

Journeys Of Street-Involved Youth Searching For Housing While Using Substances

Journeys Of Street-Involved Youth Searching For Housing While Using Substances: A Narrative
Analysis

By

TESS KOSAKOWSKI

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AUTHOR: Tess Kosakowski, B.S.W. (York University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Allyson Ion

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on street-involved youth's experiences with substance use and how it may impact their access to social services, specifically their access to housing and shelter services. I chose to use narrative interviews when speaking with the youth and it was through the sharing of their narratives that different themes, and recommendations for practice were revealed. During the analysis of the data, critical theories were applied, specifically a post-structural and intersectional framework. The youth who participated in this study shared experiences of their hardships, feelings of low motivation in seeking housing, feelings of self-agency regarding their substance use, and the need for more anti-oppressive approaches within housing and shelter services. These anti-oppressive approaches were described by the youth to include more flexible hours, less restrictive shelter rules and a need for more understanding and empathetic service providers. This research highlights important overall insights on the experiences of these youth and how they make sense of their substance use and life on the street.

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Introduction

Youth often become homeless because of the failure of multiple systems, including school, community, family, child protection agencies and youth corrections systems (Higgett et al., 2003). On any given night, more than 6000 Canadian youth are homeless (United Way, 2018). It is important to acknowledge that youth homelessness is different from adult homelessness in various ways which is why interventions and programs should be considered and applied differently for this group. Street involved youth often leave homes that were defined by relationships in which they were typically dependent on their adult caregivers who were either their parents or relatives (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Being involved in the care of child protection services also appears to result in a high percentage of homelessness among youth who are exiting out of care (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). For youth, being homeless does not just mean a loss of stable housing, more importantly it involves leaving a home in which they were engrained in relations of dependence, thus experiencing an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents, caregivers, relatives, friends, neighbours and community (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). Evidently, substance use disorders also appear to be prevalent among street involved youth, where it is estimated that 69 to 86 percent meet diagnostic criteria for at least one substance use disorder (Slesnick, 2015). This then raises the concern of viable housing options available for homeless youth, specifically those who use substances.

Definition of Central Variables and Concepts

For this study “secure housing” refers to permanent housing that youth transition to from the street or after having utilized shelter or transitional housing services. The term “substance use” refers to all types of drug and alcohol use. The term “street-involved youth” refers to adolescents and young adults living part time or full time on the street (Hadland et al., 2008). Youth refers to those aged 15 to 29 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Purpose of the Paper

This research focused on youth’s experiences with substance use and how it may have impacted their access to social services, specifically their access to housing and shelter services. I was interested in learning about youth’s journeys towards finding permanent housing, including their experiences while living on the street and in accessing shelters and transitional housing programs. Further, this research worked to understand whether these youth have or are currently experiencing any barriers during their journeys. The goal of this research was to identify what these youth believe they need from the services they are being provided, in order for them to secure housing while using substances.

Critical Review of the Literature

Prevalence of Substance Use Among Street-Involved Youth

Research has shown that youth who are categorized as runaways, homeless and street-involved are seen to experience much higher levels of alcohol and drug use than those youth who have secure living situations (Greene et al., 1997). Approximately 71% of street-involved youth have reported using 3 or more substances (Greene et al., 1997). It has also been found that street youth are more likely to have much higher rates of hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV infection, and mental health disorders than their non-street involved peers (Boivin et al., 2005). Examples of

this can be observed when looking at statistics where the prevalence of infectious disease markers among Canadian street youth were compared with non-street involved populations. It was found that when focusing on street-involved youth in Montreal, there was a Hepatitis B prevalence of 13.2% compared to 0.78% for non-street involved youth among northern Ontario while there was a prevalence of 16.9% for Hepatitis C (HCV) among street-involved youth in Montreal compared to 1.51% for non-street involved youth across Canada (Boivin et al., 2005). It is important to recognize that many street youth do not have parental support which may work to explain why these youth often self-aggregate into peer networks to survive (Hadland et al., 2008). Turning to these networks then often results in these youth being introduced to the social use of alcohol (Hadland et al., 2008). Rather than reinforcing different substance use related stereotypes about homeless individuals, it is important to understand how homelessness itself affects substance use (Sekharan, 2015). Other reasons for substance use includes social inclusion, recreation and pleasure (Sekharan, 2015). It has also been found that homelessness is an independent predictor of injection drug use among street-involved youth (Sekharan, 2015). In addition, peer substance use and homelessness have also been found to predict substance use from adolescence through early adulthood (Sekharan, 2015). Youth who are new to injection drug use are more likely to engage in risky injection practices that increase the likelihood of the acquisition and transmission of infectious diseases such as HCV and HIV (Feng et al., 2012). These findings work to emphasize the high prevalence of substance use among this group of youth and the factors that contribute to it.

Barriers For Youth Who Use Substances

When looking at addiction among adults, it has been found that injection drug users often lead chaotic lifestyles and may express challenging behaviours that can pose a unique set of

challenges to housing providers (Evans & Strathdee, 2006). Many landlords state that they find housing this group stressful and demanding, while police encourage eviction as a means of managing behaviour (Evans & Strathdee, 2006). This then results in hundreds of individuals who are experiencing addiction and mental health issues being left homeless (Evans & Strathdee, 2006). Although this is referring to adults, this literature can emphasize the importance of researching what can be done for youth regarding their substance use and housing situations so that their adulthood does not result in them remaining on the streets. Findings from another study have also indicated that if the housing needs of street involved youth are addressed, it may help prevent the initiation of injection drug use (Feng et al., 2012). One step forward would be to increase the supply of youth-focused housing (Feng et al., 2012). It is clear that the housing needs of street involved individuals need to be addressed along with barriers that are preventing this group from securing stable housing. Research has also been done that identified barriers to accessing housing for street involved youth who use illicit drugs. This study found that on a structural level, many of the youth reported a lack of formal support in trying to secure a safe place to live and appropriate income support (Krusi et al., 2010). Another housing option for these youth appeared to be single room occupancy units but the majority of the youth stated that these rooms provided very unhygienic living conditions along with inadequate sanitary facilities and insect and rodent infestation (Krusi et al., 2010). Other barriers to housing for youth include a diminished housing supply and unstable transitions (Millar, 2010). When focusing on street-involved youth living in Vancouver, it was found that the inadequate supply of affordable housing acts as a barrier for youth when trying to obtain housing (Millar, 2010). In addition, there also appears to be a lack of alternative non-market housing options for youth including supported housing and low-barrier emergency shelters (Millar, 2010). Street-involved youth also

often experience unstable transitions into adulthood and independent living (Millar, 2010). It is also important to acknowledge that homeless youth differ from the adult homeless population because youth often become homeless following a state of dependence on their families or the state, leaving them unprepared to live independently (Millar, 2010). In addition to barriers street-involved youth experience when trying to access housing, there are also many shelter specific barriers that also work to contribute to their homelessness.

