Pathways into and out of Homelessness for Women Fleeing Domestic Violence

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Community Partners

• RESOLVE Alberta (Calgary)
• Osborne House (Winnipeg)
• NEEDS Centre for War-Affected Families (Winnipeg)
• Immigrant Women’s Counseling Services (Winnipeg)
• Bryony and Adsum Houses (Halifax)
Definitions

- **Homelessness**
  - not having a permanent residence to which one can return whenever they so choose

- **Housing Insecurity**
  - Lacking permanence and safety

- **Housing Secure**
  - living in a home that she considers permanent and safe
Research Questions

• What are the key structural/systemic and individual causes of persistent and repetitive homelessness of immigrant women experiencing family violence?
  • What are the key indicators of an increased risk of homelessness?
  • What are the key indicators for decreased risk?
• What are the pathways into and out of homelessness? What are the specific conjunctures where critical interventions are most effective?
Research Questions

• What existing services are most effective in assisting people exit homelessness, and how can homeless people or those at risk of homelessness access them?
Research Design

- Comparative: Calgary, Winnipeg and Halifax
- Qualitative interviews with immigrant women X 3
- Qualitative interviews with service providers
- Inventory of employment and education services
- Quantitative data from second-stage shelter
- Consultations with key policy makers
Women Fleeing DV

- 24 women in Calgary (64.9%)
- 10 women in Winnipeg (27.0%)
- 3 women in Halifax (8.1%)
- Most aged 30-39 years (52.9% of women)
- 88.8% separated or divorced
- 62% not employed
Pathways Into and Out of Homelessness

Some women forced to return to abuse due to lack of housing, money, services, knowledge

Pre-Migration & Migration
Settlement
Multiple attempts to leave
Violence
Hidden Homelessness
Leaves for good

Factors influencing housing (in)security
- Social support networks
- Ability to live independently
- Understanding of systems
- Child & family status
- Education policies
- Language barriers
- Income & social status
- Employment policies & working conditions
- Social assistance rates
- Low wages
- Available, safe affordable housing
- Transportation

Continuum of Housing (In)Security

DV & Immigrant Women

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Key Findings - 1

• Interpersonal violence and abuse is experienced across a continuum and we need policies, including housing policies, that include women and children along the continuum.
• He told me not to go outside. He never took me out. I never called anybody and nobody called me and I was not even allowed to go out to neighbours and talk to them … I was not allowed go anywhere even to take my daughter to a park alone. No, I was not allowed so. Yeah, he kept me fully isolated from the world and he called home every half hour and if it rang for more than two rings and I didn't pick up the phone and then he accused me, like I am with somebody, I am doing something wrong and I tell him no, I am not. I was in the washroom, changing diapers or something but he never believed me.
• **IPV has significant consequences for the health of our population**

One night I was really, really depressed and I was up at three o’clock in the morning. There was no other way to survive. Could I live separate or leave my kids? It’s a big shame because of our culture, because of our own community and all these things. It’s better to commit suicide and I took all the medication.
• Systemic level change and inter-sectoral collaboration are crucial for improving the situation of women experiencing IPV and for preventing it in the first place.
• There is an important interaction between family violence, health, and homelessness.

“That’s another pressure. I really would like to move out but I can’t because before I do I have to find a job, so it’s kind of this circle. So I feel a little bit depressed.”
Outcomes

• Presentation to the National Research Program of the National Homelessness Initiative on research and policy interface
• Pilot project in Halifax
• Proposal to United Way of Calgary and area for a Partnership Coordinator to develop an innovative collaborative service for women fleeing abuse who are also immigrants
Full report

www.ucalgary.ca/gender/reports.htm

Thank you!