

## Editorial

### Women and homelessness

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Serendipity was the focus of my very first review when I joined *Qualitative Social Work* at the end of 2015 as the European Review Essay Editor. I reflected on the part serendipity had played in my own social work career (Morriss, 2016). In her book, *What's the Use* (2019), Sara Ahmed tells us that 'to follow something, it first needs to capture your attention' (p.6). This Editorial reflects an issue that captured my attention this year after attending a series of separate events. These three events focused on women and homelessness, including women who have had their child removed by the state. As some of you will know, the latter is the focus of my own work, which began with the happenstance of Professor Alys Young appointing Professor Karen Broadhurst as my mentor when we all worked at the University of Manchester in 2014. Now based at Lancaster University, Karen and I now work together on the project, [Keeping Mothers in Mind](#).

The first event was a 'Pause and Learn' webinar on Housing held on 23 January 2024 organised by the organisation, [Pause](#). Pause are a UK charity 'that works to improve the lives of women who have had – or are at risk of having – more than one child removed from their care, and the services and systems that affect them'. Having identified that housing insecurity is a key source of vulnerability for the women who work with Pause, the webinar shares their 'observational learnings on the practical and emotional challenges that women face around housing when going through care proceedings and after having a child removed from their care, as well as what services can do to better support them'. You can watch the webinar here: <https://vimeo.com/905616428/6e05e1d3c8?share=copy>

I was invited to attend an in-person, Women's Homelessness Awareness Event, held at the University of Manchester on 8 February 2024. Two important resources were launched at the event. Firstly, the University of Manchester's Feminist Collective launched their report, [Women's Safety: Housing and Intersecting Crises in Manchester](#). The report outlines the key challenges facing practitioners working to support the safety of women who are experiencing homelessness in the context of austerity and intersecting crises in the UK. The authors, Isis Barei-Guyot, with Elizabeth Ackerley and Alison Briggs, identified two broad areas of concern: (1) supporting women to access affordable housing, and (2) ensuring women have access to services. Following this, the Women's Homelessness Involvement Group (WHIG) shared their manifesto and launched their 2024 Campaign, 'Give The Mum A Chance'. Members of WHIG, including those with lived experience of homelessness and child removal, gave a powerful presentation of the ongoing impact of gaps in support on women's and children's lives. The panel outlined how the methodological approach of most official homelessness counts does not capture the numbers of homeless women because there is a focus on 'sleeping rough' in city centres, and homelessness hostels, both of which are dangerous spaces for women. Instead, women 'sofa surf', sleep outside of city centres and in safer places, such as Accident and Emergency Departments in hospitals. Their 'Give The Mum A Chance' campaign has three clear asks:

1. A day centre for women and children experiencing homelessness in Manchester, UK.
2. A more trauma-informed and preventative approach across services in Manchester, particularly around women who have had (or are at risk of having) children removed.

3. An increased awareness of the different ways in which women experience homelessness in Manchester, UK.

Please contact the WHIG Co-chairs, Megan and Sophie, if you'd like to find out more about the campaign and sign the 'Give The Mum A Chance' petition. Their email is: [womencoairs@gmail.com](mailto:womencoairs@gmail.com)

The third event I attended was a webinar on 'Homelessness and multiple disadvantage: improving responses for women' by Dr Joanne McGrath and Professor Monique Lhussier held on 29 February 2024. Joanne and Monique discussed their important study on women and homelessness. Joanne interviewed 20 women at two drop-in services for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed in the north of England. Many of the women were care experienced and had experienced physical and emotional abuse. They found that sofa surfing was by far the most long lasting and repeatedly found form of homelessness for the women. This was often linked with needing access to drugs, and was inherently dangerous, leaving the women vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Although not the original focus of the study, child removal emerged as a consistent and unexpected finding in the interviews with 14 of the 20 women. The research team found that the stigma associated with child removal further entrenched social exclusion and increasing health inequalities. You can read more about the findings in the two articles published from the study (McGrath et al. 2023a; 2023b).

These three unconnected events took place in January and February 2024 on the same area of concern, the experiences of women who are homeless. It is starkly apparent that women's experiences of homelessness are often hidden, meaning that services are not tailored to their needs. The 'Give The Mum A Chance' campaign in Manchester is an example of where this has been recognised in practice and where change is actively being called for. Please do support the campaign.

## References

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