Shelter Specific Barriers

A study that examined barriers and facilitators to shelter utilization among homeless youth found that facilitators to shelter use involved the desire of youth to get help and turn their lives in a new direction, different circumstances that appeared to influence their life while living on the street included pregnancy, and the shelter's ability to connect the youth to other services and resources (Ha et al., 2015). A lack of youth shelters appeared to act as a barrier because many youth avoided adult shelters because they did not want to be associated with the lifestyle (Ha et al., 2015). This "lifestyle" according to the youth, involved the idea that if the youth were to begin utilizing adult shelters, they would be "grouped" with the homeless adults, however, many of the youth made it clear that they did not want to remain homeless into their adulthood (Ha et al., 2015). Similarly, other youth refuse to utilize adult shelters as they do not see their street involvement to be as permanent as adults who happen to be living on the street or in shelters (Krusi et al., 2010). Youth also appear to avoid adult shelters because they generally utilize shelters that are youth specific in hopes of accessing employment or education services (Ha et al., 2015). It is important to recognize that his study by Ha and colleagues (2015) was completed because it was found that research often focuses on the barriers to shelter use and that information on what might facilitate shelter use was lacking (Ha et al., 2015). Previous research

emphasizes the importance of focusing both on the barriers that street involved youth face when trying to access housing along with learning about what the youth feel they need in order to secure stable housing.

Stressors Of Street-Involved Youth

Street-involved youth experience stressors that other youth simply do not experience including the stress of finding safe shelter, difficulty in accessing nutritional food, exposure to physical and sexual violence and the chronic stigma associated with being homeless (Sekharan, 2015). These stressors often result in the use of different coping mechanisms including turning to substance use (Sekharan, 2015). Another study by Bender et al. (2018) state that homeless youth often experience traumatic events in which they develop various coping strategies, including drug and alcohol use. This is considered to be an avoidant coping strategy with youth stating that they turn to substances as a way to self-medicate themselves and to forget about their trauma (Bender et al., 2018). Many youth choose to cope independently on their own as their experiences are often distressing and difficult to discuss (Bender et al., 2018). It has also been found that early child abuse and foster care placement have been connected to substance use among street-involved youth (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). In addition, females who have experienced physical street victimization were found to experience greater alcohol use while those who experienced more sexual street victimization were more likely to use cannabis (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Youth who have been victimized on the street were also more likely to have a substance use disorder (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018).

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance policies surrounding substance use often works to prevent street-involved youth from obtaining temporary indoor shelter while also discouraging them from being able to

build trusting relationships with their service providers (Krusi et al., 2010). According to Krusi et al (2010) for many of these youth, shelters that were abstinence-focused did not constitute a viable option which leaves youth feeling excluded from these facilities (Krusi et al., 2009). Zero-tolerance policies have been shown to prevent youth from obtaining temporary indoor shelter and also discouraged them from building trusting relationships with service providers (Krusi et al., 2010). Krusi and colleagues (2010) go on to state that shelters that hold a zero tolerance policy severely restricts many street involved youth as substance use is highly prevalent among their population (Krusi et al., 2010). Ha et al., (2015) also suggest that youth would benefit from shelters having more flexibility in their rules and having the services overall be more forgiving. It has also been found that dominant norms related to abstinence as “improving one’s life” were synonymous with being drug and alcohol free (Pauly et al., 2018). The term “getting clean”, a term used by many of the youth, refers to being abstinent but also suggests that those who continue to use substances would fall under the category of being “dirty” (Pauly et al., 2018). This reflects and reproduces stigma in relation to ongoing substance use that is inconsistent with harm reduction approaches that espouse respectful and non-judgmental strategies to working with clients (Pauly et al., 2018). It has also been found that zero-tolerance policies may further alienate youth from making use of drug services including needle exchange programs (LaMarre, 2012). Growing evidence reveals that traditional shelters and programs that practice zero-tolerance policies surrounding substance use do little to reduce the incidence of drug use or associated health issues including HIV, AIDS and Hepatitis C for youth who use substances (LaMarre, 2012).

Housing First

Housing First provides housing for those who are experiencing homelessness, specifically for those who are experiencing chronic homelessness and who have mental health and substance use challenges (Gaetz, 2014). Housing First works to provide independent and permanent housing, while requiring no preconditions and follows the principle that housing is a human right and that individuals are more successful in moving forward with their lives if they are first housed (Gaetz, 2013). In addition to providing housing, additional social services and supports are also provided including trauma informed care, harm reduction, healthy sexuality and mental health supports (Gaetz, 2013). Housing First is important to consider within this research as this approach works to provide housing while also practicing less restrictive rules surrounding substance use.

Harm reduction and substance use has been a focus within Housing First programs. One study found that Housing First participants experienced greater reductions in alcohol use over time compared to the treatment as usual participants which refer to those who were part of more traditional supportive housing models where they were required to be sober and engage in mental health treatment before they were deemed “housing ready” (Kirst et al., 2015). Although a reduction in alcohol use was found over time, there was not necessarily reductions in illicit drug problems (Kirst et al., 2015). It is not clear why there was this difference between the two different forms of substance use but it is stated that future studies should examine this pattern (Kirst et al., 2015). It was also found that those who used substances and were enrolled in Housing First services could achieve long term housing stability regardless of their substance use (Kirst et al., 2015).

While research has found that Housing First has been an effective intervention among adults experiencing homelessness, it is important to understand how this intervention works with youth (Gaetz, 2014). Housing First for youth “HF4Y” is grounded in the belief that every young person has the right to housing and that those who have experienced living on the street will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing (Gaetz et al., 2021). HF4Y acknowledges that the needs and situations of homeless youth differ from homeless adults therefore the solutions within the intervention must be youth-focused (Gaetz et al., 2021). This includes a focus on youth voice, choice and self-determination, positive youth development and wellness orientation, individualized client driven supports with no time limits, and social inclusion and community integration (Gaetz et al., 2021).

Rationale

This topic is of special interest to me because while working in transitional housing for youth, I have found that many of the residents are being forced to exit the program due to their substance use as there is a zero tolerance policy in place. Soon after starting employment in the shelter and transitional housing sector, I discovered that many of the other available housing options for youth also require abstinence. This issue is what raised my initial concern of zero tolerance policies surrounding substance use within youth shelters and transitional housing as there appears to be a high prevalence of substance use among street-involved youth and that they appear to experience challenges in maintaining abstinence.

Research Objectives

For this research I focused on answering the following questions:

1. What barriers do street-involved youth who use substances experience when trying to access housing?

2. What do street-involved youth who use substances feel they need or needed from services when trying to access housing?

