

A Qualitative Study of
**LGBTQI+ Youth
Homelessness
in Ireland**

Executive Summary

Dr Aideen Quilty
Prof Michelle Norris

FOCUS
Ireland

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Trans Young People in Ireland

belong^{TO}



The views expressed in this research report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the funders Focus Ireland, Human Dignity Foundation and St. Stephens Green Trust.

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Report commissioned by Focus Ireland

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September 2020

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Abbreviations and Specialist Terminology

Intersex	Individuals who are born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time.
LGBTQI+	LGBTI+ is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex. The + denotes other sexual orientation and gender categories not accurately described by these terms. As there is a significant body of relevant international literature that includes the umbrella term 'Queer', the abbreviation LGBTQI+ is used throughout this report.
Homophobia	Negative attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexuality which may be manifested in discrimination, hostile behaviour, or hate crimes.
Transgender/trans	A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex observed and recorded for them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities.
Transitioning	The process through which some trans people begin to outwardly live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one observed and recorded for them at birth.
Transphobia	The fear, dislike or hatred of people who are trans or are perceived to challenge conventional gender categories or 'norms' of male or female, which can result in discrimination against people who are trans.

Foreword

This report on the experiences of LGBTQI+ young people who find themselves without a home emerges from an exploration of the causes and solutions to youth homelessness which Focus Ireland has been engaged with for over 30 years. An important dimension of that work has been our engagement with researchers and activists across the world. Around 5 years ago, during a seminar at which we had invited Professor Steven Gaetz and Melanie Redman to talk to us about the Canadian 'A Way Home' youth homeless strategy, one of the slides included a statement that – 'if you are not looking at LGBTQ homelessness you are not dealing with the causes of youth homelessness.' An intern with the Advocacy team asked what was known about the issue in Ireland. This report can be traced back to the fact that the answer to that question was 'nothing at all'.

The seminar question initiated discussion in Focus Ireland and in the wider homeless systems, which reveal very different perspectives on this issue: people away from the frontline, while almost always sympathetic, just did not recognise this as an issue in Ireland's homeless services, irrespective of their own gender orientation and identity. On the other hand, lesbian and gay frontline staff told us it was a huge issue which they had been trying to get attention for over many years. This difference of perception also comes across very strongly in the ensuing report. This difference in perspective reflects the double invisibility of many of these young people – many of whom live on the margins of 'official' homelessness, while keeping fundamental parts of their human identity hidden, to protect their own safety.

A couple of decades of excellent research in Europe, the UK and the USA has repeatedly shown us that homelessness looks very different on the surface than at its core. Even people who work with 'the homeless' every day can miss important dimensions and trends which good research can reveal.

The report does what all good research must do – it brings something which was hidden into light and helps us to understand it. In helping us to understand it, it offers an opportunity for us to solve it.

What matters now is how the policy makers and the management in the homeless sector respond to the issues which this research brings into the light. All voluntary sector homeless services in Ireland are committed to values of inclusion and equality, we all aspire to be safe places for anyone who is vulnerable. It is distressing to hear, then, that our services are not always seen like that by young people who identify as LGBTQI+ or are still growing into a full understanding of their gender identity. The report recognises that the best response to the defects of the homeless system must always be to strive to eliminate the need for them at all by ending homelessness; and in that light it sets out some useful contributions to prevent LGBTQI+ young people becoming homeless in the first place. It also sets out some strategic and some practical responses to this for the sector and policy makers to adopt while homelessness persists. This report is not the end of our work on this issue, but it marks a crucial stage from evidence gathering to action.

In addition to the researchers themselves, Focus Ireland would like to thank all who participated in the Advisory Group for the report, former Research Co-ordinator, Sarah Sheridan, who initiated the research and her successor, Daniel Hoey, who brought it to completion, and to Paul Kelly whose advocacy for this issue in Focus Ireland services has extended over many years.

