance to home in on human experience, therefore lending itself more to qualitative forms of inquiry (Morrow, 2007).

This highlights a tension that exists with Counselling Psychology's focus on relational approaches and the positivist paradigm which looks to more generalisable evidence-based quantitative results (Manafi, 2010). This represents the tension with Counselling Psychology's more idiographic approach to research which focuses on unique individual experiences whilst attending critically to issues of power, justice and diversity, which has resulted largely in the discipline leaning more toward qualitative research. Counselling Psychology responds to this tension by adopting and championing pluralism in relation to research, acknowledging the value of a range of different research methods and in later years, including quantitative research (Cooper, 2006).

Philosophical paradigms underpin and steer research, reflecting the interrelated beliefs and assumptions about the social world we live in and how we see it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Ontology, epistemology and methodology are derived from the philosophical perspective taken to the research. Epistemology looks to the theory of knowledge and how we acquire that

knowledge, whilst ontology is concerned with the nature of being (Willig, 2013). Research and practice are paramount to Counselling Psychology, evidenced by the scientist-practitioner model which both underpins the discipline and which the discipline champions (Blair, 2010). In relation to epistemological paradigms for research, Counselling Psychology sits on a spectrum of perspectives and enables research from positivist inquiry at one end of the spectrum to the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm at the other. With four main research paradigms identified by Ponterotto (2005); positivism, post-positivism, constructivism-interpretation and critical ideology.

### **3.4 Epistemological Positioning**

The ontological and epistemological positionality of this research as a critical realist social constructionist sits within the middle of the continuum and acknowledges a tension often reported between ‘one reality’ and subjectivity (Willig, 2016). Willig (2016) states most qualitative research is based upon a position of ontological realism together with epistemological relativism, with many adhering to the idea that ontological realism and epistemological relativism can co-exist (Ponterotto, 2005). Counselling Psychology seeks to broaden its epistemological and ontological perspectives and look to new notions of understanding around human relation and reality, to expand its definition of ‘evidence’ and establish its role in scientific practice (Woolfe, 2016).

Adopting a social constructionist epistemology allows for understanding and inclusion of how historical, social and political structures and contexts, as well as issues of power and gender influence how homelessness is experienced and made sense of. The qualitative literature which



does exist reports frequently on these issues and calls for further research to be undertaken that investigates the underlying systems and practices, such as data collection methods and societal views of gender roles in the perpetuation of women's homelessness being underreported. Counselling Psychology has traditionally brought social justice issues to the table, and this can be facilitated through a critical-ideological positioning seen in this research project through the topic of women's homelessness (Hore, 2013; Ponterotto, 2005).

A social constructionist epistemology in this case encourages critical engagement with commonplace assumptions and understandings as socio-culturally specific, to advocate for social action and justice through the creation of knowledge (Burr, 2015). This incorporation of the socio-historical-political structures and issues of power and justice arguably mutually influence both how women experience homelessness and how their experiences are made sense of societally. This positioning demonstrates the issues and limitations I may have faced with a phenomenological approach, in seeking to include and explore how women interact with, view and experience issues surrounding justice, power and gender in relation to homelessness. Demonstrating how my ontological and epistemological positions ensure that these issues which are close to my Counselling Psychology identity, are not ignored. It is hoped that through this epistemological clarity, an ethical and empowering approach to the representation of homeless women will prevail, by addressing constructs of power, gender and society to ensure that the conceptual issues raised by the literature can be facilitated through my positioning. Having epistemological clarity means I can represent homeless women ethically to include issues of

social justice and ensure that conceptual issues noted in the literature can be drawn on through my position.

### **3.5 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) is a qualitative method of data analysis to develop, analyse and interpret patterns across qualitative data, with TA seen as a method rather than methodology, leaving more flexibility and variability to be determined by the researcher. With this, Braun and Clarke (2013) assert that TA is not wedded to or dictated by a particular theory or practice, meaning TA provides more flexibility and ability to work with smaller data sets. This can mean that TA lends itself to more novel and unexplored areas of research such as in this case, women's homelessness, presenting a suitable option when the scope of the research needs to remain broad in relation to a topic less known. Patterns and themes can be created from a range of different approaches, from inductive to deductive, semantic or latent to constructionist, allowing the researcher to take an inductive-deductive approach. Taking into consideration particular theories whilst adopting a top-down approach to generate themes which occur irrespective of existing knowledge or construct (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

#### **3.5.2 Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive TA has been chosen as the analytical framework to answer my research question as it is paradigmatically flexible and therefore aligns with my social constructionist epistemology concerned with how reality is constructed and the implications of such constructions. Actively positioning the researcher in the generation of data, as constructionism represents an empirical

process in producing knowledge. This reflexive approach acknowledges the subjectivity imparted by the researcher and encourages awareness of how researcher assumptions, interpretations and values shape the research and constructions of themes (Banister et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 1988). Reflexive TA requires the researcher to position themselves within a paradigm continuum in relation to 1) data collection 2) focus of meaning 3) qualitative framework and 4) theoretical framework. One of the key advantages Braun and Clarke (2022, p.9) stipulate about reflexive TA is its flexibility, whereby the researcher can align themselves on a continuum of different broad theoretical frameworks, foci for meaning and orientations to data. Reflexive TA requires a level of critical reflection from the researcher, their practice and process. Informed by my ontology and epistemology, I have approached the analysis from an inductive data orientation; latent focus of meaning; critical qualitative framework and constructivist theoretical framework to answer my research question.

An inductive bottom-up approach was taken to the orientation of data whereby the themes are driven by the data itself, rather than a deductive approach whereby theoretical constructs provide a lens through which the data is seen, perhaps resulting in ‘finding’ data to fit pre-existing conceptions. A latent focus of meaning was taken where the level of analysis is engaged at an implicit level rather than a semantic focus of meaning which relies on surface level explicit information. A critical qualitative framework was adopted rather than an experiential one as this allowed for criticality and interrogation of meaning and issues. Whilst the relativist, constructionist theoretical framework allowed for experiences and constructs which arose in the data to be analysed and critically engaged with, rather than these being seen as ‘truths’ and facts.

### 3.5.3 Rationale for Thematic Analysis

Largely, literature looking at homelessness experiences takes a quantitative approach and method, often generalising results across gender and country, disregarding the individual experience. As this study is looking at women's experiences from a lens of contextual experience, a quantitative approach would not have facilitated the narratives necessary to provide this. Instead, various qualitative methods of analysis were considered for analysis based on my paradigm positioning, such as interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and narrative analysis (NA).

Reflecting on my own methodology in light of research paradigms within Counselling Psychology, I initially felt phenomenology aligned with my values and approach in how knowledge is gained, due to looking at women's *experiences* of homelessness whilst also aligning with my epistemology of social constructionism. IPA and TA hold similarities in how they aim to locate and analyse themes of meaning in relation to a phenomenon. However, IPA is solely phenomenological in its approach to meaning making, whilst this research needed to incorporate and explore how women interact with, view and experience issues surrounding justice, power and gender in relation to homelessness. IPA provides a methodology more preoccupied with hermeneutics and idiography, more sharply focused on individual experience and does not place social context in primary concern, with phenomenological researchers interested more in the experiential world of the participant, rather than the structures which give rise to those experiences (Smith et al., 2021). With TA able to provide more of a

contextualisation lens than for example a phenomenological one. Therefore, IPA was disregarded for this research study.

NA was also considered initially when developing the research project, with its alignment to my social constructionist epistemology. It would provide a methodology with the intention of focusing on the stories women tell about their experiences of homelessness to seek rich data. The focus on storytelling shines a light on the narratives individuals put forward and how and why these stories are presented as such, to uncover the insights and influences behind why these are presented in particular ways. The focus of this research is placed on women's experiences of a certain phenomenon and the additional constructs that play into these experiences, with TA generating themes from this data. Whilst NA focuses on the telling of the narrative and therefore TA was favoured over NA as a method of analysis for this research study (Flick, 2013).

Based on the limited evidence in existence around women's homelessness, thematic analysis allows for the research to remain at the broader end of the funnel in the face of topics which are more novel and unresearched. Providing, as Braun & Clarke (2021; 2022) state, more flexibility, whilst allowing for the wider socio-cultural-political issues around social justice, gender stereotypes, cultural differences and how space is occupied to be explored by looking at how personal experiences are located within these systems and constructs.

TA lends itself to areas where the analytic focus is interested in how personal experiences are located within wider socio-cultural contexts and in this case, to contexts such as gender, power and politics (Braun & Clarke, 2021) in relation to women's experiences of homelessness. TA provides a paradigmatically flexible methodology which will allow me to include theories of

personal importance such as post-structuralist feminism and centre womens' voices within the socio-political constructs from which they stem. TA therefore posed the most relevant method informed by my ontology, epistemology and axiology to capture the complexities of the research area to provide rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.8 Limitations of Thematic Analysis**

Thematic Analysis was coined by its forefathers, Braun & Clarke in 2006, however faced criticism for being a simplistic demarcation without a specific approach or philosophical anchor. Braun & Clarke's latest contributions (2021; 2022) and thus development of the methodology has resulted in increased credibility, robustness and subsequent wider use of the method. In particular, Braun & Clarke's (2022) addition of reflexive thematic analysis defines the reflexive approach taken to thematic analysis, to signify "the practice of critical reflection on your role as a researcher, research practice and process" (Braun & Clark, 2022: p.5) which compliments a social constructionist epistemology.

It had also faced criticism for its paradigmatic flexibility, the process through which themes are generated said to be inconsistent and incoherent (Holloway & Todres, 2003). As Braun & Clarke (2022) state, it is important the researcher locates TA theoretically by attending to the philosophical assumptions which underpin their research and attend to the variability of reflexive TA in a considered active and engaged way regarding the approach taken. In relation to this research specifically, the theoretical flexibility of TA means it can be informed by for example poststructuralist feminism to give voice to homeless women and their experiences whilst allowing for these to be seen within the socio-political-historical settings. For example,

intersectional generalisability (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008) is applicable to reflexive TA which seeks to encompass issues of social justice and which seems to explore the lived experiences of marginalised groups.

### **3.6 Quality and Credibility of Research**

Yardley's (2017) criteria and standards for research will be used as a framework for this research which will be addressed and evaluated in full in my discussion. Yardley's (2017) framework for assessing quality is as follows; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance.

#### *3.6.2 Sensitivity to context*

This criterion refers to the emphasis placed on context and awareness of the effect context might have on both the researcher themselves and the study, for example, contexts of language, settings, perspectives, assumptions and biases must all be considered.

#### *3.6.3 Commitment and rigour*

The need to adopt a rigorous approach in engaging with the process of the research through diligent data collection, utilisation of skills or detailed analysis in showing commitment to the research.

#### *3.6.4 Transparency and coherence*

The researcher should provide research which is transparent to the reader. Through coherence the reader should be able to understand how the researcher came to their interpretations, offering transparency over their influence on the findings.

#### *3.6.5 Impact and importance*

The research should provide a contribution to the knowledge base and understanding, through adding to perspectives, providing a utility or providing future research momentum.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of East London Ethics Committee (see Appendix B). The research was carried out in line with The British Psychological Society's (BPS) *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2014) and The University of East London's *Code of Practice for Research Ethics* (2015). These guidelines were used as a framework to maintain ethical research practices and champion values of respect, responsibility, competence and integrity, as aligned with the ethos of Counselling Psychology and my responsibility as a researcher in generating data for the public arena (Miller et al., 2002). The research involves a vulnerable and marginalised group and therefore specific ethical considerations were taken which informed an ethically-driven approach to decision-making and conduct.

Participants were given the participant information sheet (see Appendix G) and consent form (see Appendix F) prior to participation detailing the purpose and process of the research, with time given (2 weeks) for them to ask questions before providing informed consent in a bid to



minimise coercion. Privacy was protected through the anonymisation of data using pseudonyms and confidentiality was ensured to participants except in cases of significant risk, whereby a trusted gatekeeper was nominated who would manage the risk practicalities. I made an ethically driven decision to interview participants who have not been homeless in the last year, in line with the BPS (2017) principles to ‘maximise benefit and minimise harm’. I anticipated that ethical issues may have occurred in accessing the homeless female population and therefore conducted a screening interview and risk assessment to screen for risk around self-harm or suicidal ideation with the gatekeeper, whilst also allowing opportunity to screen for inclusion criteria. This inclusion criteria was ethically informed to reduce any psychological harm.

An ethical tension between seeking to protect participants from harm whilst seeking the unique subjectivity of my target group posed a consideration around ethics of power. As noted in some of the research, language such as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘disempowered’ are commonly associated with the female homeless population, said to pose ethical dilemmas in reaffirming unequal power dynamics, reducing a strengths-based approach to the homeless population (Neale, 1997). The ethics of power were thought about and carefully considered throughout. The power dynamics between myself as a researcher, the participants and my identity and privilege as a white female were considered in the dynamic. During analysis of the data, ethical thinking and the responsibility I hold as a researcher in representing other voices were attended to (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is important to reflect on how I was perceived by participants as perhaps a figure of authority or as representing officialdom and to be aware of the impact of that. In order to try to work against this, open-ended interview questions were used to allow for a more equal weighted discussion where participants felt they were able to steer the conversation or expand on

particular areas of their choosing to ensure they felt heard. At the beginning of the interviews, I also spoke about my interest, aims and values around homelessness, social justice and representing a voice for a marginalised group for transparency.

Participants were monitored throughout for signs of emotional distress and it was made clear they could take breaks if and when needed, along with their right to withdraw discussed and detailed in the consent forms. A debrief session and hand-out was provided to signpost participants to gatekeepers and mental health organisations for after-care if needed. In addition, options were given to participants to follow-up with the researcher and request a copy of the research (BPS, 2017).

An incentive was provided which can be subject to ethical dilemmas due to monetary incentives feeling coercive, particularly to a population who may have experienced lower socio-economic status whilst homeless (Michelson et al., 2004). To address this, incentives were offered in the form of £15 Sainsbury's vouchers and were communicated to participants as a token of appreciation for their time and effort offered to the study, which in turn helps to work against power inequalities.

### **3.8 Procedure**

According to Braun & Clarke (2022), there is no defined dataset size to ensure a guaranteed formula, however, my aim was to recruit between 8-10 participants to answer the research question specified. This would allow for a large enough dataset that promotes the concept of 'information power' whereby the researcher can reflect on the richness of their data whilst

providing a sample that allows a small contingency for dropouts or absentees (Malterud et al., 2016).

Through existing professional links I have with organisations, I identified four homeless charities and/or projects to recruit participants from. For confidentiality purposes they shall remain anonymous and will be referred to as Project A, Project B, Project C and Project D. Within the organisation I sampled from, services are run for those formerly homeless and therefore I targeted this group specifically. I used a trusted gatekeeper to negotiate the research and source participants.

### **3.8.2 Recruitment Process**

An email was sent to Project A initially, a female-only homelessness organisation known to me providing a short summary with information on the research I was intending to carry out and to ask about their interest. A Teams meeting was set-up with the head of the organisation and the liaison to discuss the research and the ethical approval was shared. Following this, a recruitment brief sheet (see Appendix A) was shared with the liaison detailing a summary of the key information to share with selected service users instead of a poster to protect confidentiality. Following this, the participant information sheet (see Appendix G) was shared and distributed to selected service users along with the consent form.

### **3.8.3 Sampling Criteria and Rationale**

Having considered my sampling criteria and eligibility, the inclusionary criteria stipulated participants who identify as 'women' between the ages of 18-60 years old, who have experienced homelessness in the last 2 years but who are not currently homeless. Sampling

women who have been formerly homeless was an ethically driven decision to minimise further distress in a vulnerable group through a degree of separation from the experience. The period of 2 years was informed by Phipps et al's., (2018) study who suggest 1-2 years provides enough proximity to the experience and therefore memories whilst also widening the timeframe enough (beyond 6 months to a year) to ensure a sample could be obtained. However, this also results in a lack of participants living in the phenomena at the time of the research which is to be noted. For all the above reasons, purposive sampling was employed for this research project, informed by my sampling criteria.

*Table 1.* Participant demographics

| Pseudonym     | Gender/Identity | Age | Ethnicity   | Recourse to Public Funds |
|---------------|-----------------|-----|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Barbara    | Female          | 50  | Hungarian   | Yes                      |
| 2. Donna      | Female          | 62  | Jamaican    | No                       |
| 3. Lorna      | Female          | 34  | Philippines | No                       |
| 4. Bernie     | Female          | 47  | Nigeria     | Yes                      |
| 5. Alya       | Female          | 33  | Iraqi       | No                       |
| 6. Frederique | Female          | 40  | Nigerian    | Yes                      |
| 7. Guilia     | Female          | 52  | Italian     | Yes                      |
| 8. Mel        | Female          | 38  | Turkish     | Yes                      |

### **3.8.4 Data collection**

A pilot interview was conducted and audio-recorded with one individual to establish the flow of the interview and identify any discrepancies in the interview schedule (Willig, 2016). Following this, face-to-face semi-structured interviews took place with 7 participants in a private location within the organisation, with the pilot interview making up the eighth interview. The interviews were audio-recorded following consent to do so from participants and an additional back-up

audio recorder was also used to ensure safe collection of the data. The interviews lasted between 30-90 minutes, with some lasting longer than others due to a variety of reasons including language barriers, time-constraints, and other commitments which will be explored in greater depth below.

The interview schedule (see Appendix D) was created by the researcher and approved by the research supervisor following amendments to ensure the questions remained neutral and open. The schedule consisted of 12 questions with probes. All questions were open-ended to allow for space and room to allow participants to steer the conversation to certain areas or topics. The initial questions asked about experience to build rapport and ease them into the process. The data was transcribed verbatim to aid familiarisation and anonymised using a code only decipherable to me as the researcher, stored in a password protected location. The pilot and first few interviews were reflexively assessed to check they were providing sufficient depth and therefore meaningful and useful analyses as this has been noted as a potential issue with thematic analysis (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016).

### **3.8.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis defines six 'recursive' stages for researchers to follow during analysis; 1. familiarisation with the data set 2. generation of initial codes 3. searching for themes 4. reviewing themes 5. defining and naming themes 6. writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Following Braun & Clarke's (2022) latest contributions to reflexive thematic analysis, a continuum of variations to reflexive thematic analysis have been established in relation to: data collection; focus of meaning; qualitative framework and theoretical framework. As informed by

my ontological and epistemological positions, I anticipated approaching analysis from an inductive data orientation; latent focus of meaning; critical qualitative framework and constructivist theoretical framework in answering the research question. However, as Braun & Clarke (2022) state, these variations can only be anticipated when what the data represents has been thought through, yet highlight the flexible application of thematic analysis through the variations offered. For example, the theoretical flexibility allows for the inclusion of post structuralist feminist theory and for the location of women's voices within socio-political structures, defining the relevance of this method in capturing the complexities of the research area and nuances of women's experiences. Therefore, the approach taken to generating codes is latent here as this focuses on the depth of experience, aligning with my social constructionist approach.