This research is important because it can allow other service providers to learn how to better understand what it is like to have trouble accessing housing due to substance use as a young individual. This research can also help inform programs that work to support youth and could ultimately result in the implementation of new ways of working with youth, specifically with youth who use substances. It is also important to acknowledge that the perspectives and experiences from the youth being affected by this issue are being heard, as the voices of service users can often be left out of research.

Theoretical Framework

While this specific topic of research could benefit from the use of a variety of different theoretical frameworks, it is critical theory, specifically post-structuralism and intersectionality theory, that will be used and focused on when carrying out this study and in completing my thesis.

A critical lens enables the researcher to attend to underlying structures that may contribute to oppressive practices and then contribute to applying this knowledge in order to change social relations (Neuman, 1997). Rather than blaming the individual for their struggles and issues, critical theory works to understand how society and social structures work to reinforce and produce different barriers for different individuals and groups. In addition, critical theory looks at social structures operating in society and how they enable or restrain individuals and groups (Neuman, 1997). Another aspect of critical theory involves thinking about how we can do things differently while working to change dominant discourses and oppressive ways of thinking and doing (Neuman, 1997). The idea that youth homelessness is a choice is a prevalent

discourse surrounding this research topic. Critical theory can work to help educate those working within social services as well as policy makers on why this is a problematic discourse, and draw attention back to the social structures and societal factors as contributing to the issue and creating barriers to youth accessing and maintaining housing.

Post-structuralism is an epistemological and ontological position that falls within the critical theory paradigm and that became popular in the 20th century, specifically within the social sciences and humanities (Fox, 2014). Post-structuralism focuses on core social, psychological or cultural structures that are believed to impact and constrain the possibilities of human action (Fox, 2014). In addition, this theory seeks to question, articulate and disrupt practices which repress, silence or exploit subject groups such as, street-involved youth who use substances (Harris, 2001). This is important to consider when looking at my research question because many of the barriers that street involved youth who use substances face can be connected to different social structures that are oppressive within society. Ultimately, post-structuralism can be helpful for researchers to reveal and challenge power structures within the research data and can allow for connections to be made in order to understand the layers that are currently contributing to the challenges these youth are facing.

Intersectionality theory is another critical framework which examines the interconnections and interdependencies between social systems and categories (Atewologun, 2018). This theory is important to utilize within this research because it enhances analytical sophistication and offers theoretical explanations of the ways in which heterogeneous members of specific groups, for example youth who use substances, might experience trying to access housing differently depending on their social locations (Atewologun, 2018). According to Crenshaw (1989), “the failure to embrace the complexities of compoundedness is not simply a

matter of political will, but is also due to the influence of a way of thinking about discrimination which structures politics so that struggles are categorized as singular issues” (p. 167). This structure then conveys a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo (Crenshaw, 1989). This highlights the importance of addressing individual’s struggles as more than just a singular problem, rather they are interconnected with other struggles. Sensitivity to these differences and the intersectional nature of identities and social location add to the insight into issues of inequality and social justice in organizations and other institutions, therefore maximizing the chance of social change (Atewologun, 2018).

Ultimately, the goal of this research was to highlight the different needs of street-involved youth who use substances so that housing organizations and youth focused services could understand why certain struggles exist for these youth and how they can act to create positive change. Additionally, learning about how these youth felt enabled or restrained by different services they may have encountered when seeking support in the past was also a focus of this research. When generating this research data, it was important that those who appeared to hold less power, this being the youth service users, were able to make others aware of what they believe are the underlying sources and barriers that contribute to their current struggles. Specifically, by interviewing these youth my goal was to understand what they see as barriers and how these encounters have affected them.

Overall, I feel that utilizing these critical theories within my research will be very beneficial. In engaging in these theories, I hope to discover ways to foster positive social change, specifically looking at ways in which youth who use substances can work through barriers and ultimately, work to understand why these barriers exist. This research is intended to eliminate the negative misconceptions surrounding youth who use substances and help to share information

about the multiple factors that affect their lives. Additionally, this research reveals the hidden underlying structures that may produce barriers for these youth when they are trying to access housing, and how these barriers can be challenged.

Methodology

Narrative-based research aligns well with this study because it aims in taking an in-depth exploration of the meanings people assign to their experiences (Salkind, 2010). Specifically, a narrative approach to this study allows for a rich description of the youth's experiences along with an exploration of the meanings that the participants derive from their experiences (Wang et al., 2015). This methodology also engages a smaller sample of participants to obtain rich and free-ranging discourse. I will further discuss the involvement of narrative approaches later in my data collection.

When acknowledging the importance of discourse within critical theory, I thought about how I wanted to shine a light on youth's experiences from their own point of views by generating narrative-based data. This can allow the service users within this research to have more control over the narrative surrounding street involved youth who use substances. This is done through the process of storytelling and honouring one's truth. When generating my data I also wanted to make it clear that substance use among these youth is not being looked at through a negative lens as a researcher. I think that this is an ontological positioning that is important to consider, especially when focusing on the barriers being presented to youth and how these negative views may be contributing to these barriers. Additionally, harm reduction and youth involvement and engagement is often not acknowledged in mainstream society. Research has demonstrated that when looking at the engagement of at-risk youth in harm reduction, these youth have limited opportunities to inform harm reduction programming within different social

services that are being offered to youth including housing services (Paterson & Panessa, 2008). This emphasizes the need for youth to be listened to within research, especially when discussing services that work to support them.

Participants

All participants involved in this research were recruited from a local drop-in center in a mid-sized city in the greater Toronto area. I chose to utilize this community agency, specifically their drop-in center as they work with youth who are street-involved or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. While I was not recruiting any participants in person, I volunteered at the drop-in center once a week so that I was able to build rapport with some of the youth. The recruitment flyer and letter of information for this research was posted within the agency where it was visible and accessible to the youth, and other staff at the shelter helped to promote the study among the clients. Youth who were interested in participating were asked to call, text or email the cell phone number or email address provided in the letter of information. These participants self-identified as youth aged between 16 and 25. The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, does not specify an age of consent for children and youth, rather consent is based on the potential participant having the capacity to understand the significance of the research and the implications of the risk and benefits to themselves (TCPS 2, 2018); as such, I was granted permission by the McMaster Research Board (MREB) to recruit youth under the age of 18. These youth also identified as having used or were currently engaging in substance use while trying to access housing or shelter. There was a possibility that the participants who identified as using substances could have been under the influence of substances during the consent and interview process. In keeping with my correspondence with the MREB, if I suspected that any of the participants may have been impaired, I would identify

whether the youth had the capacity to consent by initiating a consent process where the youth would be asked to ‘explain back’ aspects of the consent process. If the participant did not understand or was not able to explain what was happening in the study, they would have had the opportunity to reschedule their interview. Ongoing consent and capacity to consent during the interview would have also followed these same guidelines. For the purpose of this research, substance use was defined as any type of drug or alcohol use. I was not focused on the specifics of their substance use, rather I was interested in how their overall substance use affected their experiences. The specifics of the participant’s substance use were only included in the findings if the participant chose to specify the substance and how the specific substance affected them.