Mike Allen

Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland

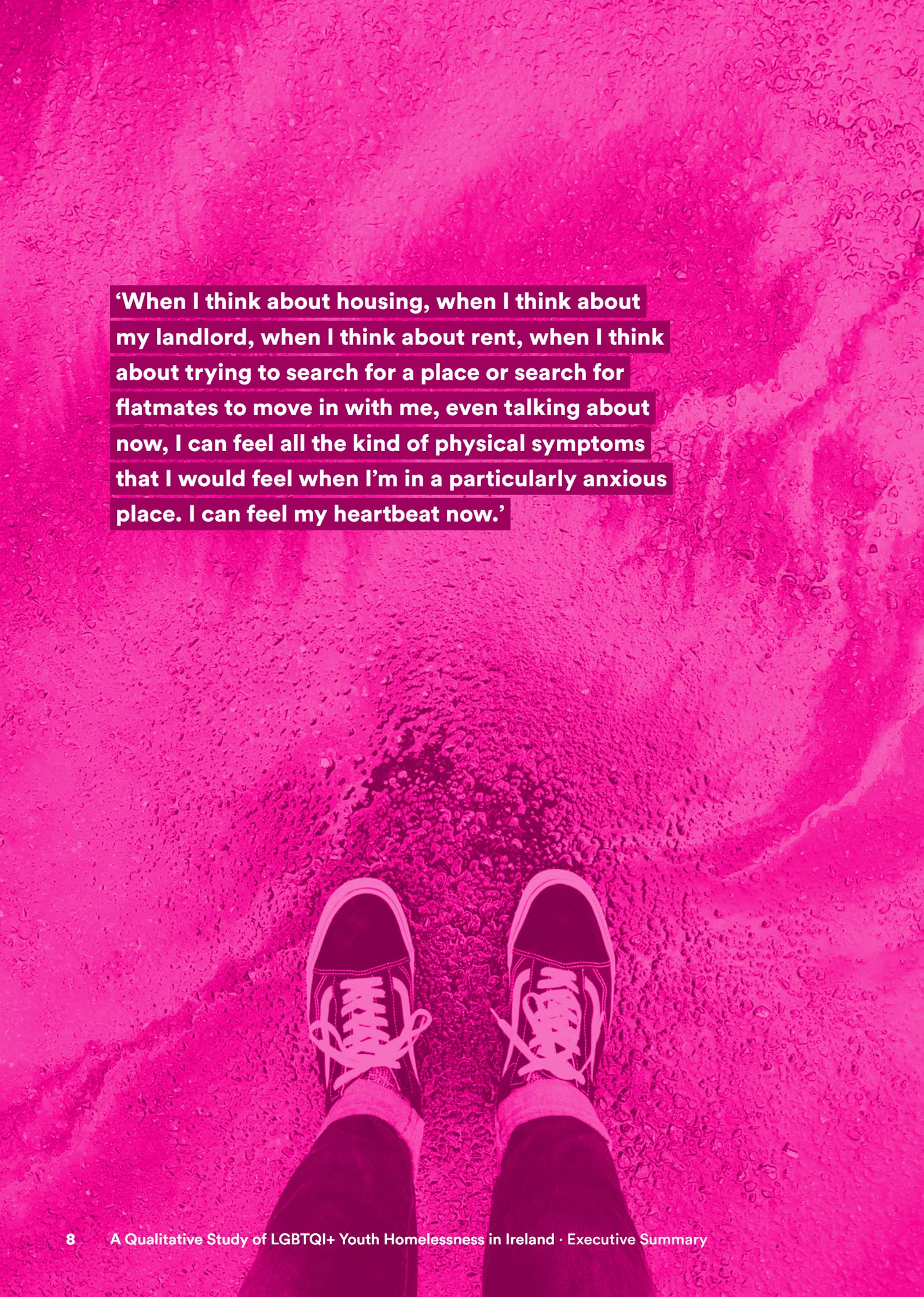
About the Authors

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Michelle Norris is Professor of Social Policy at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin. Her teaching and research interests focus on housing policy and urban regeneration. She is an independent member of the National Economic and Social Council and chair of the board of the Housing Finance Agency which finances social housing in Ireland. Her latest book entitled *Social Housing in Western Europe: The Micro Political Economy of Resilient and Fragile Systems* will be published by Routledge in spring 2021.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the support and advice they received from Focus Ireland's research department particularly from Mike Allen, Sarah Sheridan and Daniel Hoey and also from Moninne Griffith of BeLongG To. Thanks also to Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Joanne Kelleher for their contributions in the early stages of this research. Finally, thanks to everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this research, in particular the 22 young people who so generously shared their experiences of becoming, being and leaving homelessness. They made this research possible.



‘When I think about housing, when I think about my landlord, when I think about rent, when I think about trying to search for a place or search for flatmates to move in with me, even talking about now, I can feel all the kind of physical symptoms that I would feel when I’m in a particularly anxious place. I can feel my heartbeat now.’

Research Context

This research study, commissioned by Focus Ireland, sought for the first time to make visible and give voice to the specificities of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland, with a view to informing the development of policies and services to meet their needs. There is a dearth of research on the specific experiences and needs of young Irish LGBTQI+ people who are experiencing homelessness. This contributes to difficulties in fully understanding the scale of the issue in Ireland and suggests that LGBTQI+ youth who are using housing and homeless services are relatively invisible to the providers of these services. In addition to those LGBTQI+ young people who are ‘officially’ homeless, there is likely to be a significant cohort of young people living without a permanent home and surviving by sleeping on friends’ sofas, squatting or staying in other insecure or unsafe places, who are even more difficult to identify and consequently are often referred to as the ‘forgotten homeless’ or ‘hidden homeless’ (Curry *et al*, 2017)¹. As a result of this lack of evidence, there is a paucity of detailed policy and good-practice advice for supporting these young people and strategies for funding these services.

1 Curry, S. R., Morton, M., Matjasko, J. L., Dworsky, A., Samuels, G. M., and Schlueter, D. (2017). Youth Homelessness and Vulnerability: How Does Couch Surfing Fit? *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 60(1–2), 17–24.

The need for information on homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people is particularly urgent in view of the rise in youth homeless in Ireland in recent years. In February 2020, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) reported that 881 young people aged 18–24 were ‘officially’ homeless (i.e. living in emergency accommodation funded through Section 10 of the 1988 Housing Act). In contrast, only 642 people in this age group were homeless just three years earlier (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, various years)². There is also a strong consensus in the international research that LGBTQI+ youth face significant risks of homelessness (Curry *et al*, 2017; Rosario *et al*, 2012)³ and are overrepresented in the population of homeless young people (Lolai, 2015; Cochran *et al*, 2002)⁴.

This research sought to address this information deficit by examining for the first time the experiences of homeless LGBTQI+ young people aged between 18 and 30 years in Ireland with a view to informing the development of policies and services to meet their needs.

2 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, (various years). Homeless Report, Dublin: DHPCLG.

3 Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E. W., and Hunter, J. (2012). Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths: A Developmental Milestone Approach. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(1), 186–193.

4 Lolai, D. (2015). You’re Going to Be Straight or You’re Not Going to Live Here: Child Support for LGBT Homeless Youth. *Tulane Journal of Law and Sexuality*, 35(42): 37–62; Cochran, B. N., Stewart, A. J., Ginzler, J. A., and Cauce, A. M. (2002). Challenges Faced by Homeless Sexual Minorities: Comparison of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Homeless Adolescents with their Heterosexual Counterparts. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(5), 773–777.

Research Aims and Objectives

The broad aim of this research was threefold. It involved gathering and exploring information about:

- › the scale and triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland
- › first-hand qualitative experiences of young LGBTQI+ people who found themselves homeless, and
- › measures that might be adopted to combat LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland

To achieve this broad aim, the research addressed the following specific objectives:

- › Explore the processes and ‘triggers’ that contribute to LGBTQI+ young people’s homelessness or housing instability in Ireland
- › Ascertain LGBTQI+ young people’s experiences of frontline homeless and related support services in Ireland
- › Examine the potential obstacles to housing of LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland
- › Compare the experiences of LGBTQI+ homeless young people in Ireland with the findings of the international research evidence on this cohort
- › Make recommendations on the development of policies and services to meet the needs of young, homeless LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland, including recommendations on measuring sexuality and/or sexual identity in homelessness statistics

Research Literature, Parameters and Definitions

Counts of LGBTQI+ homeless youths are difficult to obtain and challenging to conduct for a range of reasons, including fear of disclosure and stigma (Rosario *et al*, 2012), sexual experimentation and identity confusion (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007)⁵. Furthermore, how one defines someone who is LGBTQI+ is a methodological challenge for researchers, not least as this can be a matter of changing definition for young people themselves (Tierney & Ward, 2017)⁶.

Such challenges notwithstanding, Ecker's (2016)⁷ comprehensive review of this research reveals that estimates of the size of the LGBTQI+ youth homeless population vary from between 8% and 37% of the total youth homeless population. Research on the triggers of youth homelessness also supports this consensus. It suggests that LGBTQI+ youth are at greater risk of homelessness because they are affected both by the factors which precipitate homelessness among the young population-at-large and by additional challenges related to their sexuality and/or gender identity which can directly or indirectly result in homelessness (Abramovich, 2012)⁸.

Two research cohorts were focussed on in this research:

- › young LGBTQI+ who had or were currently experiencing homelessness, and
- › key stakeholders in the homelessness sector in Ireland including civil servants, funders and homeless service providers and representatives of support and advocacy groups for young LGBTQI+ people.

5 Savin-Williams, R. C., and Ream, G. L. (2007). Prevalence and Stability of Sexual Orientation Components During Adolescence and Young Adulthood. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 36(3), 385–394.

6 Tierney, W. G., and Ward, J. D. (2017). Coming Out and Leaving Home: A Policy and Research Agenda for LGBT Homeless Students. *Educational Researcher*, 46(9), 498–507.