### **Phase One: Familiarising With the Data**

This phase involved immersion in the data set and familiarisation with the depth and breadth of the data by reading and re-reading transcripts as well as listening back to the interviews twice. The data was transcribed by hand (without software) with initial notes and thoughts documented in a research journal to make sense of and critically engage with the dataset.

### **Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes / Themes**

The second phase included generation of initial codes and code labels for excerpts of interest. Each of the eight interviews were coded based on the researcher's analytic take, with segments of interest highlighted and labelled with coded descriptions, from a semantic level referring to explicit meaning through to a latent level focusing on implicit meaning (Appendix I). All codes

were then handwritten and laid out to show the coded dataset as a whole which hugely benefited familiarisation and analysis of the data.

### **Phase Three: Searching For Themes**

The handwritten codes were then organised and grouped based on their content to create a series of visual maps reflecting these initial theme groupings (see Appendix J). These potential themes were then merged and distilled to generate a map of initial themes based on their prevalence and how much they reflected participants' perspectives in relation to the dataset as a whole and the themes relationship to one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of handwritten physical visual maps aided this process hugely (see Appendix K).

### **Phase Four: Reviewing Themes**

Continued review of potential themes took place in relation to the coded data to ensure they mirrored the codes, dataset as a whole and had not missed key meaning. Potential themes and sub-themes were reviewed to assess whether themes could be merged, refined or removed. Then these themes and sub-themes were reviewed and examined against Braun & Clarke's (2002) evaluative questions below to ensure themes are robust, answer the research question and tell an overall coherent story of the analysis:

- Does this potential theme capture something meaningful?
- Is it coherent, with a central idea that meshes the codes and data?
- Does it have clear parameters and boundaries?

This resulted in further merging and consolidation from five themes into four with the handwritten codes organised into the theme groupings (see Appendix L).

### **Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes**

Further refinement took place through naming the themes and sub-themes and a final thematic map representing these was formed, checking back over the transcripts and notes to ensure this captured the dataset overall as well as individual narratives. An excel document was then created with each theme and their corresponding sub-themes titled, with quotes from all eight transcripts input into the relevant theme/sub-theme categories (see Appendix M).

### **Phase Six: Producing the Report**

These themes and sub-themes were then produced and written-up in a coherent narrative which will be discussed in the analysis and discussion chapter. This includes the quotes and excerpts verbatim from participants to illustrate themes and how meaning-making occurred and in relation to answering the research question.

## **3.9 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a central practice in ensuring good qualitative research by encouraging researchers to be aware and critical of how their biases, assumptions, values and experiences will influence the knowledge they produce. The reflexivity process encourages researcher transparency, accountability, recognition and therefore a more ethical and grounded approach to representing individual's experiences and complexities at a more relational level, given the subjective nature of qualitative research. As a reflexive researcher I have kept a research diary throughout the research process, utilising this to reflect on my positioning, the interview process, capture process notes and detail personal reflections including difficulties faced for example with reflexive thematic analysis (Smith 2015; Willig, 2017). This has helped me to reflect on and



address my own subjectivity in the process, how I interact with the material and what I am therefore imparting upon the research. Through this awareness and process of reflection I aim to maintain the integrity of the data. As with much of the existing positivist research around homelessness, neutrality is feigned and objectivity is seen as a given, with acknowledgement of the researchers influence on the research lacking (Banister et al., 1994). Instead, I have endeavoured to use my reflexive processes as sources of value within my study. For example, reflecting on my experience with and interest in the homeless population to ensure credibility and qualitative sensibility through transparency (Braun & Clarke, 2022). My previous experience with this population in a different setting will have influenced the interaction with the research. My previous work with and exposure to homelessness may have caused me to carry preconceived assumptions affecting my engagement or oversee certain nuances in interactions, whilst also imparting a level of familiarity and ease which may have worked against power inequalities.

Being a cis-gender white female who has not encountered homelessness will have undoubtedly influenced the way in which the research was designed and implemented, raising issues of power to be aware of (Banister et al., 2011). Being mindful of the power inequalities, my positioning and how this might influence for example data collection, rapport and how I engage with the data meant I had to employ methods to address and minimise power inequalities to reduce this impact (Banister et al., 1994). Using my own personal therapy to discuss my positionality in the research, I was able to better understand potential microaggressions and prejudices at play which I was imparting onto the research through discussions with my therapist about my frustrations I was harbouring about the process. For example, a few participants needed to change the times

and dates of their interviews last minute which worked against my own agenda of collecting rich data in a timely manner. Through therapy and journaling I was able to understand the privilege in my position here as a UEL Doctorate level student needing something from these women who needed to prioritise getting their basic needs being met and the vast difference between our needs and opportunities. I have not experienced discrimination or stigma due to my housing identity and through using spaces around me to think more about this I was able to understand the socio-economic disparity at play and reflect on my experience of never being without a home.

Conducting face-to-face interviews in a location known to and frequented by participants felt important in providing familiarity and ease to the process, which worked to create a more equal playing field for the research. The pilot interview (Barbara) was particularly helpful in encouraging me to think about how I felt in the room as the researcher, and I became very aware of how the participant might be perceiving me as a figure of power due to them referring to me as an ‘academic’ and ‘you guys’ at one point and wondered how that might be influencing how they were engaging. Using this reflection, I adapted my interview questions to make them more informal and revised my interviewing style to be more conversational to encourage ease and authenticity from the participant.

I also became aware through supervision of how my prior experience and role working in homelessness was affecting how I was engaging in the interviews. I noticed my desire to want to help the women with homeless related issues and the tension this posed with needing to hold a level of impartiality as a researcher and the prior knowledge I held working with the homeless population. Through journaling I was able to process my thoughts on this and reframe my ‘role’ as a researcher in aiming to give voice to homeless women, create understanding about their

experiences and garner research momentum in this area, rather than problem solve as a case worker and provide immediate benefit which left me with challenging feelings.

The research benefited hugely from a very diverse participant population, with women from a range of ages, backgrounds and ethnicities, including a transgender woman. Inclusionary criteria for this research included participants regardless of immigration status, also stipulating inclusion of anyone who 'identifies' as a woman as opposed to those assigned female at birth. This research wanted to understand individuals' unique lived experiences and diversity of such experiences based on how individuals relate to themselves, others and the world. Therefore this research was enriched by such a diverse sample and plethora of experiences. In addition, an inclusionary approach was favoured as aligned with the social constructionist epistemology which engages with and welcomes intersectionality, which is arguably inherently intertwined with the homeless experience, rather than colluding with the medicalisation of gender or stereotyping of immigrants which serves to exclude and divide.

In some of the interviews, I experienced some challenges with language barriers, which manifested in difficulties with understanding participants and being understood. Reflecting on action (Schon, 1983) now, I can see that my own agenda to get rich data was perhaps more present in the room than I had thought as through the process of transcription I was able to see some nuances and intricacies in the semantics which were not picked up on at the time and which if attended to through slowing down could have provided rich unexplored avenues of discussion. By the same token, in listening back through interviews, I was able to notice how my own agenda of wanting to cover all the questions perhaps resulted in pre-emptive direction to following questions. On reflection, more breathing room between questions may have allowed

participants more time to reflect and expand on their perspectives. These points will be further explored and expanded on in the limitations section below.

## Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion which will be integrated to facilitate understanding, reduce subjectivity and preconceived ideas as well as repetition when a more interpretive theoretical analysis with links to the literature is presented (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Four master themes and corresponding sub-themes are presented (see table 2) using raw data, alongside the researcher's interpretation and existing literature. The chapter follows with sections discussing the relevance and implications for Counselling Psychology, a quality evaluation of the research using Yardley's (2000) quality framework, limitations and future directions of the research, followed by the conclusion.

Table 2: *Themes and Sub-Themes*

| <b>Theme:</b>     | <b>Theme 4.1:<br/>Illusion of choice</b>                         | <b>Theme 4.2:<br/>Intersecting<br/>identities</b> | <b>Theme 4.3:<br/>Habituation to<br/>Trauma and<br/>Abuse</b> | <b>Theme 4.4:<br/>Shape shifting</b>    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>Subthemes:</b> | 4.1.2 At the<br>Mercy of Luck                                    | 4.2.2 Levels of<br>Othering                       | 4.3.2 Unhelpful<br>and Inaccurate<br>Assumptions              | 4.4.2 Flexing<br>Identity and<br>Gender |
|                   | 4.1.3<br>Powerlessness                                           | 4.2.3 Social<br>Hierarchies                       | 4.3.3 Gender<br>Roles and Social<br>Norms                     | 4.4.3 Acts of<br>resistance             |
|                   | 4.1.4 Existing and<br>Surviving versus<br>Enjoying and<br>Living |                                                   | 4.3.4 "The Same<br>CD Keeps<br>Playing"                       |                                         |

Themes one, two and three can be conceptualised under a wider umbrella of paradoxical ways of living which represent the paradoxes which exist in women's experiences and realities of homelessness.

#### **4.1 Illusion of choice**

The first master theme 'illusion of choice' generated across the dataset evoked the concept of choice as an illusion experienced by homeless women. An overall assumption prevailed whereby non-homeless individuals presume homeless women have agency and choice in their trajectories, systematically and environmentally. With participants' accounts reflecting the irony of choice and notion of 'the best of two evils'. The first sub-theme, 'at the mercy of luck' speaks to participants describing their trajectories and experiences of support through homelessness as determined by luck, chance and being in the right place at the right time. The second sub-theme 'power and agency' looks at the role power has on the attainability of agency and locus of control. The third sub-theme, 'existing and surviving versus enjoying and living' brings focus to the reality that survival and basic needs are the primary focus, with enjoyment and 'living' as superfluous and unrelatable to immediate needs being met.

##### **4.1.2 At the Mercy of Luck**

The notion of chance and luck emerged from seven out of eight participants' accounts, representing a unique finding from this research which goes beyond existing literature into women's homelessness. Experiences of reliance on those in positions of power (i.e. homeless professionals) to determine support and opportunities was prevalent, with the idea of 'luck' determining the nature of interactions, support received and outcomes. This sub-theme evokes

the idea that luck appears to be gated by individuals rather than systems or policies and neither homeless policies nor methods of data collection take this into account in their design, due to it going largely undetected. Participants reflected on their positive and negative experiences with individuals in positions of authority. Alya spoke about the unpredictability she experienced and witnessed interpersonally with professionals in homeless organisations, illustrating the uncertainty experienced:

*Alya (172-174) so I can see in charity places, some of them, they are very rude, very, very, very, very rude you don't want even to come back to the place, but there is no another choice you come back...you get me what I mean?*

*Alya (162-163) Charities, okay they are helpful I can say helpful, but there is so many things. Some some people, they are very helpful. Some people, they are very rude.*

Experiencing interactions with professionals in a negative way was referenced by a few of the participants whereby they found staff to be rude, dismissive and unhelpful:

*Donna (390-391) I come and the lady the lady front desk lady she wouldn't let me in 'you're not coming in here' and 'I don't see no reason for you to come here'*

Mel discussed the level of influence professionals hold in helping or hindering those who are homeless, introducing the idea of fortune in who you are assigned and the reliance placed on the professional. If you are unlucky in who you are assigned, the repercussions for individuals may lead to longer in homelessness and more difficulty in exiting:

*Mel (216-220) it was one girl who just came and said, 'why are you crying?' she was from the London charity and she's like 'no, there's something wrong here'... that can't be happening and then she changed everything and this is my question there is I think ways*

*to deal with it but if you haven't met the right person you just get the streets you don't know your rights I don't know about being homeless 'what are my rights?'*

A few participants spoke about accounts of chance and luck working in their favour, specifically in terms of the professional assigned to them and the direct effect this person had on their trajectory. These accounts highlight two sides of the coin in terms of luck and in this case, the coin falling on the side of positive experiences and outcomes. Lorna spoke of her experience of being listened to by a professional from a particular charity and the rarity of this experience:

*(216-217) They're the only one accept me I call a lot of center the other one and they listen to me especially that \*name of charity\* she's the one will listen to me*

Lorna and Sylvia spoke about professionals advocating for them, feeling that the effort, resourcefulness and use of authority by professionals resulted in them receiving more support, help and accommodation options, imparting opportunities and safety:

*Lorna (262-265) one of the advice bureau different center \*name of worker\* helped me to call the housing solution that they give me accommodation he's very, very good person*

*Sylvia (353-355) they don't want me to go back on the streets and they didn't want to go back to that shelter because shelter is not good for my health they said no we find you somewhere to stay then they brought the... the Mind people*

Mel spoke to this, reflecting on how different her life would be if she had not been assigned a particular caseworker. This again nods to the notion of being in the right place at the right time and how this can dictate one's trajectory:

*Mel (118-122) I think I'm only here now because there is a lady caseworker and she works so hard to get my universal credit because they just saying no but she find er...*

*what do you say a case that was very similar to mine and she used that case to refuse and say no this is a similar to this according to the law you need to follow and she has the same thing*

Donna spoke about a caseworker risking their professionalism and career in order to help her, by allowing Donna to stay at her house:

*Donna (305-311) she said this girl now she said (indiscernible) and she was so nice she was so nice to me (oh good) and she I'm going to help you but you can't tell nobody nothing (mmm mmm) because I will lose my job and she helped me oh my god... she put me she even take me home she said come and stay with us (yeah) I said you sure? And she said yes a nice person like you, I said how you know me nice! You know when me talk to her she said I can't let you stay here I can't but it's our secret*

All accounts, both *lucky* and *unlucky*, highlight the role of power and authority in impacting homeless trajectories. Hoffman & Coffey (2019) discuss the power dynamics and social inequalities within provider-client relationships and how power discrepancies are created within the relationship. Greene (2008) looks at this from an angle of locus of power which can be applied here, with homeless individuals at the mercy of the power and the discretion of professionals. This arguably denotes the double-edged coin of luck and the lack of equality in service distribution based on the decision of the person of authority. Mel spoke explicitly in naming inequality and bias to illustrate the power that professionals hold in literally and directly affecting someone's immediate existence and the dehumanisation of this experience:

*(325-329) we are human beings but I think if you are in accounting, if you're in finance, you have the luxury to do it because your behaviour doesn't affect the outcome so much but in a place like this when you're a caseworker who deliver*



*service to homeless clients you can't that's very important that you are just you don't have any bias you are equal*

This calls into question, if someone is not listened to, how can they communicate their own hierarchy of needs and importantly, how can their needs be met? (Maslow, 1943). Kneck et al., (2021) emphasised the importance of being listened to in care-dynamics to adequately understand and meet people's needs. Mel discussed observing homeless women 'shutting down' in response to feeling ignored in the excerpt below. This echoes the literature on the 'invisible self' whereby shutting down offers a functional response and explanation to isolation and treatment, illustrating a shift from the typical pathologisation around these responses in the literature to look at structural issues (Bentley, 2007):

*(316-319) They stay in homelessness for longer and they don't know how to ask they don't know how to ask what to say because, I mean, I can talk because there's someone listening to me...in their case, I mean, I see it here I have seen it before they just shut down and the person already can't communicate*

These conceptualisations of luck within interpersonal experiences perhaps belie conscious or subconscious preferential treatment. This speaks to research on the limitations of service provision in perpetuating notions of deservingness and prioritisation based on perception of worthiness (Cooper et al., 2023). This could suggest that conscious and unconscious bias held by professionals serve to dictate homeless individuals' trajectories. Mel discussed the interpersonal dimension of the relationships between those seeking and providing help, illustrating how 'bad experiences' hinder help-seeking behaviour:

*(348-351) I'm like go downstairs I come with you and I can talk with them and stuff...but they're very hesitant, because they already had like a bad experience... they're not sure but er... yeah, I think it's a it's a very difficult thing to resolve...but that's the reality of it*

As Omerov et al., (2019) found, these types of encounters were found to negatively impact wellbeing, willingness to seek help and perceived access to care, with several others bolstering the link between professionals attitudes lacking in empathy, caring and understanding and longer-standing homelessness (Corrigan et al., 2015; Gültekin et al., 2014; Jenkins & Parylo, 2011; Martins, 2008; Voronka et al., 2014). This demonstrates the formative nature that interactions with authority and professionals can have and the importance of these relationships on homeless trajectories. Suggesting that further empathy, education, training and most importantly, self-reflexivity is to be encouraged for those working in the field.