Due to Covid-19 precautions, participants were not recruited in person and all interviews with participants occurred over the phone. Before the interviews I first went over the letter of information with the youth and then received oral consent in order to proceed with the interview. There were many ethical considerations that had to be made due to research-related restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic; as such I experienced some difficulties connecting with this particular population. These difficulties will later be discussed in the limitations of the study. As compensation for the youth’s time involved in the study, a choice of either a \$25 electronic gift card to Wal-Mart or an e-transfer of the same value were sent to all participants.

Data Collection

For this research, I wanted the youth to feel comfortable speaking about their experiences openly without judgement or fear of being ridiculed, as previous literature has revealed that there is a heavy presence of stigma that surrounds this group. I believed that by using a narrative approach to these interviews, it allowed for more discussion surrounding issues they may not have had the opportunity to talk about previously. The narrative based interviews were

conducted with the youth and ranged between 30 to 60 minutes in length, depending on the participant.

Overall, a total of two participants were involved in the research. Both interviews were from youth who resided within a mid-sized city in the GTA. The interviews were conducted by the student researcher over the phone, using the general interview guide designed for the study. The interview questions were guided by a narrative methodology where the questions were open-ended to allow for one to understand and capture the perspectives of others without predetermining those perspectives through prior selection of questionnaire categories (Butina, 2015). As a researcher engaging in narrative inquiry, it was my objective to ask questions that would help myself interpret and experience the world of the participant, rather than trying to explain or predict their world (Wang & Geale, 2015). Participants were asked various questions including asking them to describe their experiences in trying to find housing while using substances, what they believed to be factors that prevented them in securing housing and shelter, and what kind of changes if any, they would like to see happen within housing and shelter programs. At the end of each interview, I then invited the participant to share any other thoughts or reflections that the interview may have raised about their experiences. This allowed for more stories to be shared that may not have been explored through the more structured questions that were asked during the interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the student researcher. This research was approved by the MREB.

Analysis

For this research study, I decided to analyze the data gathered from the two interviews using narrative analysis. I chose this method because narrative analysis focuses on how individuals and groups make sense of their experiences in society through language

(Souto-Manning, 2012). Furthermore, narratives that individuals share are a critical means to understanding the relationship of everyday talk to the social construction of cultural norms and institutional discourses (Souto-Manning, 2012). Keeping in mind this relationship between individual narratives and societal discourses is useful when applying a critical intersectional and post-structuralist lens; a key aspect of poststructuralism is the concept that power and knowledge are seen in relational terms as a set of discourses and strategies operating in particular contexts (Fawcett, 1998). Therefore, knowledge and power shift and change according to context. Through a poststructuralist viewpoint, Fawcett (1998), states that “language is also not regarded as transparently reflecting meaning but is seen as continually recreating it. Words do not exist objectively, but take their meaning in relation to how they are positioned in particular contexts” (p. 266). I considered Fawcett’s (1998) viewpoint to acknowledge the importance of analyzing narrative data in terms of how the youth choose to express themselves as a window into dominant assumptions, beliefs and values related to youth who experience homelessness and who use substances. The way the youth choose to share their stories can help reveal connections between their experiences and structures that operate in society. As connections are being made, intersectional associations can also be applied through which the youth’s story is situated. For example, relationships between substance use, age and housing instability can be examined and recognized. Intersectionality theory informed my analysis by working to identify how different axes of power connect with one another and ultimately reproduce oppressive discourses for these youth. Additionally, narrative analysis can work to help connect micro events to broader discourses and contexts with the goal of asserting the construction of social experiences through the stories shared (Souto-Manning, 2012). This is particularly salient for my research because while I am interested in the stories the participants share, I would like to address how their

stories are contextual and situated within issues of structural oppression, power, and processes of marginalization, particularly in the area of the shelter and transitional housing systems and substance use.

Overall, acknowledging and focusing on the narratives shared by the participants can allow for insight into the meaning-making processes in their lives and can work to help myself and others assess and understand institutional and power discourses in society in more concrete ways (Souto-Manning, 2012). Therefore, this analysis adequately aligns with my theoretical framework which involves thinking critically while drawing on post-structuralism and intersectionality theory. For my analysis, I was focusing on the underlying structures that contribute to the barriers that street-involved youth experience when trying to access housing and shelter services. Understanding these underlying structures and how they may work to further oppress youth who use substances can initiate conversations that can eliminate stigma and negative views that currently surrounds this group. It is also important to understand that these barriers experienced by youth are not being looked at as singular issues, rather they are being understood as challenges that have multiple complexities. This analysis also supports my main goal of this research which is to capture these youth's lived experiences and be able to provide them a platform where they felt comfortable to share their experiences through their narrative.

When analyzing my data, I interpreted different meanings from the interviews through an analysis of plotlines, thematic structures, and social referents (Kim, 2016). Here is where I utilized different phases of analysis (Terry et al., 2017). The first two phases included familiarizing myself with the data and generating codes (Terry et al., 2017). Familiarizing myself with the data occurred during data collection, while coding took place afterwards where I was able to notice similarities and patterns across the dataset. Phase three involved constructing

themes (Terry et al., 2017). This is where I began to pull out different themes that appeared to be significant. Phase four and five then involved reviewing and defining my themes (Terry et al., 2017). This is where I made sure that the themes I had developed worked well in relationship with my coded data (Terry et al., 2017). I felt that this method worked to help ensure that the participant's realm of meaning of their experiences could adequately be captured as I acknowledged both their narratives as a whole and the common themes within these narratives. It was important to remember while analyzing the data that these narratives were context-sensitive therefore they could not be treated in isolation (Kim, 2016). I was able to develop a focus on several common themes that appeared to emerge after reading over the transcription multiple times. I ordered these themes in a way that allowed the context of the narrative to remain authentic. This was done by constantly looking at the connections between the different experiences within the narrative which allowed myself to continuously be reminded of the narrative as a whole. Once this was completed, I then utilized thematic analysis within the story to bring to light the themes that were emerged from the youth and which also correlated to my research question (Terry et al., 2017).

To enhance the credibility of the study while using this methodology, I made sure to think narratively while recognizing and reflecting on the personal narratives that guide my research interests and conduct (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My own views surrounding youth homelessness and substance use are not considered to be factual, rather these are my own views that I, as a researcher, hold and I was aware of this when analyzing the data. When possible, I also shared direct linkages between the data, my findings and my interpretation as the researcher (Bailey, 1996). Throughout my analysis, I differentiated between the two youth involved in the

interviews by assigning them each a pseudonym. For this study participant 1 will be referred to as “Tom” and participant 2 will be referred to as “Seth”.