7 Ecker, J. (2016). 'Queer, young, and homeless: A review of the literature', *Child and Youth Services*, 37, 325–361.

8 Abramovich, A. (2012). 'No Safe Place to Go: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Canada: Reviewing the Literature', *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 4(1) 29–51

In total, following an extensive recruitment process, 22 one-to-one interviews with homeless, LGBTQI+ young people aged between 18 and 30 were conducted between December 2018 and August 2019. In addition, interviews with 14 policy makers and representatives of homeless service providers and support and advocacy groups for LGBTQI+ youth and care leavers were conducted between May 2018 and June 2019. These interviewees were identified in consultation with Focus Ireland, which commissioned this research, and the research advisory group which oversaw its implementation.

The expansive abbreviation LGBTQI+ – an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex was used throughout the research. The + denotes other sexual orientation and gender categories not accurately described by these terms and captures the continuous expansion of understandings of gender identities and sexualities (Savin-Williams, 2005).

The definition of homelessness employed in this research is the ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion) typology devised by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (undated)⁹. ETHOS identifies four types of homelessness and housing exclusion: roofless (without any shelter, sleeping rough); homeless (with a temporary place to sleep, in institutions or shelters); living in insecure housing (due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence) and living in inadequate housing (in caravans on illegal campsites, unfit housing, extreme overcrowding). LGBTQI+ youth in all these situations, or who had recently been in these situations (and are now adequately housed), were interviewed for the research.

9 FEANTSA (undated), ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion, retrieved from: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/en-16822651433655843804.pdf>.

Research Findings

The key findings from the youth LGBTQI+ interviews are presented in relation to three critical processes: Becoming Homeless; Being Homeless; and Leaving Homelessness. With regards to the policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed there was a strong consensus that understanding the triggers, dynamics and experience of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness needs to be improved in order to develop more effective supports for this community. Key insights across both stakeholders and young LGBTQI+ people are outlined below.

Stakeholder Insights: Policymakers, Service Providers and Advocates

The 13 policymakers and representatives of homeless service providers and LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisations revealed little consensus about the size of the population of LGBTQI+ homeless young people in Ireland. This reflects the lack of statistics collected on this population and mirrors the challenges associated with collecting these data in the international literature. These stakeholder interviews reinforced an important finding from the youth interviews, namely while some triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness are common to the entire youth homeless population we can identify triggers of homelessness that are specific to LGBTQI+ youth, such as coming out and/or transitioning. The stakeholder interviewees also suggested that LGBTQI+ young people living in rural areas and from some minority ethnic and religious backgrounds are at particularly high risk of becoming homeless when they come out or transition.

There was significant agreement among these interviewees that the LGBTQI+ community is often subject to homophobia and transphobia by other users of homeless services. The adequacy of responses to this behaviour on the part of homeless providers varies. Some homeless organisations actively promote themselves as LGBTQI+-friendly spaces and enforce a policy of zero tolerance of homophobic and transphobic behaviour. In other organisations, this type of abuse is not treated as seriously as, for instance, racism. This finding was mirrored in the youth interviews and reinforces the particular challenges experienced by this cohort and as a consequence may contribute to their unwillingness to use homeless services and instead rely on couch-surfing or other forms

of hidden homelessness for accommodation. Nevertheless, it was also clear from the interviews that LGBTQI+ staff of homeless services can play a vital role in supporting their young LGBTQI+ clients if and when they access these services. This complex relationship between young LGBTQI+ people and homeless services was also highlighted in the interviews with the young people themselves.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Becoming Homeless

The 22 richly textured, insightful and moving interviews conducted with LGBTQI+ young people provided valuable insights into the lives and experience of being LGBTQI+ and homeless in Ireland. A key insight into the high levels of homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people was the dual set of factors that can trigger their homelessness:

- › LGBTQI+ youth are vulnerable to a range of interpersonal, familial and intrapersonal triggers experienced among the young population-at-large including leaving care, family breakdown and the shortage of affordable accommodation.
- › In addition, LGBTQI+ youth face particular triggers associated with their sexuality and gender identity that may increase their exposure to homelessness (Mayock & Corr, 2013)¹⁰ such as the complex experiences relating to coming out and/or transitioning.

Coming out featured prominently across the youth LGBTQI+ interviews and reinforced the fact that the coming-out process continues to present many young people with enormous challenges. There was significant evidence to link the process or acts of coming out within intimate family spheres with subsequent homeless experiences. The Irish context thus mirrored the international findings that parental rejection of young people's sexual orientation and gender identity is a key trigger of their decision to leave home and by extension of their homelessness (Dunne *et al*, 2002; Durso & Gates, 2012; Ecker, 2016)¹¹. The young people's stories and experiences also highlighted the sobering reality that – despite significant progress in Ireland vis-à-vis sexual and gender equality – homophobia and transphobia persist.

10 Mayock, P. and Corr, M. (2013). Young People's Homeless and Housing Pathways: Key Findings from a Six-year Qualitative Longitudinal Study, Dublin, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

11 Dunne G.A., Prendergast S., Telford D., (2002). 'Young, gay, homeless and invisible: A growing population? Culture, Health and Sexuality, 4 (1) 103–116; Durso L.E., Gates G.J., (2012). Serving our youth: findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund, Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/safe-schools-and-youth/serving-our-youth-july-2012/>

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Being Homeless

The young LGBTQI+ participants in this research study evidenced a range of formal and informal ('living off-grid') homeless experiences. It was evident that many young people did not recognise themselves as 'homeless' and minimised their at times deeply distressing experiences of what could be interpreted as classic homelessness, and which map directly to the ETHOS typology devised by FEANTSA. This process of distancing is an important finding and may help deepen understandings of young LGBTQI+ people's broader invisibility and under-representation within the raft of homeless services available.

This research evidenced a deeply concerning, complex and bi-directional relationship between homelessness and mental health problems heavily bound up in complex experiences of stigma and shame. Just over half (thirteen) of the participants disclosed mental health issues, with five participants experiencing severe mental ill-health situations, including suicidal ideation. This level of mental unwellness and its implications for stable living are immense. The young people conjured a dual process of self-imposed silencing and invisibility in relation to their LGBTQI+ identity and homelessness experiences. This 'double closet' is hugely instructive for how we understand and therefore address the complex realities for LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. Particular challenges to coping and being well while experiencing homelessness were identified as acute tiredness, exhaustion and the hyper-vigilance required to stay alert, safe and out of harm.

Participants mentioned several reasons for their decision not to use homeless services. Influencing factors included the complexity of the homeless landscape or terrain, the lack of awareness of what was available to help or support them when they were most in need and an acute sense of deeply seated fear and apprehension about 'hostels' as being unsafe and dangerous for LGBTQI+ people. The majority of young people interviewed were unwilling to enter a space where they feared that they would encounter lack of understanding or blatant homophobic and transphobic attitudes among both other service users and staff, the potential for mis-gendering and fear of further isolation.

