

Homeless Research: Mothers and Children

Christine A. Walsh, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary
National Conference on Ending Homelessness 2016. London, ON

Why Women and Children

- Women experiencing homelessness have significantly different needs than homeless men
- Proportionally fewer homeless women are absolutely homeless
- Women are less comfortable in shelters than men
- Homeless women (particularly mothers) face greater stigma
- Many women prefer to stay with relatives or friends when they cannot find suitable housing
- Many women remain in abusive relationships to avoid shelters
- Women are often prevented from (or delay) leaving abusive relationships due to the lack of affordable housing and inadequate assistance

Why Women and Children

- Women with children do not want to disrupt the lives of their children by changing their environments
- Women who are homeless are often ineligible for shelters for abused women
- Women have concerns for their safety due to the perceived and actual dangerous, criminal elements in shelters.
- Women experience higher rates of many forms of violence
- Women are more likely to live in poverty
- Gender gap in pay
- Women more likely to work in part-time and temporary labor
- Women bear greater responsibilities for children
- More women are experiencing homelessness than in the past (27.3%)
- Families stay in shelter twice as long as single individuals (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016)

Which Women and Children

- Disabilities
- Young
- Older
- LGBTQTS
- Indigenous women
- Refugees/immigrants
- Racialized population
- Mental or physical
- Cognitive disabilities (FASD, head injuries)
- Veterans
- Discharged from institutions

Why Women with Lived Experience

- Women with lived experience are viewed as experts in their lives
- Process of meaningful collaboration is empowering
- Findings are grounded in local context

Why Action Research

“It was not within the research parameters to gather participants’ tears or blood, sweat or dirt to present to you; not possible to glean and hold the essence of human complexities, to bring here as the proofs needed for us to understand and hear their voices, see them as fellow human beings, then care enough to take action immediately with proper, human and humane responses to their situations”.

- TracyRay Lewis, Community Researcher/Activist

What is Arts-based Research

- Arts-based research is a “research method in which the arts play a primary role in any or all of the steps of the research method. Art forms such as poetry, music, visual art, drama, and dance are essential to the research process itself and central in formulating the research question, generating data, analyzing data, and presenting the research results” (Austin & Forinash, 2005, pp.460-461).

Why Arts-based Research

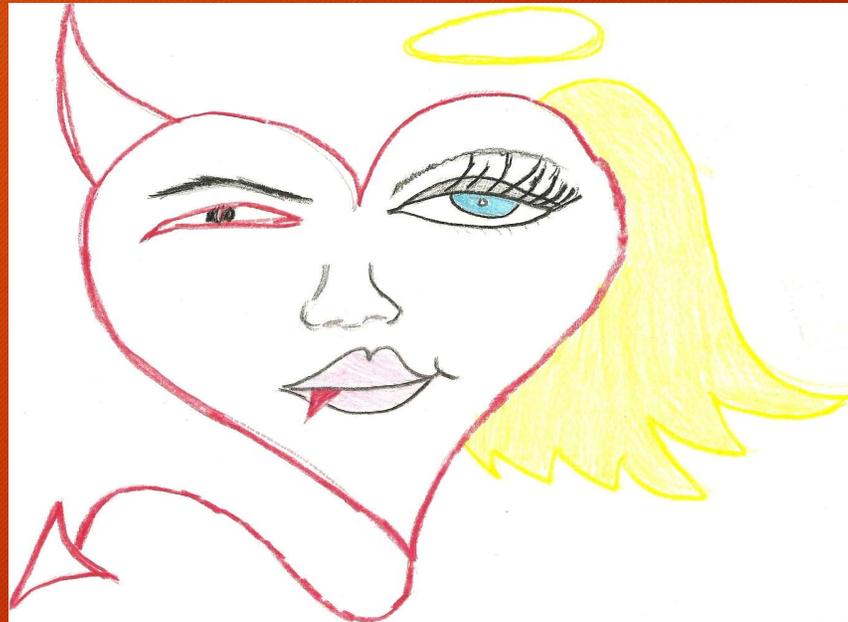
- Arts-based inquiry aims to eliminate the separation between the community of researchers and the community being researched by eliciting the free and conscious voice of research participants (Foster, 2007).
- By incorporating authentic community participation, arts-based research is both an academic investigation and a means to increase social justice.