Findings

After analyzing both interviews, four themes emerged. The following themes include: the experience of hardships, low motivation in seeking housing, feelings of self-agency regarding substance use, and a need for more anti-oppressive approaches within housing and shelter programs. While I was determining the themes within these narratives, it was through a post-structural perspective that I chose to gather the participant’s experiences and stories and “label” them as hardships. Through this perspective I was able to focus on the relationships between different forms of power and the negative effects that come when power is exerted within relationships in a social service context. These four themes are interconnected, with an emphasis on the relationships between themes being co-dependent with one another. This co-dependance became evident while identifying these themes as I realized that for the participants, their experience of hardships appeared to have affected their substance use, while they also felt that their substance use affected their motivation towards searching for housing. These experiences then appeared to contribute to their feelings of wanting more anti-oppressive approaches within shelter and housing programs. Ultimately, each narrative as a whole helps to convey how different aspects of individual experiences can impact each other. Structural barriers and forms of systemic oppression are evident throughout this study and are seen to influence the daily realities and lives of youth who experience homelessness and who use substances.

The Experience of Hardships

When sharing their experiences of using substances while trying to access housing, both participants shared stories of past hardships that they had experienced. Hardships ranged from

coping with loss, involvement with the criminal justice system and transience and punitive reactions from shelters. I understood these experiences as hardships because they appeared to have affected the participants negatively, as they had shared with me their feelings surrounding these experiences. It also became evident that there was a connection between substance use and each of these hardships, whether the struggle contributed to their substance use or substance use contributed to their struggle. Tom shared that they had experienced the loss of loved ones along with negative experiences with the police. They connected losing their loved ones as partly contributing to their substance use, sharing how there was a time where they had been drunk for months because they simply could not get over these losses. Tom shared, “I spent approximately four months drunk in the last year, all day every day. And that’s just cause I can’t get over the death of my daughter and the loss of my parent”. For a young individual to experience the loss of their child and their parent is extremely tragic and should be recognized. Such traumatic events occurring in a youth’s life can impact them immensely. Regarding Tom’s experiences with law enforcement, the first interaction they had with the police involved them being removed from a parent’s household due to their substance use. Tom later shared throughout the interview that they experienced two more incidents with the police, both occurring while under the influence of substances and involving physical altercations. While reflecting on these experiences, this participant stated that “since then I have been as sober as I can be”. Tom expressed how these negative experiences with the police ultimately influenced them to become sober as they believed remaining sober would help reduce any future negative interactions with the police. Seth recalled losing their bed in the middle of winter and having nowhere to go as a result of breaking the shelter’s zero tolerance policy surrounding substance use. Seth went on to share how horrible it was to be discharged from the shelter and began discussing the many times they

had witnessed beds being taken away from others in the shelter for the same reasons stating “don’t take their bed away from them because that’s the last thing they have to look forward to at the end of the day”. Seth continued to highlight the importance of being able to have a bed to sleep in at night because many of the youth they had met in the shelter were already experiencing their own struggles outside of the shelter. Seth shared “smoking and drinking is their escape out of reality and I one hundred percent get that because I was there and you know sometimes I’m still there when I drink. They’re going through a rough time in life how it is and to kick them out and take their bed away is just making it one thousand times worse.” Seth addressed from their perspective, that many street-involved youth turn to substances to cope and “escape”. This refers to how youth often turn to substance use to escape the feelings they are left with after experiencing their hardships.

Low Motivation in Seeking Housing

Throughout both interviews, both participants also shared that while using substances they had very little to no motivation when it came to searching for housing. Although both youth stated they had access to staff that could assist them in searching, they simply had little to no motivation to do so and would have benefitted from more encouragement from staff. Seth shared how finding housing was not considered to be a priority for them while they were using substances. When asked about how they would describe their past experiences when trying to find housing while using substances, Seth stated that it was “just useless to me at the time cause while I was using, I didn’t really care about housing um I just didn’t want to sleep on the street so I would just jump from shelter to shelter and I wouldn’t actually um what’s the word I guess, actively search for housing”. When asked what they believe the biggest factor was that prevented them from accessing secure housing, Tom shared “I’d say my [lack of] effort towards the idea of

needing a house. So the amount of time I spend on Kijiji or the amount of time I spend talking to landlords and stuff”. Tom ultimately shared that it was their low motivation and the lack of time spent actively searching for housing that prevented them from securing stable housing. This participant was able to later find and secure housing once they began utilizing housing workers from a local agency. Once accessing these services the participant stated that it took them approximately one year and three months to secure housing, stating that there were very long waits for housing opportunities. Although not explicitly stated by Tom, the long waits for housing could have been contributing to their low motivation. Seth shared that they would have liked more support and guidance from staff at the different shelters they had stayed at. Seth stated:

My main issue at some places were you know “we’re here to help you but we’re not going to hold your hand”. And I understand that you know, I’m not expecting you to help me if I don’t want the help but I think that’s another reason why I just gave up so easily is because people weren’t in my ear going “hey um if you don’t find a place you’re going to be back on the street so I’m here to help you find this place um I will help you look, I will help remind you to look, um if I find something I will let you know um that’s what I would have appreciated but um instead you know they’re just like well I’ll find places but if you’re not looking then neither am I.

Seth believes more encouragement and guidance from staff are needed, specifically for youth who use substances because those who are under the influence are often not as motivated, depending on the individual, to job search or search for housing in comparison to those who are not using substances. Seth shared that they were able to actively search and find secure housing when they came to the realization that they needed somewhere to live and that marijuana was not

the only thing that mattered in their life. They had come to this realization on their own which brought up feelings of self-agency surrounding their substance use which appeared to be another common theme among both participants.