#### **4.1.2 Powerlessness**

This leads into the second sub-theme within illusion of choice, 'powerlessness'. This sub-theme represents less of an individual level and context as seen in 'at the mercy of luck', instead encapsulating experiences at a systemic and environmental level through constructs and systems of power, agency and control. All but one participant spoke about the lack of agency or choice they experienced in their day-to-day lives, both systemically and environmentally, citing an inability to self-advocate, make decisions and exercise control. Participants unanimously spoke about the paradox between perception and reality, how their choices are limited by rules and regulations and the unsuitable or inappropriate support they must accept (i.e. housing) if they are to have their needs somewhat met. Many participants spoke of feeling powerless, helpless and infantilised by this experience. Frederique spoke about being rehomed in Wales, an area she did

not know and had no connections to - a common trend long documented in literature (Franklin, 1999; Pleace, 1998). This arguably demonstrates the lack of improvement and adaptation made to evolving homeless needs over time as a changing construct:

*Frederique (127-129) then they had a house in Wales so the following Saturday I had a program in Wales I had to go*

The idea of rules and regulations placed on participants were prevalent. Specifically, the rules stipulated on participants schedules, movement, access to and use of facilities when housed, resulting in a secondary homeless experiences, as described by Donna and Lorna:

*Donna (279-280) they put me up in hotels (**hotels**) yes and you go in you come out you go back in and come out you have to find place to go*

*Lorna (154-156) no you're in the morning, you stay only at night you can stay so daytime I need to go to London station and then somebody talk to me told me about this one (**this project?**) that's why I came here yeah*

This highlights a conditional and time-limited aspect to the support and help afforded to participants whereby help is stipulated by those in power, based on their reality, linking back to the illusion of choice. This was evident both in official regulated support and arrangements (i.e. homeless shelters) as well as unofficial arrangements where participants stayed with friends, family or acquaintances. Suggesting that either way, participants feel they lack rights, advocacy and agency in both official and unofficial housing. Some examples below from participants shed light on the lack of agency and control experienced in unofficial undocumented housing arrangements:

*Sylvia: (342-345) It's very hard very hard you ... sometimes you cannot have shower (mmm) because I cannot pay pay for the water*

*Guilia (9-11) I was with someone with friends with er mmm family er but I can't continue always er... with the live with them...so also I can't take take I can't drink drink or how I can't... mmm... home for me*

This same sentiment was referenced in official housing arrangements. Frederique spoke about housing gained through a charity, whereby rules and control were decided and enforced by those she was being housed by, limiting her freedom of choice and movement:

*Frederique (139-142) when I come back to the house 10.30pm most of the time I sleep in the station the the... overground station cause' when I'm coming back and it's 10.30pm I cannot go to the house (**the house with the nuns?**) yeah they said its 10.30 you can't come back after 10 o'clock*

Whilst Sylvia referenced her experience in staying with acquaintances and the lack of freedom she had in using facilities to meet her basic needs:

*Sylvia (487-490) It's no good (**yes, yes**) they cannot have hot food they cannot make a cup of tea (**mmm**) they cannot... what can we do? You have to be putting on the same clothes the same... sometimes you feel like itchy and you can't have shower*

This topic brought emphasis to secondary homelessness through daytime homelessness, with all participants emphasising the difficulties they faced both logistically and psychologically in having to fill their time and find places to go when their accommodation was closed. This arguably expands on the stereotypical one-dimensional view and assumption of homelessness

occurring at nighttime defined by a lack of shelter (Bretherton, 2020). This again highlights the paradox between perception and reality and calls for a wider understanding of the holistic challenges of homelessness and non-housing-related issues to be understood (Jones & Pleace, 2005). This need was evidenced in Frederique's account where she likened being housed in a shelter to being homeless again, illustrating the illusion of choice and support:

*Frederique (371-373) It's like the movies being on the streets is the worst thing (mmm) because especially when you are staying in a shelter you are still staying on the street because you have to leave the house in the morning go back to the street so in the day its hard*

Participants often framed their experiences and process through homelessness as something happening to them rather than from within their control. This was particularly interesting and framed the concept of locus of control, referring to a continuum of internal to external locus of control with individuals orienting their behaviour and beliefs on this continuum (Rotter, 1990). Participants generally appeared to describe external loci of control believing that external factors held most influence over their outcomes, describing the lack of control they feel over their environments, care and lives (Scaglia, 2008). This was echoed in Lorna's account in how she spoke about her trajectory as a separate entity outside of her control, notably in 'or what they do to me', suggesting she feels her fate is in others' hands:

*(295) I don't know whether or not they transfer me er... I stay there or what or what they do to me*

Lorna used the powerful metaphor of having a rope around her neck to illustrate the feeling of being stuck and trapped with her existence feeling beyond her control, unaware of her next steps. This sentiment was also seen in Frederique's excerpt below, using the word 'obey' to describe how it feels:

*(171-172) It's very good being in the hotel but next day you don't know...thinking about it like you have a rope around your neck you don't know what's going to happen next day again*

*Frederique (120-122) you can't do anything you have to obey whatever they ask you to do I say I'm fasting but they don't want me to do that in their house I said I've been fasting since I was a teenager... fasting is not a problem for me*

Infantilisation was a concept generated from a few participants whereby they felt diminished and debased through the illusion of choice and through the context of the support they received. Frederique spoke about her experience of being 'made to feel like a baby' by having her choices taken away and feeling entirely reliant on others:

*Frederique (200-211) but then they didn't get anywhere for me inside London it was outside on the outside London ah where is this.... erm....South West location... It was far away I didn't know anyone there just the lady they send me to so the keyworker took me there but I was miserable... she was very nice very good but you see me like a baby you want to force things on me*

This infantilising experience was found in Hoffman & Coffey's (2019) study which looked at the interactions and experiences homeless people had with organisations and providers. Foucault (1991) spoke about the effect power can possess in repressing the powerless and this was

reflected in Sylvia's account of feeling she had no independence over her own life in multiple aspects:

*Sylvia (316- 318) let's forget about privacy but you cannot do nothing on your own it's very bad*

*Sylvia (322-325) Er... you cannot say you want to cook you feel like eating fish and chips...you want to make things yourself you cannot you're not independent when you're homeless because you have to be begging people to help you or whatever you're not independent if I stay at my friend's house now or whatever I cannot go to their kitchen because it's not my house*

These experiences and protocols were framed in participants accounts as infantilising and dehumanising, feelings which are prevalently reported in homeless literature (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020). Infantilising and dehumanising lenses of homelessness arguably provide a more relational approach to understanding women's experiences of homelessness and consider the impact of social relationships on a marginalised group often overlooked in favour of factual lenses (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021; Stevenson and Neale, 2012). This sub-theme puts forward suggestions for homelessness to be viewed through additional theories such as locus of control, power and agency, as poststructuralist feminists would attest.

#### **4.1.3 Existing and Surviving Versus Enjoying and Living**

The paradox of existing and surviving verses enjoying and living was spoken about by nearly all participants. The idea that participants can think about and hold space for enjoying or living their lives was juxtaposed with the reality of needing to exist in survival mode. Participants described the priority and reality each day poses of meeting your basic needs, with shelter as the number

one priority and anything beyond this (i.e. identity, mental health, prospects) as somewhat of a superfluous unrelatable ideal, as seen in Barbara's response:

*Barbara (483-484) Well I didn't have any sense of identity, let alone identity I just wanted to disappear...just surviving each day*

The priority of shelter in order to survive was illustrated in Alya's response as well as Frederique's preference for shelter over food, arguably due to the issues of safety prioritised by women, widely reported in the literature:

*Alya (92-94) if you don't have place to stay you cannot think you only thinking one thing when I gonna get somewhere to sleep, or where, where I would go this night, or where I will stay the daytime... that's the only thing you think*

*Frederique (87-89) Citizens Advice Bureaux I went there saw a man his name was \*removed\* I explained everything he said are you eating I said no, no food he said go to somewhere for your breakfast but I say I prefer to speak to someone who can help me find somewhere to stay*

This links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) which argues that without basic needs met first and foremost, individuals are not able to attempt to reach other areas of growth such as sense of self, self-esteem and relationships. Many participants echoed this in their responses positioning survival as their only choice, as seen in Barbara's experience:

*(18) 'it was no choice in that matter but to survive in the streets'*

Coping mechanisms were discussed in the ways this survival mindset is acclimatised to in order to cope, with Barabara discussing a 'freeze' response suggesting a level of dissociation and escapism when faced with the repetitive adversity homelessness poses:



*Barbara (52-53) and and a lack of movement when it's necessary so erm I'm talking about the freeze response its survival its immobilising*

Mel also highlighted how this survival mindset is reflected within service provision and delivery, with basic physical needs focused on primarily, preventing other areas of support, such as mental health or job opportunities being offered:

*(91-93) I said yes I didn't work but do you think I wouldn't work if I'd had a chance, I would! like was it my choice? and I've been kept... I've been held hostage for four years of my life*

*(547-549) And with the charity helping me I wanted a psychologist someone to talk to (about mental health support) what else I can say? I was asking for that to talk with someone to understand what more?*

Participants regularly posed their dilemmas of 'choice' throughout the interviews, which could be conceptualised by the phrase 'the best of two evils'. They described the 'choices' they were faced with, for example shelter versus their health, staying in the UK to receive adequate healthcare versus returning 'home' to their families without adequate healthcare and unsafe housing options versus homelessness. This highlights the irony the word 'choice' holds in these contexts, again reinforcing the illusion of choice:

*Lorna (428-430) no I don't want them worry (family) because the important things here my have the medical because my sugar every two weeks or every two days or three days I have lower sugar they test my sugar (okay yeah okay) so that's the problem it's diabetes type two*

*Sylvia (146-148) they want to send me to the shelter after I check it on the I told somebody some of the volunteer to help me to check it they said it was bunk bed so I said I'm not going there because I will be sick*

*Sylvia (424-426) But at the hospital oh my god they said they give me infusions for my sickle cell the senior nurse who gave to me I managed to get one and here the needle is tiny but back home oh my god! (laughs) ah I said I'm not going back to that country*

Participants described feeling coerced into accepting help offered to them due to the lack of options (i.e. choice) available, irrespective of suitability or appropriateness. Some participants described attempts to exercise choice, agency and advocate for their needs relating to their shelter, support and so on. The inequality in this power dynamic was evidenced in Sylvia's experience whereby she was advised to accept unsuitable housing for her health needs or risk it being retracted, illustrating the illusion of choice here and the notion of being backed into a corner to decide between the best of two evils:

*Sylvia (149-152) if you don't go if you reject this offer, because you are in the priority list now if you refuse this one, they will bring you down just take it because if you tell them you don't want it they're not going to help you again because they put you on priority list they will they will know everything because if you refuse this one if you reject it it will be difficult*

A desire to move beyond a survival state and exercise free will, independence and ownership was communicated by Guilia:

*(183) It's how do you want to change you want more... you want more better... yeah better*

This desire for 'more' and 'better' communicates the limitations homelessness places on what can be desired. For example, this desire for better was reflected in other participants' accounts

but was caveated by the idea that without shelter, such desires do not feel attainable. For example, being able to look and present in ways deemed socially ‘acceptable’ or ‘normal’:

*Alya (351-353) You don't have friends you know, you know, if you want to be friends with someone, you have to be suitable places, right? and then to look after yourself as a women, let's say, if you are inviting me to drink coffee or something, I want to be a nice way*

Whilst Alya and Frederique spoke of their desires to work or go to church and the challenges the lack of shelter poses on achieving such goals:

*Alya (370-374) so the only thing I want, one thing to lift me up, the I want somewhere to live, like a place to stay, and then to renew again how I can work?*

*Frederique (358-360) The important thing to live is one shelter so you don't have that thing...you have totally everything is difficult everything is not easy, to be honest, even before I was going to church, now I don't go to church*

These accounts of women’s lived experiences of choice expose the lack of empowering and strengths-based interactions and approaches to women’s occupation of the streets (Casey et al., 2008). The absence of support informed by women’s needs and experiences arguably further position homeless women as an unseen category by those in positions of power, reaffirming misunderstandings and maintaining barriers to women breaking out of homelessness due to ineffective support (Hutchingson et al., 2014; Phipps et al., 2021). This calls for a social justice strengths-based approach to highlight individuals’ resources of resilience and coping strategies to highlight their strengths instead of pathologising such strategies (Goodman et al., 2004). More research into homeless women’s resilience provides a different lens to the status quo of anti-empowerment and anti-strengths based approaches to homelessness.

## 4.2 Intersecting identities

All participants contributed to the second master theme, intersecting identities. Participants spoke to the stigma and adversity they face due to holding or exhibiting intersecting identities (i.e. being a homeless woman) within society and the multitude of disadvantages experienced as a result (Crenshaw, 1989). The first sub-theme ‘layers of othering’ refers to the levels of oppression, vulnerability and the process of othering experienced in response to intersecting identities. With ‘social hierarchies’ representing the second sub-theme informed by overlapping identities which establish a societal hierarchy experienced by homeless women.

A range of identities were named and reflected on, providing contextual insight into how these are experienced by homeless women, by society and how these identities affect experiences of entitlement to help, treatment and support. For example, being a woman who is homeless from an ethnic minority background with immigrant status encompasses multiple overlapping identities. Other identities which emerged were technological illiteracy, postcode discrimination, language proficiency and race. Frederique spoke about the disadvantage women face if they are not aware of how to use technology and subsequently the online systems in place to register for and receive support:

*Frederique (258-263) I mean, not everyone searching where it is place you can stay let's say I am from Eritrea and then I am not perfect how things to find out... let's say homeless people, where I can say, if I Google it, and some people, they don't know what, how they can do that*

The prevalence of ethnic minorities and multiculturalism within the homeless population was also commented on by participants, noting the intersecting identities here and prevalence of ethnic minorities in homelessness as widely reported (Fitzpatrick, 2018):

*Mel (392-394) and the homeless again they're not British British they're people from Romania from Turkey from Iraq from Syria*

*Donna 43-44) I'm staying in that place yeah, so I meet a lot of people different nationality (here at the project?) yeah, I like London because multinationality cultural literate*

Immigration status was noted as a barrier by participants to access and entitlement to financial and housing support such as universal credit. It is important to note that the UK's welfare policies mean that even for those individuals with immigrant status (NRPF) who become homeless, this circumstance does not override their recourse to public funds, limiting their access to resources and support to meet their basic needs, with participants highlighting how homeless identity can be both a cause and maintaining factor of homelessness. This illustrates the role that categorisation can have in devaluing immigrants to maintain the status quo and perhaps affirm the mainstream agenda, as seen first hand in participants accounts below:

*Sylvia (117) I homeless because of my immigration problem*

*Mel (110-111) because I don't have universal credit so I didn't have the housing benefit they wouldn't be able to find any place*

*Guilia (21) And er I can't rent afford rent house. Yeah that's why I become homeless*

The link between intersectionality and homelessness reported in the literature and generated through participants accounts raises the question, do intersecting identities make you more likely

to experience homelessness or does homelessness result in further intersecting identities, such as ill-health leading to poverty or homelessness? This debate has been raised by many studies, for example Jones (1999, p.60) quotes one of his participants “it was being homeless that made me drink and led to my health problems”.

#### **4.2.2 Levels of Othering**

Othering as a process and construct appeared across most of the dataset following the idea that the more intersecting identities you hold and exhibit, the further on the edge of society you sit in terms of acceptance, opportunity and worth. The more layers of difference someone holds from the ‘status quo’, the more adversity and oppression they will likely experience, with those in positions of power ‘othering’ individuals holding intersecting identities (Giannini, 2018).

Looking at this through an intersectionality lens, discrimination due to homelessness presides on more than being without shelter to an ‘all-encompassing social identity or social label’ (Giannini, 2018, p.37). This was represented in Frederique’s account, whereby once her ‘identity’ as a homeless woman became known, she was discriminated against, prefaced on an assumption that homeless people are not welcome in public spaces:

*Frederique: (432-434) I stayed in at London station the security say ‘are you working here?’ I said no I am homeless they say ‘this place is not for homeless people don’t come here again’ so fortunately the next day I got to go to London shelter*

Alya spoke about the othering nature inherent in the semantics of homelessness and what being ‘home-less’ implies and how you are received and treated as a result societally:

*Alya (299-302) because from the name there is everything... homeless you don't have job, you don't have house, you don't even you don't have friends because if you have*

*homeless, you don't you don't have friends, you don't have who going to invite you to their house?*

Davies (2008, p.70) supports this view, stating that intersectionality represents a ‘theoretical and political remedy to what is perhaps the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism – the long and painful legacy of its exclusions’, highlighting the exclusionary focus of othering which exists in society and its top-down approach. Many argue that a more nuanced and intersectional approach to difference is long overdue (Turner, 2021), evident from these findings and the psychological impact feeling othered has. This was evidenced in Alya’s comparison of experience of homelessness to ‘madness’:

*Alya (76) Yeah, jobless, hopeless... it's not only stress it takes you to mad you know... to the madness*

Barbara and Lorna also described the experience of being othered in relation to their mental health, citing isolation and masking of their identity in order to cope and appear more acceptable to society (Morell-Bellai et al., 2000):

*Barbara (574-576) Isolate we tend to isolate 100% 90% 80% isolate... self isolate that's very common... through the lack of empathy for oneself... er... through feeling abandoned, rejected by society, not fulfilling one's expectations and society's expectations you know*

*Lorna (970-971) Yes yes but you cannot tell you cannot tell (**you can't tell people?**) you cannot tell to the people they maybe they pretend me I pretend I'm okay but I'm not okay*

A notion of being held to different standards and ideals based on intersecting identities was raised by Mel. She described being treated differently when interviewing for a job, highlighting

potential positive discrimination and tokensim in this context based on her identities as a modern slavery transgender homeless woman:

*Mel (281-282) I went to the interview they told me for homeless people, you don't even need to put a CV*

Evolving understandings of women's homelessness through an intersectionality lens encourages engagement with the unconscious and how we see and relate to the world and others (Crenshaw, 1989). Without an awareness of this, both those who possess intersecting identities and those who are marginalised are likely to remain othered, making it increasingly difficult to challenge the oppression experienced (Cho et al., 2013). McCarthy (2015) states that whilst stigma associated with some identities has decreased over time (e.g. homosexuality), homelessness has remained a deviant identity particularly for women. Barbara described masking her homeless identity due to fear of judgement, perpetuating the paradox between perception; that homeless women are rare, and the reality; that women are one of the fastest growing homeless populations, due to lack of awareness:

*(590-592) Well when they ask question, "why are you in the streets"? Of course, I'm not gonna say you know this you know... society you know can judge very easily... if you're not working... so we avoid being looking down*

*(596-597) Oh that's how it is. How I felt is through terror but what it is in society you know is erm...can be very can be judgemental through not knowing the individuals experience*

A process of 'invisibilising' can occur whereby elements of the 'other' are ignored or blocked out causing people to become blind to the other and see past them (Turner, 2021). This can be



seen in Lorna's interaction with the public, where she experienced them to be incredulous in comprehending her existence as a homeless woman which also occurred when in unofficial housing arrangements with acquaintances:

*(719-20) late at night some people traveling they come to you "why are you staying here? Why are you sleep here?"*

*(344-345) sometimes where you sleep the children they might see you 'oh my god'... anyway*

Poststructuralist feminism brings consciousness to the role of power in othering which allows for it to be discussed and acknowledged. This lens exposes the complex power dynamics and how interactions with 'non-homeless' individuals perpetuate a pathologising, divisive and problematising view of those marginalised and socially excluded based on intersecting identities (Parker and Fopp, 2004; Watson, 2018). Several participants referred to the seemingly implicit nature of othering they had experienced whereby they described being watched and unafforded privacy, normalised in helping settings, insinuating a lack of trust imparted onto them by the provider in the provider-client relationship:

*Guilia (239) Even even light always open*

*Guilia (243) yeah some some some lady 'ahh turn it of' they say no no no we have... we have to... check*

*Mel (131-133) it was emergency bed... it is not like an emergency bed here but it's almost like the three rooms there's always someone standing in front you don't have a lock they just open the doors are with the glass*

These findings arguably highlight the association between non-trust and homeless individuals in these contexts (Hore, 2013). This is supported by Foucault (1991), who points out that ubiquitous measures are devised by those in positions of power to monitor those ‘outside’ the mainstream, based on comparison to normative ideals. With this reasoning likely informing the assertion of control and power over those deemed ‘different’ on a basis of distrust and fear, presenting a dehumanising and infantilising lens of understanding, as reflected in women’s responses (Parker and Fopp, 2004; Watson, 2000).