For those who did access frontline services and where those interactions were based on support, trust and open engagement the impact on the young person was overwhelmingly positive. This important role of frontline workers, including key workers, needs to be supported with sufficient education and training provided to increase awareness and understanding of the particular needs of young LGBTQI+ people. However, the young people interviewed also reported instances of less positive interactions with both staff and clients of homeless services. There are important messages here for the sector in terms of its role in LGBTQI+ youth homeless provision.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Leaving Homelessness

It is important to acknowledge how difficult exiting homelessness is for the young LGBTQI+ people interviewed for this study. Many of the young people were still in precarious accommodation or formal homelessness at the time of interview. However, these young people showed exceptional levels of resilience through a range of agentic strategies. Those young people who had successfully navigated an exit strategy highlighted the importance of community, queer networks and friendships in supporting them through their homelessness experiences. The second range of supports identified were within the LGBTQI+ NGO sector, in particular the provision of safe spaces and an environment in which people understood the lived reality of LGBTQI+ lives. A third major source of supports was identified within the formal homeless service in the form of keyworkers and advocates. For those still experiencing homelessness, their aspirations reflected the desirability of tailored, dedicated LGBTQI+ homeless service provision and LGBTQI+-specific organisations.

Recommendations

The publication of this research, which is the first major qualitative study on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland, is timely. This study has resulted in a series of recommendations which have the potential to inform the content and implementation of the Irish government's ground-breaking *LGBTI+ Youth Strategy* and the specificity of homelessness. The recommendations were designed to take account of the three overarching goals outlined in the *LGBT+ Youth Strategy*:

- Goal 1: Create a safe, supportive and inclusive physical environment for young LGBTQI+ people
- Goal 2: Improve the physical, mental and sexual health of young LGBTQI+ people
- Goal 3: Develop research and data environments to better understand the lives of young LGBTQI+ people

The recommendations reflect the key findings of the research and the analysis of the young LGBTQI+ participants' experiences of becoming homeless, being homeless and leaving homelessness and in particular the way in which their LGBTQI+ identities and the homophobia and transphobia they experienced shaped these experiences. The recommendations also take account of the way in which services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness are funded and delivered in Ireland by non-governmental organisations both in the private and non-profit sectors. The recommendations are framed around six critical categories: prevention; information, training and communication; education and awareness raising; health; emergency accommodation; and data and measurement.

Preventing Homelessness Among LGBTQI+ Young People

- 1** The ‘Youth Homelessness Strategy’, committed to in the Programme for Government 2020, should include a ‘homelessness prevention’ pillar with specific reference to the particular risks and pathways into homelessness which LGBTQI+ youth are likely to experience. The Strategy should put in place educational, family and youth service supports to help prevent homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth.
- 2** This youth homelessness preventative pillar should include consideration of the role of conflict with parents and caregivers regarding emerging LGBTQI+ identities in young people’s departure from home and thereby their homelessness.
- 3** As an immediate step, Tusla should increase funding to extend the lifetime of the existing Youth Homeless Prevention Mediations Service. Focus Ireland should also ensure that specialist training is provided for its mediation workers related to supporting families where a child or young adult is LGBTI+ or is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 4** The Strategy should also address the specific challenges which may face LGBTQI children in foster care and residential and review and build on the valuable work already conducted by Tusla to ensure that these challenges are addressed.
- 5** The strategy should ensure that specialist support, information and training is available to teachers and youth workers to enhance their interaction with and support for LGBTQI+ youth.

Information, Training and Communication on the Front Line

- 6** As part of phase 2 of this project, Focus Ireland should develop and produce a youth LGBTQI+ homeless services infographic that identifies the key access points and services across the statutory and voluntary sectors, including prevention and outreach services.
- 7** Focus Ireland, along with the Homeless Network, which includes non-profit sector providers of homeless services in the Dublin region, and in collaboration with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, should identify and commission appropriate specialist training from LGBTQI organisations for staff working in the key access points and services. This training should include specific modules, devised in collaboration with appropriate organisations, to assist frontline workers in supporting young LGBTQI+ people from minority ethnic groups.
- 8** Focus Ireland should request the Homeless Network to develop a frontline ‘LGBTBI+ Friendly Space’ visual for display by those service providers who have evidenced that they provide LGBTQI+ friendly spaces through their training, education and mission statements.
- 9** The Homeless Network should consider establishing a network of key workers who have experience of working with LGBTQI+ homeless youth to share experiences and learning.

Education and Awareness Raising Across the Sector

- 10 Focus Ireland should deliver a series of webinars to publicise the key findings and recommendations of this research among policy makers, local authorities, non-profit homeless service providers and providers of other relevant services.
- 11 Focus Ireland should work with the Homeless Network and LGBTQI+ organisations to develop an awareness raising programme that highlights the presence and specific needs of young LGBTQI+ people including appropriate language and gender pronouns.
- 12 Focus Ireland should establish a process to monitor the implementation of recommendations from this research involving engagement with relevant government departments and statutory agencies with responsibility within those organisations.

Health

- 13 In reviewing and evaluating the mental, physical and sexual health services which are available to young homeless people, the forthcoming Youth Homeless Strategy should specifically consider the particular issues experienced by LGBTQI+ homeless youth.

Emergency Accommodation

- 14 As part of phase 2 of this project, Focus Ireland should work with the Homeless Network to develop privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTQI+ people using emergency accommodation, informed directly by LGBTQI+ youth, which could be implemented by the homeless service providers who are involved in the Network.
- 15 Focus Ireland should further research the international evidence on the impact of dedicated LGBTQI+ emergency accommodation within homeless services.

Data and Measurement

- 16 The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government should establish a group to review the process of collecting and publishing data on homelessness, including data on risk factors and at-risk groups, including LGBTQI+ youth. All data collection decisions should be informed by GDPR protocols, international best practice, the experiences of homeless service providers and should consider and evaluate the purposes to which the data will be put.
- 17 The review group should consider initiating a pilot data-gathering project using PASS¹², building on the learning from the review process, with a sample of frontline services.
- 18 Dublin's Central Placement Service and non-Dublin local authorities should consider introducing a third 'other' category when asking people who are seeking emergency accommodation their gender.

¹² The Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) is an online shared system utilised by every homeless service provider and all local authorities in Ireland.