Feelings of Self-Agency Regarding Their Substance Use

The act of wanting to obtain sobriety and/or wanting to cut down their substance use was another common theme that emerged in both of the youth's narratives. Although both youth recalled having access to services that could assist them in substance use treatment, the participants stated that they chose to work on their substance use on their own as that was their choice. Tom also had their own meaning of being sober. Being sober for this participant meant that they were no longer using meth, but would still use marijuana and drink casually at parties and social gatherings. Tom shared "I try to be responsible and respect the fact that I can do it and put more confidence in myself". Here Tom was referring to the confidence they have in themselves that they can still use substances while avoiding the negative effects it once had on them. Negative experiences appeared to have contributed to the participant's interest in becoming sober. Tom recalled a past experience where they had been using substances and woke up in the middle of winter, semi frozen, angry and wondering whether they wanted to continue living. This experience, along with past interactions with the police that have been previously mentioned, contributed to this participant's interest in becoming sober. Tom stated that after their experience during the winter they "spent the whole day working and focusing on being sober and getting support from [agency] outreach". Support from this agency motivated this youth to get sober, while this participant shared that they were able to remain sober afterwards on their own. Similarly, Seth also shared that they chose to limit their substance use, and cut down marijuana completely on their own. When asked if they utilized any services regarding their substance use,

Tom shared “Um so I forget who I called but um I tried to reach out to a facility um I don’t even remember what they’re called because I didn’t really use it as much because I decided I wanted to do it myself because I felt that if I did it myself it would really mean something to me”. Being able to accomplish and reach their own goals surrounding their substance use on their own, ultimately works to boost their self-reliance and sense of achievement. Seth went on to share how they were not forced by anyone to change their substance use habits, rather they made the decision themselves because it is what they wanted. Seth stated “No one really forced me to quit, I just eventually said you know what this isn’t for me and I just stopped smoking weed um I drink you know at family gatherings but I no longer consider myself an alcoholic”. This helps to explain the sense of self-agency the participants hold, where the participants are aware of the control over their actions.

A Need For More Anti-Oppressive Approaches Within Housing And Shelter Programs

It was evident within both narratives that participants felt that the housing and shelter programs they have accessed in the past could have practiced ways of working with youth that were more anti-oppressive. Specifically, both youth shared feelings where they felt that staff at these programs could have been more understanding and accepting of their substance use. When asked if there were any changes they would have liked to see within housing and shelter programs and how they work with youth who use substances, Tom stated that it is important for staff at these programs and shelters to understand that “sometimes it’s a learned behaviour [using substances] not a behaviour that they choose to do”. Tom felt that staff they had encountered while using substances could have been more understanding and accepting. Seth continued to share more about the importance of having a bed to sleep in and when asked about whether they would like to see any changes to the rules or guidelines from the shelters they had accessed, Seth

stated “I think so far having strict rules is a good thing but also not being so strict on them if they come back and they’re under the influence”. Seth continuously expressed how those utilizing shelter services should not be asked to leave and have their bed taken away if they happen to break a rule and come back under the influence. Seth went on to state:

I get that you have rules that you know you don’t want that stuff but the thing is, they’re young, they’re not going to listen to you. They’re going to go out and do it anyway and if they come back, as long as they’re not being an idiot they should not take away their place to sleep cause you know, they feel safe there. They may have a month you know and they could have found housing but now they’re back on the street and they can’t find housing. So the way I see it, as long as they’re not stupid, as long as they’re not disturbing the people around them, why kick them out?

This is an example of how strict rules, especially zero tolerance policies surrounding substances, can ultimately work to reinforce oppressive ways of working. I consider harm reduction practices to fall under an anti-oppressive framework because anti-oppressive practice within social work recognizes that rather than focusing on a singular form of oppression, anti-oppressive practices takes a non-hierarchical, intersectional approach that acknowledges the multiplicity and different interconnected forms of oppression (Moosa-Mitha, 2015). Another example as discussed by a participant about how different housing and shelter programs could adopt more anti-oppressive ways of working with youth would be to include more flexible hours, especially in the winter. Tom stated “I could have used more support in the wintertime. Like after hours, have shift workers and everything. To have something that would be open late like eight, nine o’clock would help a lot.” Tom shares how there was a need for more accessible hours that could have helped the services be more inclusive to the individuals that they serve.

These findings focused on the experiences of youth who have used substances while trying to access housing, through their shared narratives. The discussion below focuses on these different experiences while taking into account their social and political identities and how power structures and social structures may have contributed to their systems of oppression.

Discussion

In this discussion section I address the findings from the narratives of both youth, connect their experiences to my research question, and identify what barriers they had experienced when trying to access housing and what they believe they needed from different housing and shelter services while using substances. Their journeys of substance use and homelessness and their sense of self-determination will be discussed along with recommendations and implications these findings have for housing and shelter services. I end this section with discussing the strengths and limitations of the study.

Journeys Of Substance Use And Homelessness

Throughout both narratives, it was evident that each of the youth's substance use contributed to different aspects of their experiences. Firstly, it was discovered from the findings that it appeared to be common for the youth and their peers to have had experienced multiple hardships in their life which ultimately resulted in the use of substances to cope with these struggles or they felt that the substances helped contribute to these struggles. As one youth had mentioned, using substances is considered to be an "escape from reality" for them. These findings align with previous literature including the work of Sekharan (2015) where it was found that street-involved youth experience stressors that other youth simply do not experience due to their living environment.

Another finding from my research that appeared to be related to youth's substance use was their lack of motivation when it came to searching for housing. Both youth stated that despite wanting to find their own place, while using substances they experienced a decrease in motivation towards many things including towards finding a place to live. For workers, this could often come across as the youth being lazy or not caring about where they stay when in reality there are underlying factors that contribute to this low motivation they are experiencing. This concept also connects the common struggle of the youth expressing a need for more "understanding" staff. Both youth expressed feelings that workers they had reached out to in the past did not truly understand what the youth were going through and why they continued to use substances, even if it meant that they might lose their housing or shelter. This may then work to reinforce youth who are self-medicating to cope to continue with their substance use as they often feel they do not have anyone to confide in. This is just one of many examples of how power structures within society can often work to reproduce systems of oppression for marginalized groups. Specifically, agencies and their rules and regulations in which their management and staff follow can be seen as power structures that work to govern youth and their actions. This policing then works to dictate whether a youth is deserving of shelter on the basis of whether they are following the guidelines set by the agency, failing to acknowledge the factors that could be contributing to what the agency deems as 'deviant' behaviours. Another example of this is when a youth's bed is taken away from them because they return to the shelter under the influence. Rather than addressing the underlying factors that may be contributing to youth's substance use, youth are instead turned away and forced to cope with another struggle on their own or with very few supports. This emphasizes the need for more anti-oppressive ways of

working with this particular group, which will later be discussed under the recommendations and implications for practice.