#### **4.2.3 Social Hierarchy**

An underlying social hierarchy informed by identities was referred to by over half of participants. Noting the seemingly ingrained societal and patriarchal views which serve to segregate different groups within these hierarchical structures spoken about from the position of homeless women. Somewhat of a hierarchical structure was generated from the data, informed by a diverse participant group, sharing perspectives from a multi-cultural background. The research was enriched by Mel, a transgender homeless woman sharing her perspective from the experience of multiple intersecting identities. Mel described being (163) ‘like a magnet for trouble’ on the streets due to her identity, sharing the discrimination and fear she experienced as a result. Specifically using the word ‘rank’ to describe how different identities are treated, ranking herself as a transgender woman at the bottom of this hierarchy, below homeless women, citing examples of this:

*(148-150) That was like the level of dangers for a trans woman are much higher they would help me because they were much stronger than me the homeless woman*

*(490-491) They're easier to them (homeless women) yeah... so if transgenders are the worst the second worst are homeless women they just think they can go and ask you anything I mean you can rank it like that*

A social hierarchy was implied through participants responses which ranked the public at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by homeless men, homeless women, then transgender women. This was inferred through participants' beliefs on a more implicit level as well as their explicit contributions in how they feel they are allowed to occupy and share space compared to other groups. The language used to define the public such as 'normal' was used on a few occasions, implying that participants categorised themselves as abnormal, noting the use of us and them language here to differentiate themselves. For example, Mel spoke about discriminatory behaviour directed at homeless women which would not occur with 'normal women':

*(477-478) I have never seen them doing it to normal woman but they will do it to us. They do it all the time but they do it in my case, they all someone always calls me ask me for number and stuff*

Experiencing a need to prioritise the public and their needs emerged from Lorna's account, speaking of an unwritten rule whereby use of public space is granted as long as the public are not disturbed:

*Lorna (677) Yeah you just sit as long as you don't er... disturb to any passenger*

The quote below suggests that the public are burdened by the reality and sight of homeless women and therefore an expectation exists whereby homeless characteristics and identities need to be masked or hidden when occupying public spaces due to perceived deviance:

*Lorna (522-523) some people maybe they don't like people seeing them sleeping on the station*

This is corroborated by Guilia's experience whereby if homeless individuals behave and present in a certain way they can pass as 'normal' members of the public, affording them corresponding privileged treatment based on their 'normal' identity:

*(472-473) No because I'm not... we don't have er... mental problem we don't shout we don't nothing. They they think also we are travel... so they don't do nothing... they don't know what I am*

This supports the idea of a social hierarchy governing behaviour. In this case, it situates the public at the top of the hierarchy, with their needs prioritised and protected. Alya spoke about feeling ignored and avoided by the public due to fearing her identity as a homeless woman:

*Alya (498-400) people, they scare these things, they don't involve in your situation (**right right**)... I can see so many people they turn their face and then they go*

The idea that this social hierarchy and associated etiquette is implicit was evidenced in Lorna's examples of this being adopted and prescribed by security staff in train stations who enforce unspoken rules on those 'lower down'. With this 'code' ultimately dictating how women occupy space, when and to what standard:

*(513-515) Ten thirty you can even you see because sometimes we saw that no people already we start to lie down at ten thirty they said no, no, no even no people in the station. Eleven o'clock you start to lie down. They stop, the security take them out and you need to clean properly if you finish drink coffee you need to put in the bin that's the one they like to ask because some people they don't do but they know the face already is this one good or not? so they always keeping you look up there as well they looking you like protecting when you do something you not abuse their kindness*

Differences perceived by participants between how they are expected to relate and behave compared to homeless men were discussed. Barbara described feeling that homeless men are not expected to abide to the same codes of conduct as homeless women, suggesting certain identities are afforded more freedom and rights:

*(593-595) the streets the men are... er they have more resilience because they're allowed to cause can't they're allowed to because of the...oh yeah if you see a naked woman on the street you think "oh" look at her right? look at her shame on you. Do you see a man, oh look at him he's such an idiot*

Mel spoke about how these hierarchies inform services and provision which cater more to those in higher positions in the social hierarchy, i.e. homeless men, stating that homeless centres are geared towards the needs of men:

*(577-579) That's another thing to look at it from the same perspective is very wrong at London day centre for example it's very man oriented*

Feminist post-structuralism supports this by focusing on how power relations cease to maintain these social hierarchies and in turn, reinforce them through solidifying the status quo (Weedon, 1996). Foucault's (1991) notion of discourse can be applied here in looking at the way in which gender can govern how people act, think and feel, to interrogate the status quo, who it is serving and who it oppresses (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020). Intersecting identities of being a homeless woman immediately situate such individuals on the outskirts of society and at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with different rules as a result (Kneck et al., 2021).

#### **4.3 Habituation to Trauma and Abuse**

The third master theme ‘habituation to trauma and abuse’ describes participants feeling stuck in a repetitive cycle within the context of homelessness. This was constructed through their experience of the implicit and explicit paradoxes between the perception of homelessness and reality. With this disparity serving to maintain aspects of homelessness in part due to a perpetuation of traditional social norms, gender roles and unhelpful and inaccurate assumptions, alongside the normalisation of abuse and trauma amongst homeless women. ‘Unhelpful and inaccurate assumptions’ makes up the first sub-theme, focusing on the underlying societal assumptions around homeless women’s abilities, access to support and quality of life. The second sub-theme of ‘social norms and gender roles’ discusses the societal norms and gender roles within which women’s homelessness operates and is governed by. The third sub-theme ‘the same CD keeps playing’ (Barbara 189) discusses the normalisation and institutionalisation of adversity leading to women remaining or returning to abusive dynamics and how this is overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

#### **4.3.2 Unhelpful and Inaccurate Assumptions**

Several participants spoke about the day-to-day difficulties they faced whilst homeless due to the societal assumptions which inform interactions and support. Largely reported were implicit assumptions that homeless women had a certain level of functioning, choice and opportunity, informed by a preconception that their basic needs were being met. Some examples of these assumptions from ‘non-homeless’ individuals were that homeless women possess adequate health, technological literacy, sufficient language skills and financial means to access opportunities and make decisions. Again reaffirming the paradox between assumption and reality, with participants describing the difficulties such unhelpful and inaccurate assumptions

have on their lives. Alya, Mel and Frederique spoke to this in their accounts below, illustrating how public and professional assumptions relating to technological literacy, accessibility and language proficiency serve to maintain ineffective and unreachable means of support:

*Alya (259-261) let's say I am from Eritrea and then I am not perfect how things to find out... let's say homeless people, where I can say, if I Google it, and some people, they don't know what, how they can do that*

*Mel (507-509) there was no police... we don't have phones so who am I gonna call... it was when I was telling the story, one of the girls said why wouldn't you call the police I said I didn't have a phone*

*Frederique (252-254) they called me I had charged my phone for six hours but it would only work for 30 minutes it don't charge properly they call me but I cannot call them back it's private number ... I ended up standing by bus stops and in train stations where I can charge until 2am*

Jones & Pleace (2005) support the construct that the assumptions placed on homeless individuals can misalign with their reality and needs. In their research around the resettlement of homeless individuals, they found that support needs remain crucial to individuals long after rehoming. Barbara spoke about her experience of being housed, how 'terrifying' it was to adjust to and the admin she was faced with, highlighting the unfamiliarity of such contexts for those chronically homeless:

*(245-247) it has been a mind blowing (laughs) at first it was terrifying it was really terrifying um...honestly I was predicting that I was gonna I was projecting the worst the worst nightmare which is being kicked out again*

*(254-255) and then the bills of the house that was very overwhelming*

As Barbara suggests, the idea that providing housing waves a magic wand and that individuals are assumed to be able to adapt and function in such settings reinforces the status quo through such attitudes. Many put forward the need for more help and support with integration into aspects of society which are unfamiliar, such as housing and bills in order to prevent isolation and repeat homelessness (Jones & Pleace, 2015).

This leads to another assumption highlighted by participants that housing and shelter options are suitable for all homeless individuals. Sylvia, Alya and Frederique spoke of the 'unsafe' and inappropriate shelter options they were offered which placed them at risk due to their health needs:

*Sylvia (138-140) They put me in a shelter... that shelter is unsafe... but the shelter... they said they don't get enough funding so they're going to close down (okay) then this one sent me to this London shelter (yes mm) and that shelter is not good for my case because I am vulnerable I vulnerable I cannot catch anything*

*Alya (104-106) they have shelters to sleep for the homeless, they say the London day centre... but the thing is I have high fever I sneeze a lot if I smell something so I don't go this place*

*Frederique (260- 264) yeah before they give me room in London location but I've got TB and I was coughing coughing I need to drink water with filter they throw that away said I need to buy bottled water but I cannot...*

This infers an assumption that homeless people exist as a homogenous group with the same level of health. Suggesting that such assumptions inform a one size fits all approach taken to homeless provision, whereby individual differences and nuances are not taken into account in support and



treatment (Barrow & Laborde, 2008). Participants spoke about feeling unheard and disengaged because of this:

*Lorna (637-639) I'm the one who adjusting that so because er the type two diabetics different going low so I'm the one who adjust I don't I don't eat the stuff*

Further to this, participants cited the assumptions in the advice given to them by healthcare professionals which could not be followed due to their homeless status. The disparity between perception and circumstances has been found in homeless research reporting the struggles individuals face in abiding to a system set-up for 'normal' people (Pleace et al., 1999). For example, Sylvia was advised to stay indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic due to her vulnerable health status which was not possible:

*Sylvia: (73-74) I went there for the screening the COVID said to me make sure you don't go outside you have to stay inside because we don't want you to have to have COVID*

Similarly, assumptions based on the mainstream population seem to influence presumptions that homeless individuals can access support, turning a blind eye to financial barriers. Sylvia described experiences where she has been unable to reach support provided due to being unable to afford the travel fare:

*Sylvia (170-171) then that day I only go to the library when they send us out sometimes I don't have money to come to the to here I don't have money to put on for the travel I will be crying.*

*Sylvia (217-219) and I don't have money to come here I have to go to the library where I can walk to where I can carry my leg to take myself to, I have to go there, I have no choice*

Lorna described the lack of awareness she feels is present in 'non-homeless' communities around such contexts, suggesting the underlying experience of being othered due to the lack of accurate understanding that exists around the realities of homelessness:

*Lorna (317-318) yeah that's why some people I think they don't know they don't realise what's going on to the homelessness*

It seems that these assumptions are inherent and feed into multiple aspects of society such as housing options, healthcare advice and perception of ability and capacity based on the needs of the status quo, what is available to them and their reality. As echoed in Pleace (1995) and Franklin's (1999) research, establishing and maintaining suitable housing, care and advice can prevent re-occurring homelessness. This is illustrated in Sylvia's experience of needing to 'choose' to remain homeless rather than accept unsuitable shelter which would impact her health, providing an otherwise overlooked explanation.

This sentiment perhaps explains the blame and judgement placed on homeless individuals for not accessing the help available to them. Perhaps informing the stigma and stereotype of homelessness as a choice, of homeless individuals as lazy and rejecting of capitalism (Franklin, 1999; Pleace, 1995). A lack of understanding of the complex and sequential systems in place around support and housing were described by Alya, who pointed out that without a home or base, work is not an attainable ideal:

*Alya (44) That's the problem you know, if they give you some place to stay, you can search to work*

Mel was able to recognise and reflect on her own assumptions about the homeless population prior to and after experiencing homelessness herself, affirming the difference in her outlook and the paradox between perception and reality:

*Mel (614-617) before I was very fortunate I was one of them as well you know before I would say about homeless people it's a choice they use drugs and assume they've been given place to stay but that's not the reason why because people don't think about modern day slavery domestic abuse they just don't think about it...*

#### **4.3.3 Gender Roles and Social Norms**

This sub-theme captures the presence of gender roles, social norms and associated biases referenced in the majority of participants' experiences. Some participants spoke directly to their awareness and or/internalisation of such roles and norms and how these filtered through to their sense of self and interactions, whilst others acknowledged and challenged the limitations these had on their lives. The origin of these social norms and gender roles constructed by those in positions of power (non-homeless individuals) represents another paradox between perception and reality which is reaffirmed through lack of understanding, informed support and reinforced segregation.

Public space and therefore the streets have historically been constructed as masculine spaces, with women's homelessness deviating from traditional social norms and gender roles of women as matriarchs and homemakers destined for caring roles (Reeve, 2018). Mayock & Sheridan (2020) found that these stigmatising discourses of women deviating from normative assumptions

may mean that women's homelessness remains concealed due to perceived deviance, serving to maintain it. This historical and evolutionary lens was seen in Barbara's account:

*(588-589) No it's like a female female strength and men's strength you know the female are more sensitive more self-knowledge more you know the men are mmm... men is a hunter in a way*

Traditional gender roles were apparent in the transcripts, with participants sharing their own views of such roles alongside how they are treated within homeless contexts due to their gender. The excerpts below from Lorna suggest that she prescribes to an idea that women as a gender need more help than men on the street, describing her observations of this in action:

*(736) I think because they see that woman it's more er... need more helping than to the man they give more to the ladies*

*(766) And woman always always priority to help*

These quotes speak to the idea that the streets pose more danger due to patriarchal power structures, associated gender roles and cultural imagery which influence perceptions of vulnerability for women (Reeve, 2008). Sylvia's account shared similar insights, detailing that for women, the experience of homelessness is particularly bad, due to being a woman and the corresponding issues this surfaces:

*Sylvia (467-468) because women, for them to be to be in that condition is very bad it's not good*

Guilia echoed this, sharing her observation that women are viewed as weak and vulnerable and that their place on the street is at odds with their traditional domesticated roles, suggesting women want to be homeowners who keep house:

*Guilia (148-149) Er...woman is considered very weak woman...it's not good er woman erm... she want to she want to own a home for example clean...*

This supports the literature around the stigma associated with the 'unaccommodated woman' and a breakdown of female domesticity (Watson & Austerberry, 1986). Whereby through holding a homeless identity, women deviate from social and gender norms placed upon them. Post structuralist feminist theorists purport that deviant assumptions are deep rooted, widespread and need to be understood in the context of societies bias that women should not be on the street (Mayock & Bretherton, 2020). This may provide an explanation for the huge disparity between homeless women being one of the fastest growing populations and the invisibility of women's homelessness (Wardaugh, 1999). There was a strong sense of this within Barbara's account where she named the streets as a 'masculine space' based on the number of homeless men she sees, questioning, 'where are the women?':

*Barbara (575-576) I don't want to be...I don't know... it is what it is. I've seen men I'm thinking where are the women? Yeah, sometimes it feels that way masculine space isn't it*

A patriarchal construct was generated from four participants' accounts, who described experiencing this in various contexts, from the public to homeless professionals and fellow homeless individuals. Barbara spoke to the patriarchal influence directly, describing the societal patriarchal dominance she experiences within homelessness:

*(561-563) I mean, it's been said, you know, it's been saying so, again and again, you know, it's we live in a very patriarchal er...dominance but it still remain you know*

Mel discussed her experience of those working in the field of homelessness, specifically female professionals and their inherent subconscious patriarchal views which centre men's perspectives in care and support settings, resulting in the subordination of women's perspectives and needs:

*Mel (577-579) That's another thing to look at it from the same perspective is very wrong at London day centre for example it's very man oriented, like they just don't think about even the woman who works there will still think about it from homeless men's perspective*

Mel's experience supports a large proportion of the evidence base which suggests women have differing needs to men, due to gendered differences, with many advocating for women's needs to be acknowledged and addressed (Phipps et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2009), such as gynaecological health and pregnancy, uniquely faced by women (Gelberg et al., 2004). Sylvia's quote speaks to this blind spot around homelessness and women's health, providing a window into the logistical challenges women face with menstruation on the streets and the added complications that poses:

*Sylvia (472-476) some women you know its difficult they might be on their period they don't have anywhere to go they don't have anywhere to wash their undies its very horrible...*

Literature has called for further social science research into the dangers homeless women face on the street (Walsh et al., 2009). Mel discusses the sexualisation and risk women can experience in fulfilling their daily needs such as occasions where they need to urinate on the street and the stark contrast to how men can fulfil such daily needs without such threats:

*(563-567) lets say you don't have an option I need to do it here if someone sees a man doing it they will just nothing but if a man sees a woman doing it, they will probably like come over the response are very different outcomes are very different doing the same*

*thing you would have completely different response...because they see it as a sexual they will see there's a nudity but men do it just ignore it*

This suggests the patriarchal bias informed by social norms and gender roles filtering through to how the streets are occupied by different identities (Mayock & Bretherton, 2020). Mel's experience below suggests the normalisation homeless men benefit from on the street, noting the deviance which might be assumed and associated with women engaging in such behaviours:

*(559-561) Yeah you know very different experiences, the risks are very different the difficulties as a woman for example using the bathroom men can just stand there and do it like woman doesn't have it, it's just really different...*

Post-structuralist feminism provides a lens to interrogate how gender and gender-based roles dictate how individuals are likely to relate, behave and occupy space (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1987). This is echoed in Barbara's account of the varying judgements and treatment men and women receive on the street when engaging in the same behaviour:

*(593-595) the streets the men are... er they have more resilience because they're allowed to cause can't they're allowed to because of the...oh yeah if you see a naked woman on the street you think "oh" look at her right? look at her shame on you. Do you see a man, oh look at him he's such an idiot*

These examples from lived experiences support the literature calling for gendered differences to be taken seriously, with more understanding needed into the extent to which patriarchal dominance seeps into and maintains a blindness to women's needs (i.e. health) and homelessness. Stein et al., (2007) support this in stating that the use of healthcare by homeless women is ultimately informed by predisposing influences such as how much they feel their needs are catered for and accepted, illustrating the vicious cycle of judgement, need and outcome.