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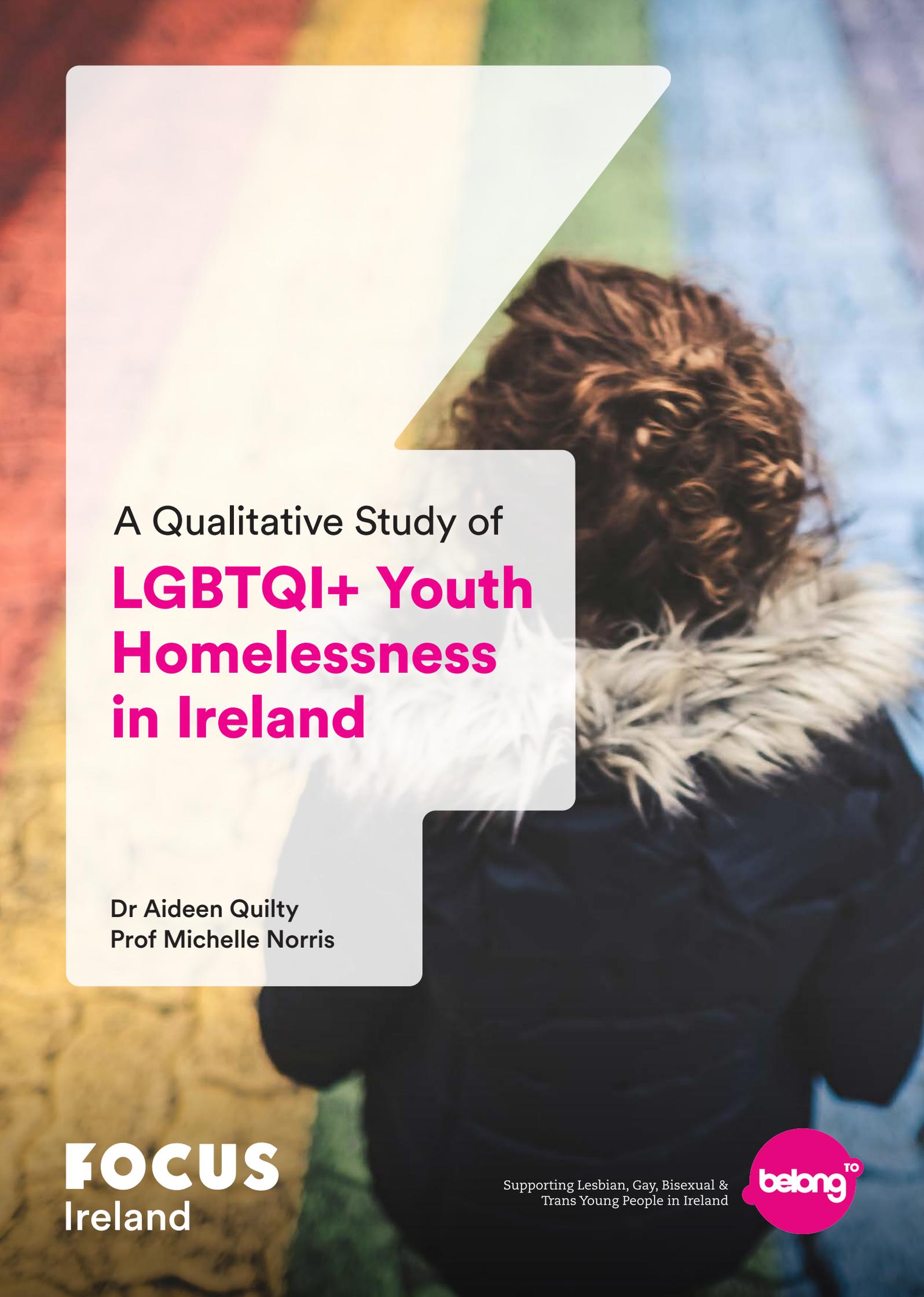
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Foreword

This report on the experiences of LGBTQI+ young people who find themselves without a home emerges from an exploration of the causes and solutions to youth homelessness which Focus Ireland has been engaged with for over 30 years. An important dimension of that work has been our engagement with researchers and activists across the world. Around 5 years ago, during a seminar at which we had invited Professor Steven Gaetz and Melanie Redman to talk to us about the Canadian 'A Way Home' youth homeless strategy, one of the slides included a statement that – 'if you are not looking at LGBTQ homelessness you are not dealing with the causes of youth homelessness.' An intern with the Advocacy team asked what was known about the issue in Ireland. This report can be traced back to the fact that the answer to that question was 'nothing at all'.

The seminar question initiated discussion in Focus Ireland and in the wider homeless systems, which reveal very different perspectives on this issue: people away from the frontline, while almost always sympathetic, just did not recognise this as an issue in Ireland's homeless services, irrespective of their own gender orientation and identity. On the other hand, lesbian and gay frontline staff told us it was a huge issue which they had been trying to get attention for over many years. This difference of perception also comes across very strongly in the ensuing report. This difference in perspective reflects the double invisibility of many of these young people – many of whom live on the margins of 'official' homelessness, while keeping fundamental parts of their human identity hidden, to protect their own safety.

A couple of decades of excellent research in Europe, the UK and the USA has repeatedly shown us that homelessness looks very different on the surface than at its core. Even people who work with 'the homeless' every day can miss important dimensions and trends which good research can reveal.

The report does what all good research must do – it brings something which was hidden into light and helps us to understand it. In helping us to understand it, it offers an opportunity for us to solve it.

What matters now is how the policy makers and the management in the homeless sector respond to the issues which this research brings into the light. All voluntary sector homeless services in Ireland are committed to values of inclusion and equality, we all aspire to be safe places for anyone who is vulnerable. It is distressing to hear, then, that our services are not always seen like that by young people who identify as LGBTQI+ or are still growing into a full understanding of their gender identity. The report recognises that the best response to the defects of the homeless system must always be to strive to eliminate the need for them at all by ending homelessness; and in that light it sets out some useful contributions to prevent LGBTQI+ young people becoming homeless in the first place. It also sets out some strategic and some practical responses to this for the sector and policy makers to adopt while homelessness persists. This report is not the end of our work on this issue, but it marks a crucial stage from evidence gathering to action.

In addition to the researchers themselves, Focus Ireland would like to thank all who participated in the Advisory Group for the report, former Research Co-ordinator, Sarah Sheridan, who initiated the research and her successor, Daniel Hoey, who brought it to completion, and to Paul Kelly whose advocacy for this issue in Focus Ireland services has extended over many years.