A Narrative Of Self-Reliance

As shared in the findings, both youth discussed feelings of self-agency regarding their substance use. Both youth realized that they wanted to change their substance use habits and made the decision to do this on their own, where one participant stated that it would mean more to them if they did it this way. Existing literature has shared statistics involving street-involved youth and attempts to access addiction services where 68.4% of youth stated they did not attempt to access such services due to multiple reasons, including the youth not believing that they had a problem with drugs, the youth recognizing that they had a problem but did not feel a need to stop, the youth feeling that they could handle their drug problem on their own and lastly, that youth stating that they could not conform to the behavioural requirements specified by treatment programs that were available to them (Hadland et al., 2009). This can help explain why many street youth who are using substances may not be interested in stopping their use as they do not view their lifestyle to be an issue. Although these statistics date back 12 years, my findings from the two narratives appear to echo these statistics where the youth, although having access to different substance use related supports, chose to deal with their substance use on their own. One youth stated that controlling their substance use on their own would help them feel more confident in themselves. This alone expresses the power of self-reliance. For many street involved youth, self-reliance and independence become valued qualities which allows the youth to avoid needing others for help during stressful times (Bender et al., 2018). Although this can help the youth's sense of independence, this can also be harmful for them. This emphasis on independence may encourage youth to withdraw and distance themselves from others during

difficult times which is considered to be another avoidant coping mechanism (Bender et al., 2018). While a majority of literature refers to youth's drug use as a drug problem, I refrain from doing so. Although I am aware that substance use can be a health problem due to the acquisition and transmission of infectious diseases, I believe the language that refers to youth's substance use as a drug problem contributes to the stigma and to the oppressive systems that operate in society and how they often work to be harmful towards those who use substances. I believe it is important to acknowledge that each youth who participated in this study determined on their own that they wanted to see changes in their substance use as they could see it was beginning to affect other aspects of their lives.

Existing literature also states that homeless youth often respond to past negative experiences and distrust by developing a narrative of self-reliance (Bender et al., 2018). This may help explain why both participants refrained from seeking additional support because both youth had been punished for their substance use, experienced a lack of empathy and understanding from workers and services, particularly those services that enact and enforce zero tolerance policies. This 'Failed help seeking' for this group can be reframed as an increased confidence in their own abilities to handle their struggles on their own (Bender et al., 2018). This reframing follows an anti-oppressive frame of social work practice where service providers are encouraged to work from a strengths-based perspective.

Recommendations And Implications For Practice

The youth interviewed for this study shared a variety of recommendations of what they would like to see from housing and shelter programs and from their workers. One of the recommendations made by a youth suggested that they would have appreciated more accessible hours regarding drop-in centers, especially during the wintertime. A study that looked into

reasons why street-involved youth experience difficulty accessing different social services supports this recommendation as literature states that services that youth need often do not exist or are unavailable or, the service is not accessible due to opening hours, waiting times or an unwelcoming atmosphere (Barker et al., 2015). A youth specified that they would have liked to see more accessible hours, especially in the winter because they have experienced homelessness during extreme cold weather. The limited time frames given for drop-in centers simply did not suffice for them as they were trying to manage living on the streets in unbearable conditions.

Recommendations regarding workers were also raised during the interviews with the youth, where they stated that they would have liked to see staff at the programs they were utilizing to be more accepting and understanding of their substance use. Previous research echoes this recommendation where Higgett et al (2003) found that a positive aspect highlighted by youth accessing and using services was the importance of organizations having empathetic staff (Higgett et al., 2003). According to Higgett et al (2003) many youth were able to identify a key person from an agency they had been involved with and this person was a major contributor to their transition off the street (Higgett et al., 2003). This is a pivotal point of interest as it focuses on the importance of providing youth with services that can provide them with a sense of agency, in addition to emphasizing the impact that staff can have on youth. It is important to understand that the roles workers play in different housing and shelter programs have the ability to impact youth who use these services immensely. Existing literature also supports this claim, stating that the relationship between service providers and youth are typically built over time and that the lack of initial trust these youth have in their workers can ultimately prevent them from seeking the supports they need (The Children's Aid Society of the District of Thunder Bay, 2011). A youth explained how they wished service providers could understand that they did not

necessarily choose to start using substances, rather they felt that it was a learned behaviour for them, given their environment. This expresses how outside factors including structural inequities and oppressive systems can contribute to one's substance use which emphasizes the importance of understanding that substance use is not an individual issue and that these outside factors must be addressed. Structural inequities include healthcare, education and housing inequalities. Youth should be able to access services without fear of being judged or punished. More empathy and understanding are needed from service providers as youth who are trying to transition off the streets often report needing more assistance and better guidance, specifically in planning, advice, support, encouragement and life skills training from workers (The Children's Aid Society of the District of Thunder Bay, 2011).

Lastly, a youth highly emphasized the recommendation of having more lenient rules within shelters. This recommendation arose when the youth began discussing how common it was for their peers and themselves to be discharged from the shelter for breaking their zero tolerance rule related to substance use and coming back under the influence. According to this youth, they agree the shelter should have clear set rules in place but that there should be some 'leeway' around them. The reasoning for this is the importance of having a bed and safe place to sleep at night. This is where the principles of Housing First could be beneficial, where they hold the belief that every young person has the right to housing and that those who have experienced living on the street will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing (Gaetz et al., 2021). The youth believes that as long as you are not being an 'idiot' and disrupting the environment then you should be allowed to stay while receiving a warning of some sort. This participant views the situation of having a bed to sleep in at night as the only thing they have to look forward to. In turn, taking beds away from these youth ultimately

complicates their journey and adds additional barriers for those who are trying to transition off the streets. Existing literature echoes this notion of zero tolerance policies surrounding substance use appearing to be more harmful and oppressive for youth than productive, where these policies often work to prevent street-involved youth from obtaining temporary indoor shelter while also discouraging them from being able to build trusting relationships with their service providers (Krusi et al., 2010). This literature aligns with my research which found that housing and shelter opportunities for street-youth that have zero tolerance policies regarding substance use can be problematic while also failing to acknowledge the issues of addiction and substance use in this particular constituency. Research goes on to share that zero tolerance policies must be challenged in order to reduce harms for residents (Pauly et al., 2018). Along with challenging these policies, there is also a need for more consistent organizational policies that support harm reduction and education to support client choice related to substance use within these transitional programs (Pauly et al., 2018). Residents within these transitional programs who appreciate the harm reduction approach suggested a pathway of recovery that went beyond abstinence where there was an emphasis on learning about one's self and involved shifting life goals and social networks (Pauly et al., 2018). In other words, recovery is still possible while continuing substance use for these individuals. Abstinence as an option rather than a requirement for recovery helps to promote a more holistic and realistic goal for those continuing to use substances (Pauly et al., 2018).

Overall, I consider harm reduction practices to fall under an anti-oppressive framework because anti-oppressive practice within social work recognizes that rather than focusing on a singular form of oppression, anti-oppressive practices takes a non-hierarchical, intersectional approach that acknowledges the multiplicity and different interconnected forms of oppression

(Moosa-Mitha, 2015). In working through this framework it can be recognized that zero tolerance policies can continue to further oppress these youth as different forms of oppression would be acknowledged

It is evident that there are existing patterns between the recommendations that were shared by the youth in this study and the findings from existing literature. This highlights the importance of these recommendations being acknowledged in social work practice, specifically for those working in youth oriented spaces and overall more attention being paid to the needs of these youth. Overall there is a need for more anti-oppressive practices within services being provided for youth, especially for those who are using substances while trying to access shelter and housing.