#### 4.3.4 “The Same CD Keeps Playing”

This sub-theme was reflected across half of participants and symbolises the vicious cycle participants alluded to, whereby adversity and trauma is internalised and normalised, leading to habituation of abuse and distress. The concept of normalisation to distress and abuse was explicitly named by two participants:

*Barbara (154-155) we we suffer immensely but we get used to suffering so we normalise the whole thing*

*Mel (48-49) and I was talking with my mom. So I'm Turkish and she she had a very bad relationship with my stepdad and I think if you see that, as a growing child, we will normalise these things*

These accounts support the idea of internalised adversity leading to habituation to abuse and distress which is arguably difficult to detect and becomes easily overlooked, as Barbara attests to:

*(177-180) I also did filter everything with a lot of shame it could be just a criticism however because I had already internalised so much shame that anything*

The concept of the ‘devalued self’ (Boydell et al., 2000) can be seen in participants accounts, described as experiences of withdrawal, isolation and low-self-esteem (Grigsby et al., 1990). Participants in Morrell-Bellai et al’s., (2005) study found that experiences of social isolation and alienation induced feelings of shame and disgust. It seems in Barbara’s account she describes a feeling whereby self-esteem and sense of self become so devalued that rejection and abandonment are expected, void of expectation and hope:



*Barbara (28-30) they feel helpless or they feel down the chain and so I met people like that, like me, because it's very familiar yeah? and we expect nothing, we hope nothing and the outcome is going to be the same which is rejection and abandonment so why try... that's familiarity*

The sense of feeling stuck in a cycle of shame and devaluation was discussed by participants, with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness at the centre. Such feelings are reported in the literature as characterising chronic homelessness, with powerlessness making it difficult to find motivation and resilience to exit such cycles (Goodman et al., 1991; Hopper & Baumohl, 1994). Feelings of shame and a loss of sense of self, whereby the lens of shame becomes internalised was powerfully echoed in Barbara's description where she reports the unfamiliarity of 'self-love' on the streets, inferring a connection between homelessness and low self-esteem:

*Barbara (208-210) it's really very familiar to people like I (laughs) hey I'm meeting someone like me but someone to meet somebody who have self love is really unfamiliar obviously now I'm aware that I want that to meet people with self love being responsible for themselves and er an now I like that*

There was a strong sense of dehumanisation within these accounts relating to an implicit powerless mentality. The dehumanising effect of this mentality was seen in Alya's account where she describes her experience of not feeling like a human being and 'not counting':

*Alya (355-358) I didn't count even now like I'm I'm human I'm not a human even, because I don't have any shelter to stay I don't have place to cook I don't have to bring my shopping and then to do stuff in my place which I don't basically I don't have the important thing to live*

Whilst Frederique likened the unpredictability of housing as ‘being thrown back to the street’. This metaphor gives insight into feeling discarded, perhaps linking back to the social hierarchy and subsequent treatment as a result:

*Frederique (177-178) 7 days 10 days give me another place when they finished with me  
throw me back to the street*

A handful of participants described how this devalued sense of self, normalisation of abuse and habituation to trauma and distress led to a lack of resilience, perhaps informing maladaptive coping mechanisms of engaging, returning to or remaining in abusive dynamics. Several participants spoke about the familiarity and predictability such dynamics provided compared to the streets. This illustrates ‘the best of two evils’ seen in theme one ‘illusion of choice’ which is echoed in Mel’s account:

*Mel (206-208) they said ‘call on Monday’ I said what I’m gonna do til Monday? And that’s my strongest message to people that’s the first thing even if it’s bad, because you’re familiar, you’re thinking about going back to what you know... so I was like, I go back to my boyfriend*

This is supported by Mayock et al’s., (2015) research on the narratives of women’s homelessness which corroborated a return to abusive relationships due to a lack of emotional support and the risks presented by homelessness. The excerpts from Mel and Barbara below shed light on the uncertainty, unpredictability and risks being a woman on the street poses. With the idea of these potential dangers representing a catalyst for returning to abusive relationships and dynamics, drawing on the concept of ‘better the devil you know’:

*Mel (212-213) I'd experienced two days but at least with him, he would sexually exploit me, but no one will hurt me... but on the street I feel like I could be like dead or something*

*Barbara (422-425) Yeah prostitution very abusive highly abusive but the thought of being in the streets alone is quite terrifying*

Barbara described how the experience of being on the street can mimic and feel familiar to the trauma and violence that has become normalised, using the powerful metaphor of “the CD keeps playing and playing” to illustrate a broken record. The quote below suggests how the interplay of experiencing abuse, low-self-esteem and lack of resilience manifests itself, creating a pattern or vicious cycle which is difficult to break out of:

*Barbara (185-189) most, if not all, who end up in the streets have addictions... underneath there is a lot of trauma a lot of violence... erm a lot of abuse has been done to them that's why it's much easier... to be erm rejected and abandoned in the streets because that's what internally is the case chaos is it's internalised so they project this outwardly... its going to be the same result the same CD keeps playing and playing you know*

The idea of a shared blindness emerged within this sub-theme, comprised of societies blindness informed by ingrained and inaccurate understandings of women's homelessness mixed with a blindness to the habituation of distress and abuse experienced by homeless women. Alya and Barbara spoke about the ways they cope with abuse, trauma and the experience of homelessness through shutting down, isolating oneself and rejecting the world, demonstrating another maintaining factor informed by shame which blocks help seeking behaviour:

*Barbara (295-297) it's hide hide and disappear as the aim hide I want to disappear I want to exit the world...I want to be invisible... not visible, invisible. It means you know don't talk to me you know I reject myself but I reject you... and it's abandonment*

*Alya (477-478) I don't have interaction I sleep in the library and I reject every single...conversation you know I was in in a hide situation so I was feeling ashamed*

There appears to be a fair amount of research into abuse and abusive dynamics as causes for homelessness, but very little around women returning to or remaining in such relationships due to the risks the streets pose. Reeve et al., (2006) were one of the few to report on this in their research, finding that women did return to prior abusive relationships to secure shelter, often only once all other avenues had been explored at an 'alarming rate'. Demonstrating the multi-faceted issues with unsuitable accommodation and untimely support, alongside the risks and unpredictability the street poses which cause women to feel they have no choice but to remain, return or engage in transactional relationships, as reflected in Mel's observation:

*Mel (484-485) people I see you look at the man then you look at the girl and you just think that's a shame you just know it's a transactional relationship*

#### **4.4 Shape Shifting**

The final master theme 'shape shifting' provides somewhat of a unique finding by building on the widely reported conceptualisation of women's homelessness as invisible, both within the transcript data and the literature. The first sub-theme of 'flexing identity and gender' describes how participants account's developed and expanded on the notion of invisibility to incorporate how identity (i.e. homelessness) and gender (i.e. female) are used, adapted and flexed interchangeably by homeless women to meet their basic needs. The idea that homeless women shape shift in how they behave and occupy space by putting on different identities to have their

needs met occurred in seven out of eight participants, driven by strategies of safety. The second sub-theme of ‘acts of resistance’ was constructed around participants’ examples of resisting the constraints placed on them in various ways, through their identity, gender roles and stereotypes, societies judgements and expected codes of conduct.

#### **4.4.2 Flexing Identity and Gender**

Most of the participants confirmed the literature in reporting on the hidden nature of their own homelessness as well as other homeless women more generally. For example, Barbara spoke of seeing few women on the street as well as her own experience of ‘hiding’ from the world:

*Barbara (330) women are very hidden, if you go into the streets you see men maybe a few woman*

*Barbara (395) I'm not in the outside world I'm hiding*

Frederique’s account below speaks to the literature around women hiding in plain sight which looks at how women occupy public space or meet their basic needs in undetectable ways, consciously chosen to better safety and protection (Reeves et al., 2006). Providing examples of locations where she herself and other homeless women would sleep that meant they remained invisible, such as photobooths and toilets:

*(146-150) Inside the station there's a little room where you picture yourself*

*OA: Ah yeah photo booth with the curtain?*

*F: Yes so that if anyone is there they will not see me...*

*(410-412) Yeah yeah... I saw women this one woman from EU country because she's fully on the street maybe she's a student usually she have laptop she go to the toilet and lock herself because she wants to sleep*

Discussion around the strategies of safety used were prevalent, particularly highlighting the motivator of being hidden. Strategies such as moving between accommodation and locations, arranging last-minute and random accommodation set-ups with acquaintances, not staying in the same place and sleeping during the day instead of at night were all mentioned. This suggests attempts to remain unidentified perhaps informed by the stigma and risks associated with homeless women as discussed earlier (Casey et al., 2008). Alya spoke specifically about the risks associated with your location being known to others, whilst Sylvia confirmed her experience of being on the move as a homeless woman:

*Alya (230-232) so I prefer to go different places and then if someone is following me, they're asking me, oh, today I saw you here so I move from that place I don't feel safe*

*Sylvia (272-273) In and out homeless sometimes with friends sometimes in the streets, sometimes elsewhere*

Importantly, these strategies of safety, such as informal networks maintain an invisibility around women's homelessness due to this presentation being invisible to methods of data collection (Mayock & Sheridan, 2020). For example, Barbara discusses lying about her identity as a homeless woman, due to the lack of safety this imparts onto her:

*(519-521) Only libraries and bars and people gossiping "why are you on the street with no jacket" so I will lie and lie and lie. Women we tend to lie to protect ourselves*

This presents a tension between engaging in strategies to stay safe (i.e. hiding) and reaffirming perceptions that women's homelessness is not prevalent (Bretherton, 2021). With the consequences of this meaning that women are hidden from the methods used to measure and record homelessness, resulting in inaccurate perceptions and under representative data (May et

al., 2007; Reeves et al., 2006). Barbara and Frederique spoke to this conflict, with Barbara questioning the disparity she has experienced first-hand, calling for this to be better understood and addressed, as in much of the literature:

*Barbara (559) what's going on behind the cordons, where are they cause it's a high population*

*Frederique (511-512) Yes when you are writing this thing please let the government know that ladies lady... they need to protect women*

Gender (female) and identity (homelessness) were raised most by participants in how they adapted and used these identities, their associated characteristics and traits in various contexts to meet their needs. Barbara spoke about recognising and identifying with these strategies used by other homeless women to minimise their visibility, discussing that in female-only spaces she felt more able to flex her female identity and expressions due to feeling safe:

*(599-601) when I come here in this place identify much more as a woman my insides my expressions what I thought it was only me the behaviour, the behavioural expressions... I look I see a she's doing the same as me*

Mel spoke about not wearing make-up and dressing down in more neutral 'simple' clothing in an attempt to minimise her female identity when on the street:

*(360-363) I wouldn't put a makeup I wouldn't I would dress something like simple I was a bit scared and stuff I had full makeup as that attracts more men because they want you more want... I wanted not to be wanted I want to just people ignore me*

She also gave an account of meeting another homeless women who had learned through chronic homelessness that using identity disguises through adopting male traits, characteristics and performative tools would result in more safety:

*Mel (449-455) I just thought she would be LGBTQ or trans man but she said no I'm woman I just like, yeah, have been homeless for ages I find it easier to look and dress like man and you can see though men treat her differently (**really**) they treat her like a man and she does told me she definitely is not lesbian or something so she does it deliberately... she would say hI guys a woman wouldn't normally and they will just come to her... but she said she is deliberately doing that (**wow**) and you can see that when you start to talk with her she's not... talks differently with me... and she's very different with the men around her it's very interesting*

Huey & Berndt's (2008) research looked at how behaviours constructed as masculine such as toughness, fearlessness and assertiveness are adopted by women as a strategy of safety. In addition to this, they introduced a concept of 'passing' which defines an attempt by females to appear as lesbians to male audiences which is echoed in Mel's experience above. Mel went on to share how the disguise led her to believe the individual was a male finance manager (i.e. non-homeless individual), insinuating the effect adopting such traits, disguises and characteristics can have on how someone is perceived and treated:

*(438-441) she just said because it's safer she dressed like a man and she is not an LGBTQ she doesn't have the benefits as well she's constantly on the street she comes to the London day centre and she looks like a clean shaven man... I was like wow, she looks actually very British. Like a British gentleman (laughs) with the hair and jacket I was like, wow, she could be like a finance manager...*

Alya shared the physical strategies of safety she has drawn on whilst being homeless to protect herself from sexualisation and assault. She describes wearing multiple layers of clothing and adapting her clothing in summertime to mean her body is more difficult to access in the face of potential assault:



*(273-276) Yeah, yeah because for me, if I'm in street I have, I have for example, three trousers (right) let's say that so I am thinking if someone came to do something with me, so at least I have three trousers on (yeah) which is it takes time it takes time yeah to these three trousers the same on the top I have the same thing*

*(286-288) Yeah, summertime, I'm not quite sure to do that, or there is a trouser zip down from top to bottom a jumpsuit as well a little bit more safe ...I am trying my best to, you know, not to be harmed by someone*

A tension was raised by participants between needing to be invisible to stay safe and needing to be seen (i.e. as homeless women) to be eligible for support and have their needs met. This represents the delicate balance expected of participants, the responsibility placed on them and how this tension manifests in further challenges. For example, Mel spoke about needing to 'blend in':

*Mel (371-373) When you homeless you want to be as blending as possible not stand out*

Some participants spoke about the tension between needing to be visible to use homeless shelters and facilities but this meaning that their homeless identity became known to others. Mel described how your homeless identity being known means you are more likely to experience risk and sexual advances from men:

*Mel (460-465) You know I always talk with them at the London charity to say that I think this is something that you guys should start to focus on because you know they're not stupid they're not going to come and assault you at the London charity but they know we are homeless so they will come in the street and say I know you from the London charity (ahh mmm) they just know you're homeless and then they... I mean worst was there was a*

*guy and I wasn't expecting he was like oh, I know you from the London charity and grabbed my hand*

Whilst Lorna also spoke about her experience of being visible within female-only spaces and the challenges this can pose with others knowing your information:

*Lorna (854-856) but she's annoying if you see her in the street 'why you always priority?' they know that they give me the hotel as well even now I just ignore her*

These examples tie into the finding that fewer women present as homeless to services and access support, ultimately reinforcing the underreporting of women's homelessness (Phipps et al., 2018; Reeve et al., 2006), with additional barriers to exiting homelessness due to the lack of services which are informed by women's needs and experiences (Hutchingson et al., 2014). This sub-theme raises questions about the stereotypical construction of homelessness, how this is conceptualised by an idea of lone men in plain sight and who this serves. Thinking about the dominating visible face of homelessness (i.e. lone men) means that women are likely to continue to remain invisible to such conceptualisations and contexts (Reeve, 2018). Beyond that, this theme evidences the difference in experience within intersecting identities, i.e. Mel as a transgender woman and the clear need for further recognition, understanding, research and evidence needed within homelessness understandings.

#### **4.4.3 Acts of Resistance**

The sub-theme of 'acts of resistance' highlights the idea that homeless women can also shape shift to resist and challenge constraints placed on them systemically and environmentally such as stigma, stereotyping, victimisation, norms, roles and codes of conduct, amongst others to regain

power, agency and choice. This was present in six out of eight of the women's interviews both through first-hand accounts and in their description of observing these through others.

The idea of taking back power and agency through acts of resistance were present, whereby women had 'chosen' to be on the street. Lorna spoke about some of the reasons behind this 'choice':

*(580) it's not controlling her like sleeping the center*

*(48-50) talking to the ladies especially one in the corner of \*London location\* she don't want to stay here she want to stay on the street*

This idea of freedom on the streets links back to the conditional, controlled and time-limited nature of homeless support and help, as mentioned in 'illusion of choice'. A handful of participants attested to this, citing that some women 'chose' the streets due to the freedom it presents, resisting the systemic control placed on their lives by rejecting the conditional help offered to them in place of independence and self-governance:

*Lorna (988-991) mostly I yeah I going when I go to church in London location young, mostly young people there I saw but I think that's the one they choice to stay in the er... in the street like that on the pavement because they looks very nice their looks look like they have money but*

Alya shared her observations that some women 'choose' to be homeless to avoid financial demands which can instead be fulfilled by utilising organisations and facilities to meet their needs:

*Alya (338-343) some people, they choose to be homeless to be honest... honestly, they choose because maybe, maybe they want, they don't want rent, they don't want to pay so many things, they prefer to come here they wash their clothes and they stay here they go, maybe they have another family in the back home or something.. yeah, I'm not going to judge them, but some them they prefer to do that*

Lorna discussed how she feels some individuals capitalise on the set-up of the systems in place around homeless support and how homelessness is experienced, either by begging or by choosing to be on the street, conceptualising a resourcefulness and resisting the responsibilities and demands associated with accommodation:

*(995-996) I think that's their choice because they get money from the people they ask money from the people and maybe theyre happy to do that*

*(988-991) mostly I yeah I going when I go to church in London location young, mostly young people there I saw but I think that's the one they choice to stay in the er.. in the street like that on the pavement because they looks very nice their looks look like they have money but they want to stay on the street with the other people there*

Resistance to stereotypical constructs of 'home' were also discussed, seen in participants experiences and observations of women creating communities and home-spaces on the streets, reconceptualising and resisting the traditional idea of home (Bretherton & Pleace, 2023; Somerville, 1997). For example, Lorna shared:

*(1006-1007) I'm thinking why they want to sleep on the... just sitting there smoking eating there with the friend on the pavement in London location*

Lorna and Mel spoke about how women resist the weak and vulnerable stereotypes placed on them by looking after each other in order to stay safe:

*Lorna (561) Yeah we look each other even if we don't know them*

*Mel (505-507) I would try to keep woman around me so we can create like a team because they help me*

Frederique spoke about resisting the constraints put on her in terms of opportunities as a homeless woman and utilising her resourcefulness to resist these constraints through studying, skilling herself and encouraging other women by helping them learn how to use a laptop. Frederique described her experience of learning how to use a computer as a lifeline, advocating for learning and fulfilment to resist feelings of hopelessness and helplessness and regain agency and control:

*(189-190) Yeah because I know how to use computer... can do my own... my vocational thing online... some music and games*

*(377-384) I'm going to study this computer it was 10,000 Naira in my country I saved the money and that month I needed to start attending so when I came to London it was free I bought a laptop for myself and (indiscernible) so I encourage each one here don't even though you're going through that problem do something that is useful for you if I don't learn that computer I think I'd be dead cause you don't have anything to do you are in the library you will be sleep they don't allow you to sleep because if you got no computer you cannot so ladies I see what they're going through its a problem its a challenge but you have to do something that will help*

The systemic issues with help-seeking and the barriers that categorisation, technicalities and eligibility can pose to homeless women were discussed. Mel spoke about how different

categorisations i.e. domestic abuse can unlock more immediate support for women and that in some cases, women may fabricate such eligibility in order to access help, resisting systemic barriers and gaining back power:

*(534-537) I'm sorry to say that but once I went to a woman I said, say my partner domestically abused me... you can't continue because she's already abused every day in the street...I just said lie to them in order to get safety so she can get something... Because I was so upset seeing her*

Issues with unsuitable or inappropriate support were also mentioned due to systemic barriers, with Mel citing how she would reject support if it did not feel like a safe option for her, demonstrating resistance to ineffective help:

*(601-603) like if they now tell me we're gonna give you a place you can leave by yourself I probably wouldn't take it to continue here for a while **(you'd rather stay housed here in a female only setting?)** yeah I probably wouldn't feel safe I just don't feel ready for it*

The experiences and examples discussed in this sub-theme support arguments that women are not a homogenous group of passive victims void of power or agency (Neale, 1997). As noted in some of the research, language such as 'vulnerable' or 'disempowered' are commonly associated with the female homeless population, said to pose ethical dilemmas in reaffirming unequal power dynamics, reducing a strengths-based approach to the homeless population and disregarding positive psychology (Tribe & Bell, 2018; Neale, 1997).