Mike Allen

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Acknowledgements

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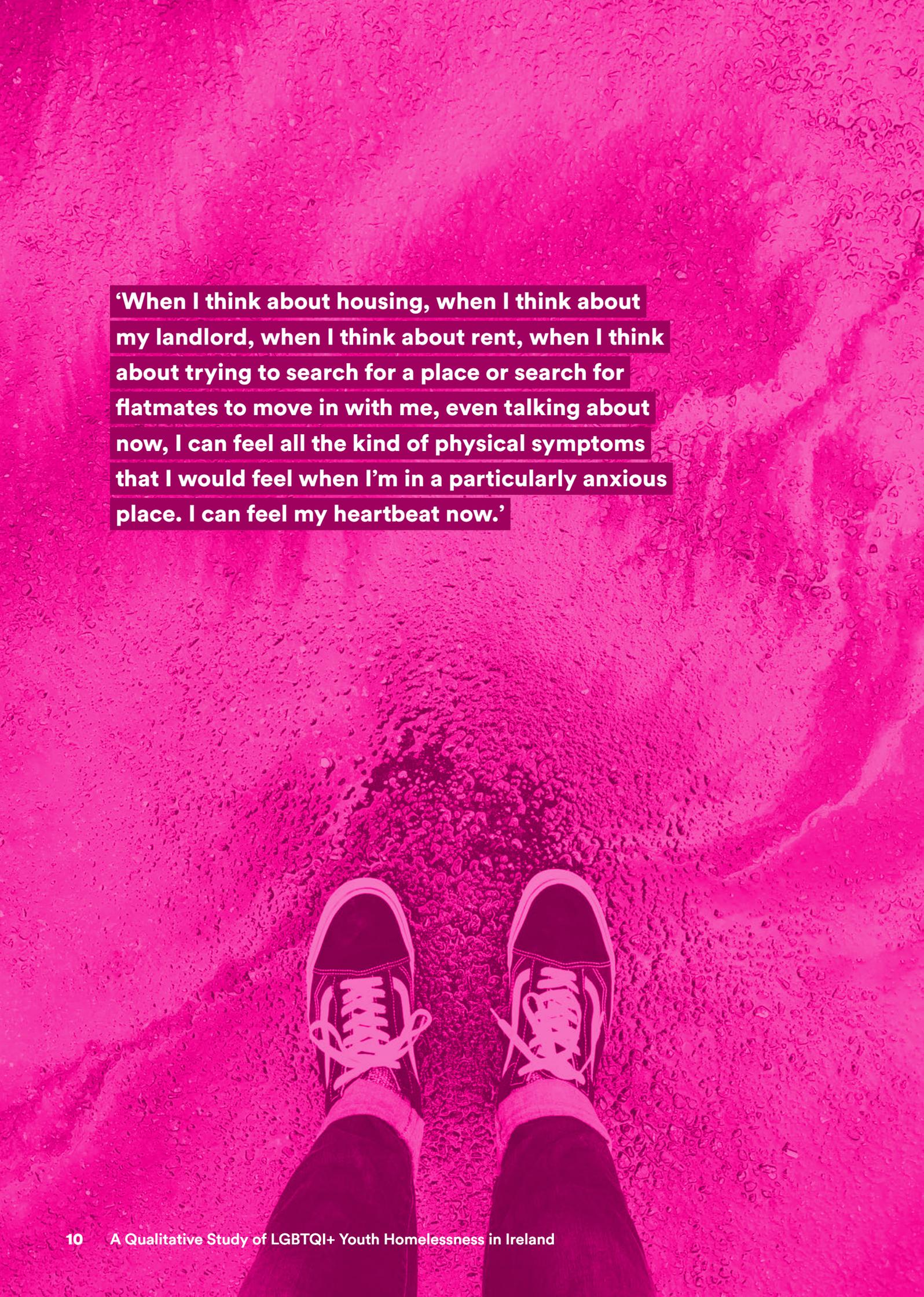
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Abbreviations and Specialist Terminology

Cisgender	A person whose gender identity and gender expression is aligned with the sex observed and recorded at birth.
Cisgenderism / Cissexism	The assumption that a cisgender identity is more authentic or natural than a trans identity. The belief that a person's sex observed and recorded at birth always remains their real gender.
DHPLG	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
DRHE	Dublin Regional Homeless Executive
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
Gender expansive	Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system.
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment – an income-related housing subsidy for private renting households.
Intersex	Individuals who are born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories, or that belong to both at the same time.
LGBTQI+	LGBTQI+ is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex. The + denotes other sexual orientation and gender categories not accurately described by these terms. As there is a significant body of relevant international literature that includes the umbrella term 'Queer', the abbreviation LGBTQI+ is used throughout this report.
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
Non-binary	Non-binary is an umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female.
Homophobia	Negative attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexuality which may be manifested in discrimination, hostile behaviour, or hate crimes.
Transgender/trans	A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex observed and recorded for them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities.
Transitioning	The process through which some trans people begin to outwardly live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one observed and recorded for them at birth.
Trans man	A person who was recorded as female at birth but who identifies as a man/male.
Trans woman	A person who was recorded as male at birth but identifies as a woman/female.
Transphobia	The fear, dislike or hatred of people who are trans or are perceived to challenge conventional gender categories or 'norms' of male or female, which can result in discrimination against people who are trans.



‘When I think about housing, when I think about my landlord, when I think about rent, when I think about trying to search for a place or search for flatmates to move in with me, even talking about now, I can feel all the kind of physical symptoms that I would feel when I’m in a particularly anxious place. I can feel my heartbeat now.’

Introduction

There is a strong consensus in the international research that LGBTQI+ youth face significant risk of homelessness (Curry *et al*, 2017; Rosario *et al*, 2012) and are overrepresented in the population of homeless young people (Lolai, 2015; Cochran *et al*, 2002). Counts of LGBTQI+ homeless youths are difficult to obtain and challenging to conduct for a range of reasons, including fear of disclosure and stigma (Rosario *et al*, 2012) and sexual experimentation and identity confusion and deception (Savin-Williams & Ream 2007). Further, how one defines someone who is LGBTQI+ is a cause of methodological confusion, not least as this can be a matter of changing definition for young people themselves (Tierney & Ward, 2017). Nevertheless, researchers estimate that between 22% and 40% of homeless young people in the USA identify as LGBTQI+ (Bidell, 2014). Canadian research estimates that this cohort makes up 25% to 45% of the young homeless population (Abramovich, 2012) and the Albert Kenny Trust (2015) places this figure at 24% in the UK. These findings reflect the fact that, while young LGBTQI+ people are at risk of the factors that precipitate homelessness among the young population in general, LGBTQI+ young people may face *additional* challenges in the family home, school or local community due to their sexuality and/or gender identity, which increases their risk of homelessness or housing instability (Abramovich, 2012).

There is a dearth of research on the specific experiences and needs of young Irish LGBTQI+ people who are experiencing homelessness. A report on key findings from a six-year qualitative longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Dublin city acknowledged the invisibility of LGBTQI+ youth in homeless policy, but did not present any findings in relation to this cohort of young people (Mayock & Corr, 2013). No data on clients' sexual orientation or gender identification are recorded by homeless service providers in Ireland. This contributes to difficulties in fully understanding the scale of the issue, and also suggests that LGBTQI+ youth who are using housing and homeless services are relatively invisible to the providers of these services. In addition to those LGBTQI+ young people who are 'officially' homeless, there is likely to be a significant cohort of young people living without a permanent home and surviving by sleeping on friends' sofas, squatting or staying in other insecure or unsafe places, who are even more difficult to identify and consequently are often referred to as the 'forgotten homeless' or 'hidden homeless' (Curry *et al*, 2017).

The need for information on homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people is particularly urgent in view of the marked rise in youth homelessness in Ireland in recent years.

As a result of this lack of evidence, there is a paucity of detailed policy and good-practice advice for supporting these young people and strategies for funding these services. It is notable that the Department of Health and Children's (2001) *Youth Homelessness Strategy* makes no reference to sexuality or gender identity or to any possible links with youth homelessness. The 2013 review of the implementation of this strategy, *Every Child a Home*, identified LGBTQI+ youth as a vulnerable group and emphasised the need for more specialised support services for such young people at risk (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013). This review found that LGBTQI+ youth were not often identified by homeless service providers as a group with particular needs. This, it suggested, 'may reflect a lack of understanding of the issues for this group' (Ibid, p. 24). This view is supported by UK research, which indicates that homeless service providers often lack adequate understanding of the support needs of LGBTQI+ youth and that the problem may be hidden or misunderstood (Tunaker, 2015a). More recently, consultations with young Irish people in preparation for development of an LGBTQI+ youth strategy flag the problem of homelessness among young LGBTQI+ people excluded from home because of their sexuality and gender identity, and identifies the need for housing responses that are tailored to deal with this issue (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). However, none of these strategies details what specific supports should be provided for homeless LGBTQI+ youth or how they should be funded.