Types of Arts-based Research

- Drawing
- Photovoice
- Digital Storytelling
- Theatre
- Poetry
- Theatre

Drawing: Incarcerated Woman

- “Drawing allows an in-depth and less linear insight into complex situations” (Zweifel & Van Wezemaal, 2012, p. 0)
- Depicts one woman’s internal struggle: maintaining positive change or relapsing into harmful behaviors after leaving the correction centre.



Photovoice

- Photovoice is a participatory research method which combines images and text to create grassroots action for marginalized populations (Wang & Burris, 1997).
- Through community consultation, Photovoice aims to bring the perspectives and expertise of those who are marginalized into the policy-making process (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Photovoice: Immigrant Family



U-Haul Truck-
“For two months, this was our first home in Calgary.”

Digital Storytelling

- Authors use still images and voiceover to relate a personal story (Gubrium, 2009; Tucker 2006).
- Facilitates participants self-exploration, expression and empowerment (Benmayor, 2008; Hull & Katz, 2006).
- Individuals connect to community through the workshop process (Gubrium, 2009).
- Delivers a powerful message to an audience.

Digital Storytelling: Aboriginal Woman

- “Even as a teenager, I had two choices. Either be on the street or shack up. Well I was too scared to be on the street so I shacked up. I’m not proud of it. What I did, I did, and that’s why now I tell my kids never look down on anybody. ‘Cuz you don’t know why they’re there.”



Theatre: Ensemble of Actors

- “Theatre entertains and engages the audience in story but that intimate relationship can be used to engage theatergoers in conversations about the broader societal issues” (Prinsloo, 2007, n.p.)



Out of the Lower Depths: Indigenous Woman

*Somewhere along the way I became
hopeless.
I got lost in my soul.
Look, look closely.
Open your eyes to my soul. Do you dare?
I am right here, please don't look away.
I was one of the homeless people out
there and you walked right by me.
Look, look I am here. Why did you walk
by me and look right through me?*



Shirley A. Aarrestad

Poetry: Indigenous Woman

The Unheard voice

I feel so alone and cold,
I'm lost and blind.

A childless mother,
Also, the motherless child.

I walk aimless around and around,
What I am looking for, never finding.

I am scarred from the inside out.
Never to heal my wounds, lost, forgotten.

Who am I?

I am any and every women you have judged on the street corner.
I have died alone in a shallow grave.

Never to be found,
And if found, never to be identified

I AM your mother, your sister, your daughter.

I am that voice crying for help that falls upon deaf ears.

Found Poetry: Immigrant Woman

- Poetry which has been created using another primary source (a piece of prose, a person speaking, a list, even, in some cases, another poem by someone else). The poet shapes this original material into a poem, using the words and phrases found within the document. (Morrissey, 2010, para. 1)

Nayika had trusted acquaintances from her home country to help her. While initially friendly and welcoming Nayika was eventually betrayed and taken advantage of.

I trusted them
I felt protected
Living with people
They had been in this country for a long time
They knew all the rules
They are people from my own place
I was alone, I didn't have family
I trusted them
They welcomed me
I felt I met
Like friends, like family
I felt safe with them
I trusted them

Textile Art: Immigrant Women/Researcher/Artist

- While creating this piece I was thinking of all the internal and external stressors in Mariane's life.
- Memories of her past life in refugee camps, emotional suffering, need for housing and food, and a lack of consistent and culturally informed medical care.



Questions?

For further information contact:
cwalsh@ucalgary.ca