Poststructuralist feminism purports that where there is power, there is resistance, and this arguably encourages wider contextualisation's to understand fragmentation in response to oppression, challenging the status quo. Applying a poststructuralist lens allows for engagement with how homeless women shape shift, navigate and respond to power structures, systemic

barriers and societal perceptions by engaging in acts of resistance to gain back power, as evidenced in the excerpts above. This sub-theme provides a perspective on how women shape shift to oppose forms of control and challenge the status quo of women as weak and vulnerable to fight against powerlessness (Foucault, 1991; Mayock & Sheridan, 2020).

#### **4.5 Summary of Unique Findings**

This research garnered unique findings and perspectives in looking at ‘women’s experiences of homelessness’. At the mercy of luck, shape shifting and acts of resistance offer understandings which go beyond the existing knowledge base and warrant further exploration. Importantly, these unique findings demonstrate what this research has created and the breadth of perspectives in relation to women’s experiences of homelessness. Incorporating contemporary theories of intersectionality and post structuralist feminism to expand the lenses of understandings and access the inter-related multi-layered structural and individual contexts which make up individual experiences of homelessness.

#### **4.6 Relevance to Counselling Psychology**

As Counselling Psychologists, we are responsible in acknowledging and utilising our power, expertise and access to marginalised populations to challenge power inequalities and powerlessness (Steffen & Hanley, 2013). Hore’s (2013) call to action for Counselling Psychologists to use their leadership and power to engage with homelessness and social justice issues is addressed through this research, demonstrating its relevance to Counselling Psychology. Hore (2013) reports that those experiencing homelessness in the UK are more likely to

experience emotional, physical, and mental health challenges than those who are housed, with the prevalence of mental health diagnoses reportedly 44% higher in the homeless population than the general population (Homelesslink, 2014). Homeless women within the homeless population are stigmatised, pathologised and alienated by society, experiencing additional marginalisation due to their gender and intersectional discrimination within the homeless population, which has seen higher risk of abuse and violence (Savage, 2016).

With the knowledge of the psychological harm of homelessness and women representing a vulnerable segment of this population, women's homelessness is contextualised as crucially relevant to Counselling Psychology in its clarity as a social justice issue (Hore, 2013). As defined by the BPS (2018), the division of Counselling Psychology is committed to 'fairness, equality and social justice', whilst the Health & Care Professions Council (2015) standards for proficiency state the importance of practitioner psychologists understanding the impact of difference (including gender) on psychological wellbeing to adapt their practice to meet the needs of different groups.

Counselling Psychologists have been championing and seeking to empower homeless populations for decades, as much of the research from the 1990s and 2000s attests, demonstrating the importance of homelessness to the discipline. The existing literature concerning women's homelessness can be used to inform our practice as Counselling Psychologists in understanding the context of homelessness and in doing so challenge pathologisation and discrimination to better understand individual needs and alleviate psychological distress (Hore, 2013). If Counselling Psychologists are to hold oppressive views of



homelessness to account, then first, a foundation of sound understanding of women's homelessness is needed to springboard from.

#### **4.7 Implications for Clinical Practice**

This research aimed to give voice to homeless women as a marginalised group and address Counselling Psychology's commitment to issues of social justice to encourage inclusion and reduce social inequality (BPS, 2017; Tribe and Bell, 2018). A transformational leadership approach was taken to this research to represent a 'hidden' population, challenge the status quo and engage with women's homelessness as complex and relational (Fassinger & Shullman, 2017; Lane & Corrie, 2006). The existing literature highlights the gap in knowledge about women's experiences of homelessness, the role of difference (i.e. gender) on psychological distress, pathologisation and discrimination of a vulnerable group (Hore, 2013).

The Division of Counselling Psychology calls for social contexts and discrimination, concerned with the semantics, beliefs and contexts which mediate psychological wellbeing to be focused on (BPS, 2005). Yet the education, training and curricula seem largely absent of specific guidance for clinicians working with homeless populations, who instead are grouped into the marginalised category without further distillment of their individual differences. There is call to action for Counselling Psychology training to look beyond an individual therapeutic lens and expand this to incorporate social and community understandings which can inform teaching and training. As continued development of knowledge and understanding stands practitioners in better stead to advocate, champion and empower marginalised groups, such as homeless women (Tribe & Bell, 2018). The BPS (2021) code of human research ethics provides general guidance for the research

but the individual differences of specific populations such as homeless women warrant tailored ethical guidelines specific to this population. For example, multiple-exclusion homelessness, gender roles, social norms and performative identities would be relevant areas and issues to include.

Based on what is known about the experience homelessness has on long-term psychological wellbeing, it is assumed Counselling Psychologists will encounter homeless clients in various contexts. This research highlights the lack of understanding, services and provision informed by those with lived experience to challenge the position of 'passive service recipients' without agency or internal locus of control (Tribe & Bell, 2018, p. 113). With a lack of research relating to homelessness from a Counselling Psychology discourse, informed therapeutic work with so called 'hard to reach' groups such as homeless women are crucial, through improving knowledge and ensuring practitioners ways of working are therapeutically informed through self-reflexivity. Reflexive practice for practitioners about their constructions of home and the homeless population should be explored based on the stereotypes and discrimination implored societally onto those without homes (Thompson & Thompson, 2023). Clinical practice must be informed by self-reflexivity, with awareness from the clinician about what they bring to the dynamic and self-reflection around issues related to homelessness such as power, social norms, assumptions, hierarchies, and resistance to oppression, reflecting on their own positioning and place within these frames as an individual. As Prillettensky & Nelson (2002) state, psychologists must remember that they do not exist outside of power vacuums, demonstrating the need to reflect on their power and role in systems of oppression. Engaging in these practices will inform

practitioners awareness of individual needs, improve therapeutic practice and psychological wellbeing (Hore, 2013).

This study has contributed to the field of Counselling Psychology to provide further understanding of how women experience homelessness, finding that homeless women experience lack of agency, othering, dehumanisation and barriers in their interactions with homeless services and professionals in various settings. This suggests that more needs to be done to educate and encourage self-awareness and reflexivity in professionals dealing with the homeless population, from healthcare staff to psychological practitioners about how their beliefs and views of the world and others are imparted. The implications from this research advocate for social justice, intersectional and post-structural feminist approaches to be adopted by clinicians to engage with deeper issues and therefore reduce the psychological distress that these additional dynamics can have on individuals and their help-seeking behaviours.

## **4.8 Quality Evaluation**

Yardley's (2000) guiding principles for quality in qualitative research outlined in the methodology chapter have been applied in relation to the quality of this study. Specifically, it's sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence and impact and importance.

### ***4.8.2 Sensitivity to Context***

I aimed to acknowledge and address both power and ethical contexts throughout this research. Before the interviews with participants, I shared and acknowledged my position as a researcher aiming to understand more about homeless women's experiences, acknowledging the participants role in the dynamic as experts-by-experience. The interview schedule was designed to be informal and open to allow for participants to steer the narrative and guide the research. In doing so I aimed to address the power imbalance within the process of investigation and attend to this from an ethical context (Yardley, 2000). Verbatim quotes from participants were included at length to ensure their voices were represented (Goodman et al., 2004). Awareness was applied in relation to the setting of the interviews, with privacy ensured and secured via a private room due to interviews taking place at a homeless organisation participants attend. Chapter One demonstrates immersion in the literature around the topic to ground the research in theoretical context.

#### ***4.8.3 Commitment and Rigour***

Commitment to participants was prioritised throughout. In-depth engagement with empirical data collection and analysis was facilitated by the methodology and through reflexive thematic analysis. All transcripts were typed up by hand, with the analysis, including coding, distilling and finalising written out by hand without the use of coding software to ensure rigorous immersion in the data and thus competence in analysis (as evidenced in the appendices). My previous experience in conducting research was applied, building in a pilot interview to allow for the interview schedule to be reviewed and optimised to ensure quality. The sample was diverse and

varied, demonstrating its adequacy for comprehensive analysis by providing multiple perspectives.

This research aimed to demonstrate ethical rigour throughout by acknowledging the power-dynamics which can naturally occur, positioning the researcher as expert (Steffen & Hanley, 2013). Power discrepancies were worked against by encouraging open dialogue around prejudice, oppression, power and acts of resistance, as well as acknowledging individual contexts to empower participants contributions. Participants roles as experts of their experience were acknowledged prior to the interviews to highlight the collaborative joint venture approach of this research and highlight the knowledge and expertise they brought to the dynamic (Afuape & Hughes, 2016; Goodman et al., 2004).

#### ***4.8.4 Transparency and Coherence***

Engagement in self-reflexivity throughout the methodology and discussion aided transparency by reflecting on my positioning, choices, assumptions and biases which formed my interpretations and their influence on the research and findings. Transparency can also be seen by detailing the procedure and providing visual examples of each stage of analysis as seen in the appendices, alongside multiple excerpts from the data to help the reader understand the interpretations made and follow the meaning-making process.

#### ***4.8.5 Impact and Importance***

The lack of literature about women's homelessness resulting in psychological distress demonstrates the importance of the contribution of knowledge to reduce distress societally and clinically. By representing fresh voices and experiences, the research builds momentum and awareness for women's homelessness. The richness of the transcripts, the depth and breadth of the themes and unique findings presented in the analysis demonstrate the impact and importance of novel perspectives in answering the research question, the implications for Counselling Psychology and the need for future research.

#### **4.9 Limitations**

Reflecting on the limitations concerning this research encourages transparency and improvements for future research. Recruitment relied on purposive sampling which involved a third-party gatekeeper who distributed information to potential participants. This may have created a level of separation, perhaps informing an initial power imbalance. Whilst the sample size falls within that recommended for TA, a larger sample size sampled from different organisations and services could have yielded more diversity in experience, perhaps providing more representative, generalisable and varied data. Whilst participants' voices verbatim were used at length throughout the discussion, championing a collaborative representative approach, more detail about participants through further demographic questions would have created a better picture of participants, ensuring they were not deduced to statistics or case studies, in turn, working against the power remaining with the researcher (O'Connor, 2005).

Through the process of self-reflexivity prior to data collection, I was aware of needing to bracket my prior experience and assumptions to reduce interviewer bias (Smith et al., 2021). In the initial

stages of analysis I became aware that perhaps my preconceived ideas and experiences were pre-emptively informing deductive theme ideas and formation before thorough analysis. Discussing this with my director of studies, I decided to carry out the analysis process by hand to facilitate immersion in the dataset and followed Braun & Clarke's (2022) guidance to repeat the prior stage of analysis to ensure the thematic map fit the dataset rather than preconceived ideas. As a result, I re-read the transcripts multiple times and coded and re-coded to review and distil meaning prior to defining themes.

As raised in the methodology, language barriers and therefore perhaps issues with semantics and transcreation likely occurred in some interviews and transcriptions, such as Guilia's. Providing the option of a translator could have helped in these circumstances to facilitate participants to express themselves in their native language, capture the raw meaning and perhaps put them more at ease. This therefore suggests that building in an additional screening stage prior to interviews whereby the researcher could discuss the research and decipher any participant needs would have been useful. Additionally, the agenda of the researcher in meeting their objectives and attending to their pressures of fulfilling a 'good' research project may have reduced the level of informality and openness in the interviews.

#### **4.10 Future Considerations**

Several areas for future direction were identified through the process of this research. Overall, qualitative enquiry is needed at a broader level addressing women's experiences of homelessness to provide rich, in-depth, individualised research to establish a sound foundation, wider evidence base and areas for distilled research. Qualitative research at structural and individual levels are required to understand more about hidden homelessness, gender roles, constructions of

homelessness, structures of power, evolving adaptations to homelessness and methodological innovation in how homelessness is recorded. These are some of the areas identified through this research which warrant further exploration, coupled with a need for distinctions between raising ideas and evidencing them through sound research. For example, specifically, research is needed to investigate how societal influence and cultural bias around gender roles and associated prejudice influence the recording of homelessness (Bretherton & Pleace, 2018).

Research addressing the characteristics, traits and demographics in relation to women's experiences of homelessness, for example, race or duration of time in homelessness would provide refined insight into this population. Interpersonal experiences homeless women have with different societal groups, such as professionals, the public and other homeless individuals present a path of enquiry which would incorporate social identity theory and the social hierarchies discussed. As Parsell (2011, p. 445) highlights, "rarely is it explained how individuals who are homeless actively shape and display their identities", noting the relevance of studying the processes through which identities are constructed, resisted, and reshaped within a homeless domain (Preece et al., 2020). Further research looking at marginalised identities within women's homelessness would bolster understanding about how the construction and perception of identity influences experiences of homelessness, for example, in LGBTQ+ or older adult homeless populations. With a handful of themes evidencing the need to hone in on the different intersections of gender within homelessness (i.e. transgender women), how such identities can elicit such different experiences and the reasons behind this, evidencing a call to action for a more filtered approach to understanding these sectors.



Adopting a narrative analysis in future research could enable more of a story-telling lens focusing more acutely on individual difference and the uniqueness of experience. Whilst a discourse analysis approach could assess the role of language and semantics associated with homelessness further, particularly considering the prevalence of multi-culturalism within homelessness. As women's homelessness becomes anchored in a stronger evidence base over time, this will provide a lens which can move away from homogenising experiences and inform research further down the funnel, contributing to knowledge and representation. The unique findings offered by this research are hoped to inspire future research and researchers to adopt and bolster further qualitative enquiry.

With regards to dissemination of the research, both stakeholders from the charity organisation and participants will be offered a copy of the research as well as a shorter summary. The research will aim to be published to represent and create awareness of women's voices and experiences in homelessness, contribute to the small evidence base, inform clinical practice and encourage momentum and further research into this topic (Hore, 2013). Once published, the research could be disseminated to homeless organisations, projects and charities, as well as to practitioners and professionals within NHS healthcare settings working with the homeless population and those at risk to share the issues affecting women and inform work with homeless women to advocate for this group.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

The first three themes: illusion of choice, intersecting identities and habituation to trauma and abuse all frame a paradoxical way of living for homeless women, highlighting the disparity between perception and reality of women's experiences and the added dynamic of difficulty this poses. The fourth theme, shape shifting, also alludes to paradoxical themes, with women walking a tightrope between needing to meet their needs but remain hidden as well as women resisting constraints (stereotypes, gender roles, perceptions) through their identities, how they occupy space and present. These paradoxes confirm and reaffirm many areas reported in the literature regarding absence of knowledge and misunderstandings about women's homelessness, their needs and experiences, the ways in which they meet their needs and ultimately, their experiences of homelessness – which this research question aimed to tackle. Of particular importance are the unique findings, generated exclusively from this research, specifically looking to the concept of luck and an evolution from hidden homelessness to specifically how gender and identity are flexed and adapted to meet needs.

All themes generated reflect the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality theory and post-structuralist feminism, linking back to these ideologies which address social environments, position women's homelessness as socially and relationally embedded and engage with contemporary perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of women's homelessness (Crenshaw, 1989). Post-structuralist feminist lenses welcome the multidimensional ways in which homelessness is experienced by women, welcoming debates about agency, power and resistance, producing an understanding of how homelessness and housing instability is negotiated (differently) by women. Championing an approach which spotlights lived experiences

and empowerment focused understandings which counter simplified and generalised approaches to homelessness (Bretherton, 2017; Mayock and Sheridan, 2021; Pleace, 2016).

The qualitative approach of this research has been essential in giving voice and representation to homeless women and the complexity of their experiences structurally, societally and practically rather than whitewashing their experiences through statistics. This research has overwhelmingly magnified the multi-faceted difficulties and complexities women face in a homelessness context, alongside the ever-evolving nature of women's homelessness as aligned with the socio-cultural-political constructs within which the phenomenon sits. The evolution and fluidity of women's homelessness is increasingly seen through the creative ways homeless women are forced to explore to remain hidden. For example, adopting performative gender tools and 'passing' (adopting homosexual identities) as strategies of safety, demonstrating how methods of data collection informed by outdated understandings serve to reinforce the invisibility, underreporting and therefore neglect of women's homelessness. This research and its findings demonstrate the relevance and importance of women's experiences of homelessness as a social justice issue central to the discipline of Counselling Psychology and its values. Through giving voice to homeless women and representing their experiences, it is hoped this research tends to the social justice mission through advocating for marginalised groups and increasing knowledge and understanding which can inform policy and services from structural and individual perspectives.

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## **Appendix A: Recruitment Brief Sheet for Organisation and Participants**

### **Research brief sheet for participants**

**Title:** Women's experiences of homelessness

**What is the study about/for:** I am a Counselling Psychology trainee interested in women's experiences of homelessness having worked in homelessness day centres. There appears to be a lack of research and understanding in relation to women's experiences, needs and services relating to homelessness and this research will therefore aim to address the gap in the literature (anonymously) represent women's voices and hopefully encourage momentum and awareness of women's stories of homelessness to inform services and policy.

**Who:** 8 individuals who identify as women, between the ages of 18-60 who have been homeless in the last 2 years but who are not currently homeless

**What will this involve:** An informal interview (roughly 1hr – 1h30) where we discuss your experiences and stories around homelessness. This will be an informal discussion and I will ensure we have breaks during the interview should you need them.

**What happens before the study:** You will be given a full information sheet telling you in more detail everything you need to know about the study, you will then be asked to sign a consent form to ensure you give consent to participate.