The need for information on homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people is particularly urgent in view of the marked rise in youth homelessness in Ireland in recent years. In February 2020, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) reported that 881 young people aged 18-24 were 'officially' homeless (i.e. living in emergency accommodation funded through Section 10 of the 1988 Housing Act). In contrast, only 642 people in this age group were homeless just three years earlier (see Figure 0.1 below) (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, various years).

Aims and Objectives

This research aims to address this information deficit by examining for the first time the experiences of homeless LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland, with a view to informing the development of policies and services to meet their needs.

To achieve this broad aim, the research addresses the following objectives:

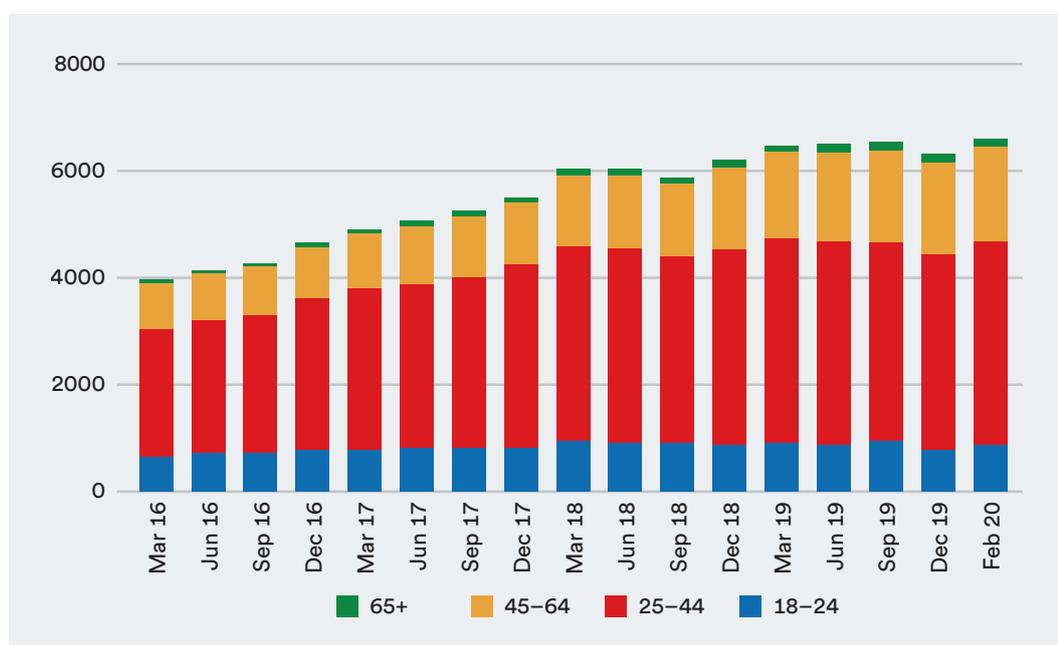
- › Explore the processes and 'triggers' that contribute to LGBTQI+ young people's homelessness or housing instability in Ireland
- › Ascertain LGBTQI+ young people's experiences of frontline homeless and related support services in Ireland
- › Examine the potential obstacles to housing of LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland
- › Compare the experiences of LGBTQI+ homeless young people in Ireland with the findings of the international research evidence on this cohort

- Make recommendations on the development of policies and services to meet the needs of young, homeless LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland, including recommendations on measuring sexuality and/or sexual identity in homelessness statistics

Focus and Definitions of Terms

The definition of homeless employed in this research is the ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion typology devised by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (undated). This typology is based on the concept that there are three domains that constitute a ‘home’, the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness.

Figure 0.1 Homeless Adults by Age Group in Ireland (N), March 2016–February 2020



Source: Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (various years).

These are:

- The physical domain: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession
- The social domain: being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations
- The legal domain: having a legal title to occupation

This conceptualisation of inadequate housing in turn points to four principal ways in which the absence of a home is manifested: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing. Further details on this typology and the specific operational categories associated with these dimensions of homelessness are set out in Table 0.1. FEANTSA (undated) suggest that these operational categories can be used for different policy purposes such as mapping the problem of homelessness, and developing, monitoring and evaluating policies.

Table 0.1 · ETHOS – European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

		Operational Category	Living Situation	Generic Definition
Conceptual Category	Roofless	1 People living rough	1.1 Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
		2 People in emergency accommodation	1.2 Night shelter	People with no usual place of residence who make use
	Homeless	3 People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short-term
			3.2 Temporary accommodation	
			3.3 Transitional supported accommodation	
		4 People in women's shelter	4.1 Women's shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short-term
		5 People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 Temporary accommodation/reception centres	Immigrants in reception or short-term accommodation due to their immigrant status
			5.2 Migrant workers' accommodation	
		6 People due to be released from institutions	6.1 Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
	6.2 Medical institutions (e.g. drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals etc)		Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing	
	6.3 Children's institutions/homes		No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)	
	7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 Residential care for older homeless people	Long-stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)	
		7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people		
Insecure	8 People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 Temporarily with family/friends	Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing	
		8.2 No legal (sub)tenancy	Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling	
		8.3 Illegal occupation of land	Occupation of land with no legal rights	
	9 People living under threat of eviction	9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented)	Where orders for eviction are operative	
		9.2 Repossession orders (owned)	Where mortgagee has legal order to repossess	
10 People living under threat of violence	10.1 Police-recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence		
Inadequate	11 People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	11.1 Mobile homes	Not intended as place of usual residence	
		11.2 Non-conventional building	Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty	
		11.3 Temporary structure	Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin	
	12 People living in unfit housing	12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulation	
	13 People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1 Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms	

Source: FEANTSA (undated).

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; long stay is defined as more than one year.

As is flagged in the title of the report, the study focuses on LGBTQI+ young people. This is an abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex. The + denotes other sexual orientation and gender categories not accurately described by these terms. As a number of participants identified as queer and given the significant body of relevant international literature that includes the term queer, the abbreviation LGBTQI+ is used throughout this research project. The word queer was reclaimed from its pejorative associations by lesbian, gay and bisexual activists and theorists from the late 1980s to early 90s. As it has evolved, it can be understood or applied in at least three important ways, all of which are relevant to this LGBTQI+ youth homelessness study.