Strengths and Limitations Of The Study

While completing this study, there were both strengths and limitations that I experienced along the way. The strength of my research included myself being able to volunteer at the drop-in center where I recruited my participants. While volunteering at the drop-in center once a week, I was able to build rapport with the youth there. I believe this to be important because participating in this research involved the possibility of the youth sharing personal experiences and stories. Volunteering at the drop-in allowed the youth to put a familiar face to the research which helped to make them feel more comfortable sharing more personal experiences.

In addition, there are also some limitations of this study. While this research focuses on those who were interested in seeking permanent housing while living on the street, in shelters and housing programs, it is also important to acknowledge that these views are not representative of the entire homeless population. It is important to recognize that not all homeless individuals would like to live in traditional housing, although from my experience in working with street

involved youth, I have found that almost all of these youth would like to access secure housing. In addition, although the two interviews produced rich narratives, the small sample size does not allow for a generalizability among the street-youth population, rather the two narratives can provide insight into how different street-involved youth navigate their life on the street while using substances. Conducting my research during COVID-19 also posed many challenges, specifically regarding my data collection. Due to the restrictions to research that were imposed by the McMaster Research Ethics Board and McMaster University more widely during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to complete in-person interviews. Instead, all interviews were to occur over the phone or through a video call platform. This in itself posed a major limitation for this study because many of the street-involved youth who were eligible to participate through the drop-in center did not have access to wifi and a computer. Regarding phone interviews, there were two instances, one where a youth who was scheduled for an interview had to reschedule due to issues with their phone plan, and another where the call could not get through to the youth. This added some complexity to scheduling and completing the interviews, but I was able to conduct my research in a manner that allowed the participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories.

Conclusion

This study amplified the voices of two youth who were once homeless and trying to access housing and shelter services while also engaging in substance use. Through their narratives I was able to reveal what street-involved youth believed they needed while trying to access housing and shelter services while using substances. This research was also able to give an overall insight on the experiences of these youth and how they make sense of their substance use and life on the street.

My intention throughout this research was to shine a light on youth's experiences from their own perspectives and to be able to give them a platform where they felt comfortable in doing so. From the two narratives that were shared, many common themes emerged. These themes included the youth experiencing multiple hardships throughout their life, having low motivation in searching for permanent housing, having feelings of self-agency regarding substance use and lastly, expressing the need for more anti-oppressive approaches within housing and shelter services. Through the exploration of these themes I was able to learn about the difficult realities that street-involved youth face while living on the street and trying to access housing while using substances.

Furthermore, the findings helped to reveal various recommendations to practice that youth would like to see within housing and shelter services. These recommendations included more flexible hours, less restrictive shelter rules, and the need for more understanding, empathetic workers. Although recommendations were discovered from these youth, it is important to continue to learn more about how youth feel about the services being provided to them and to recognize what they believe is needed within these services and why. This can help to inform social workers and other service providers that work with youth, especially those working within housing and shelter programs, how to respond more effectively to their client's needs.

Appendix A: McMaster University Research Ethics Board Certificate Of Ethics Clearance



McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
MREB Secretariat, GH-305
1280 Main St. W.
Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8
email: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Today's Date: Apr/30/2021

Supervisor: Dr. Allyson Ion
Student Investigator: Ms. Tess Kosakowski
Applicant: Tess Kosakowski
Project Title: An In Depth look at the barriers street-involved youth who use substances experience when trying to access housing.
MREB#: 5329

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 5329 entitled "An In Depth look at the barriers street-involved youth who use substances experience when trying to access housing." have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

If this project includes planned in-person contact with research participants, then procedures for addressing COVID-19 related risks must be addressed according to the current processes communicated by the Vice-President (Research) and your Associate Dean (Research). All necessary approvals must be secured before in-person contact with research participants can take place.

Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: Apr/29/2022. If the Annual Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).

Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Agreements	CPIIC Letter - Tess Kosakowski - 2021 - PDF	Mar/12/2021	1
Interviews	Interview Guide	Mar/12/2021	1
Recruiting Materials	Screening.Questions.2021	Mar/17/2021	1
Letters of Support	support:counselling2.doc	Apr/22/2021	2
Consent Forms	Oral.Consent.Log.2021	Apr/22/2021	2
Recruiting Materials	Recruitment.Flyer.2021	Apr/23/2021	2
Response Documents	Summary Of Revisions For MREB 5329 Kosakowski	Apr/28/2021	1
Consent Forms	Kosakowski.Consent.Letter.2021	Apr/28/2021	2

Dr. Violetta Ignieski

Dr. Violetta Ignieski, MREB Chair,
Associate Professor,
Department of Philosophy, UH-308,
905-525-9140 ext. 23462,
ignieski@mcmaster.ca

Dr. Sue Becker, MREB Vice-Chair,
Professor,
Department of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour, PC-312,
905-525-9140 ext. 23020,
beckers@mcmaster.ca

Appendix B:

Interview Guide

Tess Kosakowski

Masters of Social Work Student Recruiter

A Look Into The Barriers Presented To Street Involved Youth Who Use Substances When Trying To Access Housing

The purpose of this research study is to understand the barriers that street involved youth who use substances, like yourself, experience when trying to access housing. Here, housing is referring to shelters, as well as housing you may transition to after shelters. In understanding these barriers, it can allow for more discussion to happen surrounding what youth believe they need in order to secure housing.

You are being asked to participate in a narrative based research study to explore the experiences of youth, including street involved youth, who use substances in securing housing. I am interested in how your experiences with substance use impacts access to social services, specifically your access to housing. Further, I am interested in whether you have, or are currently experiencing any barriers to securing housing, due to your substance use. More specifically, I am interested in identifying common barriers to help inform social work and social services to be able to effectively respond to your needs.

Induction Questions:

1. What is your current living situation?
 - a. For how long?
2. Are you currently using substances or have you used in the past?
 - a. How would you describe your present or past substance use habits?

Accessing Housing:

3. How would you describe your experiences in trying to find housing?
 - a. Do you feel that your substance use affected these experiences, why or why not?
 - b. Have you ever been forced to leave a past living situation, if so why?
4. What do you believe is the biggest factor that is preventing you or has prevented you in the past, from securing stable housing?
5. When trying to find housing, was there anything you feel you needed during these experiences that were missing?
 - a. From the workers?
 - b. From the program/shelter?
6. What kind of changes would you like to see happen within housing programs and shelters for youth, specifically those who use substances?
 - a. Would you like to see any changes within approaches made towards youth who use substances?
 - b. Changes to rules and guidelines of shelters and other programs?
7. Would you like to share any other thoughts, stories, or reflections that you'd like to share about your experiences when looking for housing?

Interview Wrap-Up:

8. I will remind the participant about study confidentiality and next steps about follow-up and sharing study results
9. I will provide the participant with a list of community resources.
10. Thank you for attending this interviewing and being of contribution to this research.

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