**Where will this take place:** A safe private room will be provided at Project A

**What incentive will be offered:** A £15 Sainsburys voucher

**Will the interviews be recorded / how will they be kept anonymous:** Yes, the interviews will be audio recorded but all names and identifying information will be kept confidential and anonymised (names will be replaced with codes and letters)

**When:** Between November - January/February

**What happens after the study:** The interviews will make up part of the research and will be turned into a 'research dissertation' – this plus a summary will be available to you towards the end of the study once this has been written up and assessed. However, after the study, I will ensure I check in with you and after-care counselling services will be provided should you feel you need any additional support.

## Appendix B: Ethics Review Decision Letter

### School of Psychology Ethics Committee

#### NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION LETTER

**For research involving human participants**

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

**Reviewer:** Please complete sections in **blue** | **Student:** Please complete/read sections in **orange**

| Details                         |                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reviewer:</b>                | Please type your full name<br><b>Lucia Berdondini</b>                                                  |
| <b>Supervisor:</b>              | Please type supervisor's full name<br><b>Lucy Poxon</b>                                                |
| <b>Student:</b>                 | Please type student's full name<br><b>Olivia Adamson</b>                                               |
| <b>Course:</b>                  | Please type course name<br><b>Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology</b>                     |
| <b>Title of proposed study:</b> | <b>Experiences of women who have been homeless: A critical realist social constructionist approach</b> |

#### Checklist

(Optional)

|                                                                                                                        | YES                      | NO                       | N/A                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Concerns regarding study aims (e.g., ethically/morally questionable, unsuitable topic area for level of study, etc.)   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Detailed account of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Concerns regarding participants/target sample                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Detailed account of recruitment strategy                                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Concerns regarding recruitment strategy                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All relevant study materials attached (e.g., freely available questionnaires, interview schedules, tests, etc.)        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Study materials (e.g., questionnaires, tests, etc.) are appropriate for target sample                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Clear and detailed outline of data collection                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Data collection appropriate for target sample                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If deception being used, rationale provided, and appropriate steps followed to communicate study aims at a later point | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If data collection is not anonymous, appropriate steps taken at later stages to ensure                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|                                                                                                                                              |                          |                          |                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| participant anonymity (e.g., data analysis, dissemination, etc.) – anonymisation, pseudonymisation                                           |                          |                          |                          |
| Concerns regarding data storage (e.g., location, type of data, etc.)                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Concerns regarding data sharing (e.g., who will have access and how)                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Concerns regarding data retention (e.g., unspecified length of time, unclear why data will be retained/who will have access/where stored)    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If required, General Risk Assessment form attached                                                                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any physical/psychological risks/burdens to participants have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Any physical/psychological risks to the researcher have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If required, Country-Specific Risk Assessment form attached                                                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If required, a DBS or equivalent certificate                                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|                                                                                                                                                             |                          |                          |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| number/information provided                                                                                                                                 |                          |                          |                          |
| If required, permissions from recruiting organisations attached (e.g., school, charity organisation, etc.)                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All relevant information included in the participant information sheet (PIS)                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information in the PIS is study specific                                                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Language used in the PIS is appropriate for the target audience                                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All issues specific to the study are covered in the consent form                                                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Language used in the consent form is appropriate for the target audience                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| All necessary information included in the participant debrief sheet                                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Language used in the debrief sheet is appropriate for the target audience                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Study advertisement included                                                                                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Content of study advertisement is appropriate (e.g., researcher's personal contact details are not shared, appropriate language/visual material used, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Decision options

|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>APPROVED</b>                                                                          | Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice), to the date it is submitted for assessment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>APPROVED - BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES</b> | <p>In this circumstance, the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <b><u>before</u></b> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box at the end of this form once all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to the supervisor. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.</p> <p><b>Minor amendments guidance:</b> typically involve clarifying/amending information presented to participants (e.g., in the PIS, instructions), further detailing of how data will be securely handled/stored, and/or ensuring consistency in information presented across materials.</p> |
| <b>NOT APPROVED - MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED</b>                        | <p>In this circumstance, a revised ethics application <b><u>must</u></b> be submitted and approved <b><u>before</u></b> any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.</p> <p><b>Major amendments guidance:</b> typically insufficient information has been provided, insufficient consideration given to several key aspects, there are serious concerns regarding any aspect of the project, and/or serious concerns in the candidate's ability to ethically, safely and sensitively execute the study.</p>                                                                                           |

## Decision on the above-named proposed research study

Please indicate the decision:

**APPROVED**

## Minor amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

## Major amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

## Assessment of risk to researcher

|                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?</b>                                                                                       | <b>YES</b><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>NO</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                                                                                                                    | If no, please request resubmission with an <b><u>adequate risk assessment.</u></b>                                                                                                                                                         |                                       |
| <b>If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard, please rate the degree of risk:</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                       |
| <b>HIGH</b>                                                                                                                                                        | Please <b>do not approve a high-risk</b> application. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not be approved on this basis. If unsure, please refer to the Chair of Ethics. | <input type="checkbox"/>              |
| <b>MEDIUM</b>                                                                                                                                                      | Approve but include appropriate recommendations in the below box.                                                                                                                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/>              |
| <b>LOW</b>                                                                                                                                                         | Approve and if necessary, include any recommendations in the below box.                                                                                                                                                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |
| <b>Reviewer recommendations in relation to risk (if any):</b>                                                                                                      | Please insert any recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                       |

## Reviewer's signature

|                                                      |                         |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Reviewer:</b><br>(Typed name to act as signature) | <b>Lucia Berdondini</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>                                         | <b>22/09/2023</b>       |



***This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Ethics Committee***

**RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE**

For the researcher and participants involved in the above-named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard.

**Confirmation of minor amendments**

(Student to complete)

**I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data**

**Student name:**

(Typed name to act as signature)

**Student number:**

Please type your student number

**Date:**

Click or tap to enter a date

***Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed if minor amendments to your ethics application are required***

## **Appendix C: Title Change Approval Form**



**University of  
East London**

**Department of Psychology and Human Development Ethics  
Committee**

**School of Childhood and Social Care**

**REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION**

For BSc, MSc/MA and Professional Doctorate students

**Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the Department of Psychology and Human Development**

By applying for a change of title request, you confirm that in doing so, the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed, then you are required to complete an 'Ethics Application Amendment Form'.

### How to complete and submit the request

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Complete the request form electronically.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2 | Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).                                                                                                                                       |
| 3 | Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to Dr Rita Lopes (Ethics Committee Member): <a href="mailto:r.lopes@uel.ac.uk">r.lopes@uel.ac.uk</a> |
| 4 | Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.                      |

### Required documents

|                                                            |                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application. | <b>YES</b><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|

### Details

|                            |                                                         |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Name of applicant:</b>  | <b>Olivia Adamson</b>                                   |
| <b>Programme of study:</b> | <b>Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology</b> |
| <b>Title of research:</b>  | <b>Women's experiences of homelessness</b>              |
| <b>Name of supervisor:</b> | <b>Dr. Lucy Poxon</b>                                   |

### Proposed title change

| Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below |                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Old title:</b>                                                           | Experiences of women who have been homeless: A critical realist social constructionist approach |
| <b>New title:</b>                                                           | Women's experiences of homelessness                                                             |
| <b>Rationale:</b>                                                           | This was my original title, the 'old title' was added in error - apologies                      |

| Confirmation                                                                                         |                                                   |                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Is your supervisor aware of your proposed change of title and in agreement with it?                  | <b>YES</b><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>NO</b><br><input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research? | <b>YES</b><br><input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>NO</b><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

| Student's signature                                 |                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Student:</b><br>(Typed name to act as signature) | <b>Olivia Adamson</b> <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a> |
| <b>Date:</b>                                        | 31.10.2024                                                      |

| Reviewer's decision                                  |                                                   |                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Title change approved:</b>                        | <b>YES</b><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <b>NO</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Comments:</b>                                     | Please enter any further comments here            |                                       |
| <b>Reviewer:</b><br>(Typed name to act as signature) | <b>Rita Lopes</b>                                 |                                       |
| <b>Date:</b>                                         | <b>06/11/2024</b>                                 |                                       |

## **Appendix D: Interview Schedule**

### **Interview schedule**

1. Can you tell me about your journey into homelessness?

*Prompts: when did you become homeless, where did you go?*

2. Can you describe what it felt like for you to be homeless/did you consider yourself to be homeless/how would you describe being homeless?
3. How did it feel to be a female who was homeless?

4. Do you feel that being a woman changed how you experienced homelessness and if so, how?

5. What were the behaviours you might have engaged in to feel/stay safe whilst homeless?

6. What were the behaviours you might have engaged in when you did not feel safe?

7. How did you experience safety as a homeless woman?

8. What were the issues you faced whilst being homeless?

*Prompt further depending on what is brought up*

9. How did you feel you were seen as a homeless woman by others who were homeless / by the public?

10. How do you feel women are experiencing homelessness now / do you feel this is changing/evolving/adapting?

### **Appendix E: Confirmation of Consent from Organisation (by supervisor)**

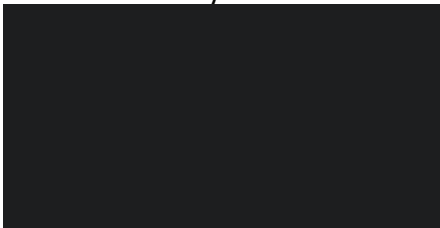
In order to protect the confidentiality of the project that is supporting the student in recruitment of participants, please find below my signed confirmation that I (DOS) have read the approval letter from “Project A” where Olivia Adamson is recruiting participants for her Doctoral research.

I confirm that they state:

*I provide Olivia Adamson from the University of East London permission to carry out their doctoral thesis at our charity (Project A). We are aware that Olivia will undertake this research in line with the British Psychological Society and UEL’s code of ethics to ensure ethical robustness,*

*Signed, Acting Operations Manager (Project A).*

Yours sincerely



Dr Lucy Poxon, Counselling Psychologist  
Lecturer  
Director of Studies

## Appendix F: Participant Consent Form



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### Women's experiences of homelessness

Contact person: Olivia Adamson

Email: [u2068210@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u2068210@uel.ac.uk)

|                                                                                                                                                          | Please<br>initial |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated XX/XX/XXXX (version X) for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep. |                   |
| I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.                                        |                   |
| I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without explanation or disadvantage.                   |                   |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| I understand that if I withdraw during the study, my data will not be used.                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| I understand that I have 3 weeks from the date of the in-person interview to withdraw my data from the study.                                                                                                                                 |  |
| I understand that the interview will be recorded using an audio Dictaphone.                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| I understand that my personal information and data, including audio recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission. |  |
| It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.                                                                                                                                                |  |
| I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview data may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.   |  |
| I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.                                                                                |  |
| I agree to take part in the above study.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....  
 .....

Participant's Signature

.....  
 .....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

OLIVIA ADAMSON

.....  
 .....

Researcher's Signature



.....  
.....  
Date

.....  
.....

## Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

**The experiences of women who have been homeless**

**Contact person: Olivia Adamson**

**Email: [u2068210@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u2068210@uel.ac.uk)**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not, please carefully read through the following information which outlines what your participation would involve. Feel free to talk with others about the study (e.g., friends, family,

etc.) before making your decision. If anything is unclear or you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above email.

**Who am I?**

My name is Olivia Adamson and I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London (UEL) studying for a Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. As part of my studies, I am conducting research into women's experiences of homelessness that you are being invited to participate in.

**What is the purpose of the research?**

I am conducting research into the experiences of women who have been homeless, with the aim of giving voice to an underrepresented group in homelessness literature and one of the fastest growing homeless populations. The findings from the study will aim to contribute to the current small evidence base and provide further insights into women's experiences. The research aims to provide a space to hear your story, understand more about women's experiences and hopefully add to what we currently know to promote better informed policies and services.

**Why have I been invited to take part?**

To address the study aims, I am inviting women who have been homeless in the last 2 years to take part in my research. If you are a woman between the age of 18-65 who has experienced homelessness in the last 2 years and would like to share your experiences, you are eligible to take part in the study. It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not, participation is voluntary.

**What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured informal interview to discuss your experiences of homelessness. This is expected to take between 1-2 hours with potential for a follow-up interview if necessary. Interviews will take place at 'Project A' in a meeting room or similar. The interviews will be audio recorded using a Dictaphone and stored securely on MS Teams using codes to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Payment in the form of a Tesco voucher will be provided to thank you for your time and to cover any travel expenses.

**Can I change my mind?**

Yes, you can change your mind up until 3 weeks after the start of the study and up until that point you can withdraw without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. If you would like to withdraw from the study into the experiences of women who have been homeless you can do so by emailing the address at the top of this sheet to inform me, up until 3 weeks after the start of the study. If you decide to withdraw, your data will not be used as part of the research.

Separately, you can also request to withdraw your data from being used even after you have taken part in the study, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of collection of data (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

**Are there any disadvantages to taking part?**

- Talking about personal experiences of homelessness could evoke some emotion or distress, I will be sure to monitor this, provide breaks and check-in throughout
- Information for appropriate support will be shared ahead of time and after-care will also be signposted to ensure third party specialist support is available throughout the research process.

**How will the information I provide be kept secure and confidential?**

Clearly outline what will happen to the data during and after its collection. This should include:

- Participants will not be identified by the data collected, or any material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research. All identifiable information will be coded (through letters and numbers) and therefore anonymised – with only myself the researcher able to decipher the code.
- Data will be stored in the UEL One Drive which provides a secure location. Only myself as the researcher will have access to the raw data and recordings. My research supervisor will also have access via UEL One Drive to the pseudonymised transcripts. Personal contact details will be stored in the UEL One Drive which is a secure location for up to 2 years post research.
- Research data will also be stored in the UEL One Drive
- Data will be transferred via the UEL One Drive, via shared access links to ensure maximum security
- Myself – the researcher and a third-party transcription company (UEL recommended) will have access to the raw data (which will not be anonymised). My research supervisor will then have access to the anonymised data which ensures confidentiality to all participants.
- Research data will be anonymised using letters and numbers only decipherable by the researcher.
- My research supervisor, examiners and eventually those with access to the UEL repository will have access to the anonymised data
- Once the study has been completed, the contact details of participants, interview recordings, transcripts will be stored safely on the UEL One Drive for up to 2 years before being destroyed.
- I as the researcher will be responsible for the personal contact details stored of participants in a password protected location. These details will be retained should you wish to take part in future research.

- Confidentiality will need to be broken should it be deemed that there is risk to self or others, however you will be notified of this and be kept updated on all stages of this, with as aforementioned, counselling and support provided.

For the purposes of data protection, the University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University processes this information under the 'public task' condition contained in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Where the University processes particularly sensitive data (known as 'special category data' in the GDPR), it does so because the processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how the University processes personal data please see [www.uel.ac.uk/about/about-uel/governance/information-assurance/data-protection](http://www.uel.ac.uk/about/about-uel/governance/information-assurance/data-protection)

#### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally [personally identifying information will either be removed or replaced using codes only decipherable to the researcher].

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided. If you are interested, you can email to request a copy of the study.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by Dr. Lucy Poxon for a maximum of 5 years, following which all data will be deleted.

#### **Who has reviewed the research?**

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

#### **Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?**

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

[Olivia Adamson / [U2068210@uel.ac.uk](mailto:U2068210@uel.ac.uk)]

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor Dr. Lucy Poxon School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,  
Email: [l.poxon@uel.ac.uk](mailto:l.poxon@uel.ac.uk)

**or**

Chair of School Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.  
(Email: [t.patel@uel.ac.uk](mailto:t.patel@uel.ac.uk))

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet**

## **Appendix H: Participant Debrief Sheet**



### **PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET**

#### **Women's experiences of homelessness**

Thank you for participating in my research study on women's experiences of homelessness. This document offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

**How will my data be managed?**

The University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. More detailed information is available in the Participant Information Sheet, which you received when you agreed to take part in the research.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by Dr. Lucy Poxon for a maximum of 5 years, following which all data will be deleted.

**What if I been adversely affected by taking part?**

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise distress or harm of any kind. Nevertheless, it is possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways, you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

**EACH Counselling & Support**

Counselling and support to help people affected by drugs and alcohol, mental health issues and violence and abuse, to remain safe, sustain positive change and lead meaningful lives.

Telephone : 020 8577 6059  
Email: [info@eachcounselling.org.uk](mailto:info@eachcounselling.org.uk)  
[www.eachcounselling.org.uk](http://www.eachcounselling.org.uk)

### **Solace Women's Aid**

Free advice and support to women and children in London to build safe and strong lives.

**Advice helpline:** 0808 80205565 (Monday – Friday 10 am – 4 pm)

Email: [advice@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:advice@solacewomensaid.org)

### **Woman's Trust**

Specialist mental health charity, providing free counselling and therapy for women who have experienced domestic abuse.

Phone: 020 7034 0303

Email: [office@womanstrust.org.uk](mailto:office@womanstrust.org.uk)

[www.womanstrust.org.uk](http://www.womanstrust.org.uk)

### **Women & Girls Network**

Free, women-only service that supports women in London who have experienced violence, or are at risk of violence. They offer counselling, advocacy and advice for women and girls who have experienced gendered violence.

Advice line: 0808 801 0660 (Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm, Wednesday 6-9pm)

Sexual violence line: 0808 801 0770 (Monday- Friday 10.00-12.30 & 14.30-16.00, and Wednesday 18.00-21.00)

Website: [www.wgn.org.uk](http://www.wgn.org.uk)

**Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?**

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Olivia Adamson / [u2068210@uel.ac.uk](mailto:u2068210@uel.ac.uk)

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor Dr. Lucy Poxon School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: [l.poxon@uel.ac.uk](mailto:l.poxon@uel.ac.uk)

**or**

Chair of School Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: [t.patel@uel.ac.uk](mailto:t.patel@uel.ac.uk))

**Thank you for taking part in my study**

**Appendix I: Analysis Example of Phase Two Coding**



8 And it can go off on a tangent that that you feel, you know, you would like to talk about. So I'm just  
9 going to start by saying, you know, in the broader context erm can you kind of share your story and tell  
10 me about the kind of events that led to you experiencing homelessness?

11  
12 B: homelessness and trauma or just homelessness?

13  
14 OA: What was your kind of experience of... how did how did you come about to be...

15  
16 B: being in a trauma traumatic situation erm it was a lot of violence, alcoholism... drugs erm sex  
17 working you know erm... so uh I had no choice but to be erm well it was it was a lot of poverty so it was  
18 no choice in that matter to survive in the streets

19  
20 OA: And what was your what's your um kind of experience that led to that, to that point of becoming  
21 kind of on the streets? What's your

22  
23 B: so what experience is growing up in a dysfunctional alcoholic home, a lot of drugs that are violence,  
24 beatings, severe punishment um a lot of shame, emotional, physical abandonment, and to survive, to be  
25 alive then then, I was kicked out in the street all the time. So luckily, I was on the streets, Usually other  
26 people are on the streets, and it's very familiar to be on the streets and the people that they have, they  
27 have chaotic lives and they're on a helpless erm they feel helpless or they feel down the chain and so I  
28 met people like that, like me, because it's very familiar yeah? and we expect nothing, we hope nothing  
29 and the outcome is going to be the same which is rejection and abandonment so why try? That's  
30 familiarity. (indiscernible) the 10 years, yeah, centuries... a number of centuries you see the other side  
31 to be in in a loving erm... emotional, physical essence within that was very unfamiliar, let alone out  
32 outside so what else what I was projecting from the inside is unsafety erm lack of self erm knowledge  
33 and awareness, lack of self knowing who I am? So erm that uh matches you know, I subconsciously I  
34 seek, you know, seeking people like I that they don't know themselves they lost, they feel really  
35 ashamed of the thinking and the doings and the acting outs... erm that's because of the lack of self  
36 management or self love. You know? And that takes a lot of consequence in health matters in bodily  
37 matters it really does in the nervous system as an example we're always... well not really, people like  
38 us are stuck in in in hybrid amazon you know, too much and out of too much adrenaline too much  
39 excitement too much trauma and that er it takes a lot of energy it takes a lot of um uh blood pressure,  
40 cardiac... heart problems inflammation bodily inflammation and um lack of concentration lack of  
41 intimacy lack of joy lack of um companions to be creative, you know and it takes its toll on the body and  
42 the body and the mind and the spirit, the spirit is rocking and the mind is gone you know, through the

QA Olivia ADAMSON

- no choice in experiencing traumatic situations on the street
- no choice but to survive on the streets

QA Olivia ADAMSON

- The streets as the best of two evils - to be on the streets is to survive
- Habituation to an abusive environment

QA Olivia ADAMSON

- 'we expect nothing, we hope nothing' - no expectation
- the outcome of the collective 'we' as always being let down (repetitive cycle)

October 29, 2024 at 5:48 PM

@mention or reply

QA Olivia ADAMSON

- Identity beyond survival on the streets doesn't exist
- Lacking life experience, identity development and sense of self as survival takes over

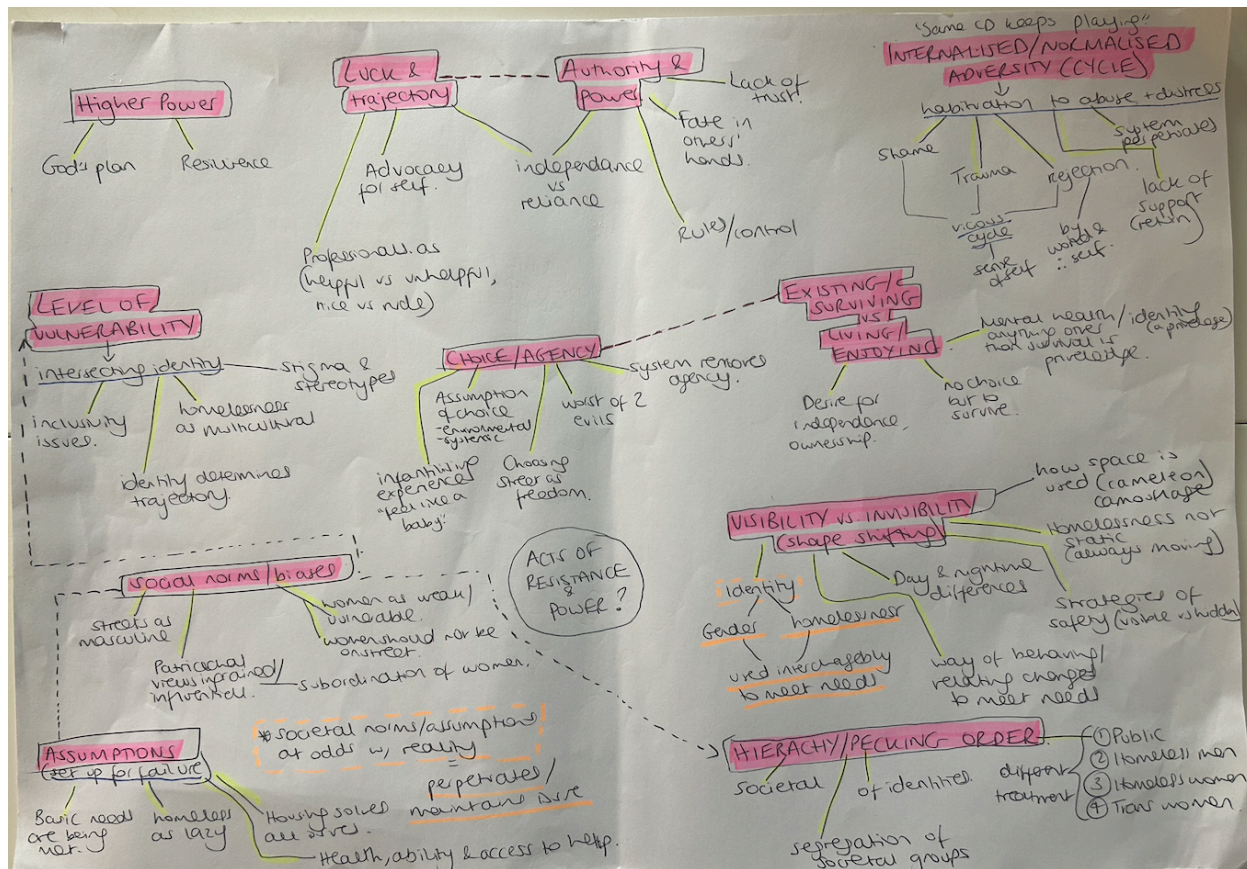
QA Olivia ADAMSON

- Impact of homelessness on the psyche and physical health & therefore experiencing life
- Functioning through dissociation 'leave the body'

## Appendix J: Example of Phase Three Coding and Mapping

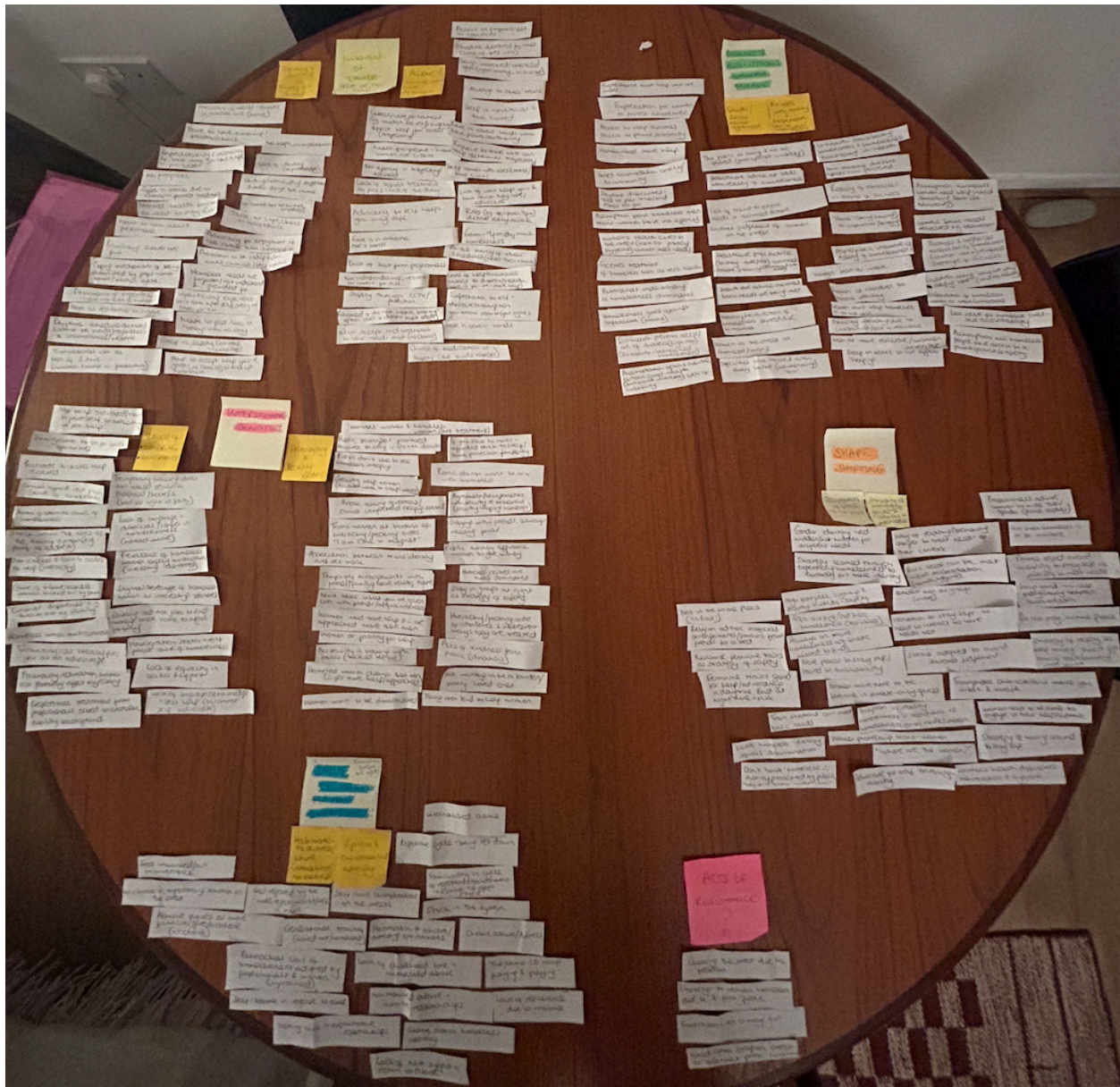


## Appendix K: Example of Phase Three Thematic Map and Theme Formation





## Appendix L: Example of Phase Four and Five Reviewing and Defining Themes



### Appendix M: Example of Excel Sheet with Quotes per Theme

[illegible]

## Appendix N: Data Management Plan



### UEL Data Management Plan

Completed plans must be sent to [researchdata@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchdata@uel.ac.uk) for review

*If you are bidding for funding from an external body, complete the Data Management Plan required by the funder (if specified).*

Research data is defined as information or material captured or created during the course of research, and which underpins, tests, or validates the content of the final research output. The nature of it can vary greatly according to discipline. It is often empirical or statistical, but also includes material such as drafts, prototypes, and multimedia objects that underpin creative or 'non-traditional' outputs. Research data is often digital, but includes a wide range of paper-based and other physical objects.

| Administrative Data              |                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PI/Researcher                    | Olivia Adamson                                                                                                                              |
| PI/Researcher ID (e.g. ORCID)    | 0009-0006-4849-8890                                                                                                                         |
| PI/Researcher email              | <a href="mailto:U2068210@uel.ac.uk">U2068210@uel.ac.uk</a>                                                                                  |
| Research Title                   | Women's experiences of homelessness                                                                                                         |
| Project ID                       | N/A                                                                                                                                         |
| Research start date and duration | October 1 <sup>st</sup> 2023 – Sept 2024                                                                                                    |
| Research Description             | This study aims to look at the experiences of women who have previously been homeless, to understand their perspectives and give voice to a |

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|                                                                             | vulnerable population who are underrepresented in the literature (despite being the fastest growing homeless population).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Funder                                                                      | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Grant Reference Number (Post-award)                                         | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Date of first version (of DMP)                                              | 01.11.2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Date of last update (of DMP)                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Related Policies                                                            | e.g. <a href="#">Research Data Management Policy</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Does this research follow on from previous research? If so, provide details | No.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Data Collection</b>                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| What data will you collect or create?                                       | <p>Interview recordings x 8: (mp3 or mp4)<br/>semi-structured face-to-face interviews (likely 1 hour each) to take place.</p> <p>Informed (ONS, 2021) s x8 (docx)<br/>hardcopies to be collected from participants containing personal information and therefore these will be stored in a password protected location and destroyed after 2 years.</p> <p>Audio recordings and interviews transcripts x 8 (docx)<br/>Verbatim transcripts containing data from interviews likely containing personal information as above.</p>                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                             | <p>Interviews will be conducted in person (only) at ‘Project X’ and a Dictaphone will be used to record these.</p> <p>Microsoft Teams is a university-approved application, and the Interviewer will use their university-managed and allocated account to upload the recordings to and for storage.</p> <p>Audio Recordings will be created in the format .mp3 files and transferred to the University of East London’s OneDrive and will be deleted from the device once transferred.</p> <p>These recordings will be stored in the following format:<br/>[InterviewerInitials]-[ParticipantNumber]-[Date]<br/><b><u>Transcript Data:</u></b></p> |

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|                                                           | <p>Transcripts of the audio recordings will then be created using Microsoft Word (.docx) and saved onto the OneDrive university account. These will be carried out by a third party transcription service (that recommended by UEL).</p> <p>These Data files will be stored in the following format:<br/>[ProjectCode]-[InterviewerInitials]-[ParticipantNumber]-[Date].Ext</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Documentation and Metadata</b>                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?  | A template of the consent form, participation information sheet, debriefing sheet, and interview schedule will be collated and presented in pdf format.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Ethics and Intellectual Property</b>                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Identify any ethical issues and how these will be managed | <p>is pertinent to this research due to the small vulnerable population being interviewed. All participants will be anonymised through pseudonyms with all identifying information changed or amended to ensure confidentiality. All data will be stored and handled securely, with access only given to the PI and research supervisor, with all data stored on the UEL One Drive – securely. Transcripts will be stored separately from the pseudonymised data to avoid re-identification.</p> <p>There will be a separate folder created alongside the audio and transcript files containing participant consent forms. This folder will also contain a table (created in Microsoft Word) that links the pseudonyms to the participant number and name. This is to ensure the correct participant data is removed should a participant wish to withdraw from the project. Once analysis has begun, and the participants right to withdraw has ended, then this table will be deleted.</p> <p>All data collection and storage will comply with data protection legislation, both DPA 2018 and GDPR to ensure anonymisation techniques are abided to as much as possible.</p> <p>Informed consent will be sought from participants – they will be given a participant information sheet which will include all aspects of the research, along with an opportunity to ask questions or</p> |



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|                                                                                              | <p>discuss the research before an informed consent form is given and signed.</p> <p>Participants will be made aware that they obtain the rights to their data, and they have the right to withdraw themselves and their data from the research up to three weeks after the day of the interview completion (this will be part of the consent form). Following this date, rights to use participant data is controlled by the researchers.</p> <p>Aftercare is offered to participants via the signposting of specific resources should additional support be required.</p> |
| Identify any copyright and Intellectual Property Rights issues and how these will be managed | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Storage and Backup</b>                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?                               | <p>MP3 files will be stored on the University of East London's One-drive.</p> <p>Anonymised participant data (transcripts of the .MP3 files) will also be stored and backed up on the same OneDrive account.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| How will you manage access and security?                                                     | <p>Access will be restricted by password protection and made available to the primary researcher and DOS</p> <p>Access will be granted on request by the above, using a shared link to the necessary OneDrive account folder.</p> <p>Other security measures include password protection and the in-built Microsoft security for One-drive platform.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Data Sharing</b>                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| How will you share the data?                                                                 | <p>Segments of anonymised transcribed data will be included in the write up of the project.</p> <p>Participants will be aware and will have provided consent to this use of their data.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|                                                                                     | <p>The data write-up will be available on the UEL Research Repository – this will not contain any identifiable information, with all participants pseudonymised and anonymous.</p> <p>The transcripts are of potential interest to researchers in the field. They will be anonymised before deposit to the ISO27001 certified secure UEL Research Repository at project end alongside appropriate documentation &amp; metadata, assigned a DOI, and shared under a CC BY 4.0 license.</p> |
| Are any restrictions on data sharing required?                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Selection and Preservation</b>                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Which data are of long-term value and should be retained, shared, and/or preserved? | Anonymised transcripts                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| What is the long-term preservation plan for the data?                               | Anonymised transcripts and consent forms will be stored on the primary researcher's UEL OneDrive for 5 years after which they will be reviewed for further retention or deletion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Responsibilities and Resources</b>                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Who will be responsible for data management?                                        | <p>Researcher: Olivia Adamson</p> <p>DOS: Lucy Poxon (via access on OneDrive)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| What resources will you require to deliver your plan?                               | <p>Microsoft One-drive</p> <p>Microsoft Teams</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Review</b>                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                     | <p>Please send your plan to <a href="mailto:researchdata@uel.ac.uk">researchdata@uel.ac.uk</a></p> <p><b>We will review within 5 working days and request further information or amendments as required before signing</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Date: 15/11/2023                                                                    | <p>Reviewer name: Joshua Fallon</p> <p>Assistant Librarian RMD</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

## Guidance

Brief information to help answer each section is below. Aim to be specific and concise.

For assistance in writing your data management plan, or with research data management more generally, please contact: [researchdata@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchdata@uel.ac.uk)

### Administrative Data

#### Related Policies

List any other relevant funder, institutional, departmental or group policies on data management, data sharing and data security. Some of the information you give in the remainder of the DMP will be determined by the content of other policies. If so, point/link to them here.

#### Data collection

Describe the data aspects of your research, how you will capture/generate them, the file formats you are using and why. Mention your reasons for choosing particular data standards and approaches. Note the likely volume of data to be created.

#### Documentation and Metadata

What metadata will be created to describe the data? Consider what other documentation is needed to enable reuse. This may include information on the methodology used to collect the data, analytical and procedural information, definitions of variables, the format and file type of the data and software used to collect and/or process the data. How will this be captured and recorded?

#### Ethics and Intellectual Property

Detail any ethical and privacy issues, including the consent of participants. Explain the copyright/IPR and whether there are any data licensing issues – either for data you are reusing, or your data which you will make available to others.

#### Storage and Backup

Give a rough idea of data volume. Say where and on what media you will store data, and how they will be backed-up. Mention security measures to protect data which are sensitive or valuable. Who will have access to the data during the project and how will this be controlled?

#### Data Sharing

Note who would be interested in your data, and describe how you will make them available (with any restrictions). Detail any reasons not to share, as well as embargo periods or if you want time to exploit your data for publishing.

### **Selection and Preservation**

Consider what data are worth selecting for long-term access and preservation. Say where you intend to deposit the data, such as in UEL's data repository (<https://repository.uel.ac.uk>) or a subject repository. How long should data be retained?