- First, queer can be read as a noun: in its plural form it serves as an umbrella term that seeks to focus on coalitions across a range of non-normative sexual orientation and gender identification categories including LGBT, and as a singular noun denoting a specific anti-identitarian naming category called queer.
- Second, queer can be read as political. Its politics can be traced to the activist campaigns, including ACT UP and Queer Nation, led thirty years ago by LGB individuals in the USA and elsewhere in response to outrage over government handling of the AIDS crisis that plagued the LGB community.
- Third, queer refers to an area of theoretical scholarship. Commonly referred to as queer theory, this is an expansive and challenging area of interdisciplinary thought that has a complex genealogy (Jagose, 1996; Turner, 2000). It is important to acknowledge that there is no 'queer' theory in the singular – only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can loosely be called 'queer theories' (Hall, 2002). Nevertheless, the general point can be made that queer theory challenges fixed categories through concepts and practices that question the logic of normalcy in an effort to create more equitable, relatable, safe and socially just environments (Fraser & Lamb, 2015, p65). Thus, queer theory's emphasis on mobile subjectivities and identities as complex, fluid and evolving actively seeks to unsettle and disrupt a form of comfortable stasis that can hinder innovative solution-seeking and interventions (Quilty, 2019b). While the accusation that 'queer theory is often perceived to focus on sexuality, and perhaps gender, at the expense of other social dimensions', as queer scholarship has unfolded, 'rather than separating sexuality from other axes of social difference – race, class, gender, nationality and so on – queer studies has increasingly attended to the ways in which various categories of difference inflect and transform each other' (Hall & Jagose, 2013, pxvi). This has important implications for this study as it reflects the intersectional dimension of our research participants' complex and, for some, fluid and evolving identities and socio-cultural and material contexts.

The research examined the experiences of people aged between 18 and 30 years. This is a broader definition of 'youth' than employed in some other research and also in policy statements – for instance; a recent review of youth homeless policy by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) focuses on children (aged under 18) and young adults aged between 18 and 23. However, it was deemed appropriate to focus on a wider age range in this study because sexual and gender identity is a developmental process which varies between individuals. Young people may come out or transition at different ages and life stages, and it is important to capture the full spectrum of their experiences in this research (Ecker, 2016).

Research Methodology

The approach adopted in designing and implementing this study reflects the researchers' understanding of the lives and identities of young LGBTQI+ people as complex and fluidly evolving. It also reflects the sensitive nature of the research topic and potentially vulnerable status of many of the research participants.

Research Methods and Implementation Stages

To capture these complexities, qualitative research methods – specifically, in-depth, one-to-one interviews, informed by a comprehensive literature review – were used to conduct this research. Qualitative research methods are 'flexible and fluid, and therefore suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of vulnerable groups' (Liamputtong, 2007, p7). They are particularly useful for capturing the variety and complexity of LGBTQI+ young people's experiences of, and pathways into, homelessness, which are shaped not only by their sexual and gender identities but also by other intersecting social identity categories and socio-geographic experiences (Babbitt, 2013). The research design encompassed three key stages: first, a comprehensive literature review; second, qualitative interviews with young LGBTQI+ people with prior or existing experiences of homelessness; third, qualitative interviews with key stakeholders from the homeless sector. We address each stage in turn.

Stage one involved an in-depth review of the Irish and international literature on the scale, drivers and implications of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and of policy and service responses. Although, as mentioned above, little Irish research evidence on this issue has been conducted, there is an extensive international literature on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in the USA and Canada and to a lesser extent in Western Europe. In addition, there is extensive Irish research literature on youth homelessness more generally, which was also reviewed. The relevant policies and arrangements for funding services targeted at young LGBTQI+ homeless people in Ireland and internationally and the research evidence on their effectiveness were also reviewed. A thematic analysis of these literatures was conducted in order to link studies across these two domains.

Stage two of the research involved qualitative in-depth interviews with young LGBTQI+ homeless people. A total of 22 interviews were conducted between December 2018 and August 2019. The relevant characteristics of these interviewees are summarised in Table 0.2, as are the anonymous ID numbers used to identify interviewees in the analysis presented later in the report. All of these interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis: 17 face-to-face, three over the internet (via Skype and similar technologies) and two by phone. The interviews were loosely structured and conversational in format. Interviewees were invited to weave their personal stories around the following themes:

- › Entry into homelessness, the how it all came about and whether there were any specific triggers
- › Coming out and its relationship to becoming homeless, if any

The approach adopted in designing and implementing this study reflects the researchers' understanding of the lives and identities of young LGBTQI+ people as complex and fluidly evolving.

Table 0.2 · Characteristics and Anonymous ID Numbers of the Homeless, LGBTQI+ Young People Interviewed for this Research

ID	Location	Gender	Pronoun	Sexuality	Age	Housing situation with reference to the ETHOS typology
1	Dublin	Cis M	He/Him	Gay	22	Houseless (Homeless hostel)
2	Dublin	Cis F	She/Her	Lesbian	23	Houseless (Homeless hostel)
3	Dublin	Cis F	She/Her	Lesbian	26	Houseless (Homeless hostel)
4	Dublin	Non-Binary/ Queer	They/Them	Bi	20	Insecure (private renting with housing allowances)
5	Dublin	Trans/ Human	They/Them	Pansexual	23	Insecure (private renting with housing allowances)
6	Dublin	Non-Binary	They/Them	Bi	27	Inadequate (room rental/car)
7	Galway	Non-binary/ Trans	They/Them	Bi	19	Roofless (Bed and breakfast/ street)
8	Dublin	Cis F	She/Her	Gay/Lesbian	21	Adequate (Social housing – recent)
9	Dublin	Non-binary	They/Them	Bi/Polly (non-cis men)	24	Insecure (family home returned to problematic)
10	Dublin/ Glasgow	Trans	He/Him	Gay	26	Adequate (private rented)
11	Co Dublin	Trans	She/Her	Bi	28	Adequate (recently secured social housing)
12	Dublin/ Waterford	Non-Binary	They/Them	Bi	27	Adequate (private renting)
13	Cork	Cis F	She/her	Bi	22	Houseless (supported accommodation)
14	Cork	Trans M	He/Him	Heterosexual	22	Houseless (supported accommodation)
15	Cork	Cis F	She/her	Lesbian	22	Houseless (supported accommodation)
16	Dublin/Sligo	Cis F	She/Her	Bi	21	Adequate (private renting)
17	Dublin/Tipp	Trans F	They/Them	Bi	30	Adequate (private renting)
18	Dublin	Cis F	They/ Them/She	Queer	28	Adequate (private renting)
19	Kerry	Cis F	She/Her	Queer/ Lesbian	25	Insecure (couch surfing, Airbnb)
20	Kerry	Non-Binary/ Trans	They/them/ She/Her	Queer	28	Insecure (couch surfing, Airbnb)
21	Dublin	Cis F	She/Her	Lesbian	27	Insecure (family home returned to/problematic)
22	Dublin	Cis F	Queer/ agender	Bi	24	Inadequate (squat)

- Experiences of homelessness – what these experiences felt like and looked like, the key challenges faced and how the interviewee navigated them
- Exit routes from homelessness, if relevant, and how these were successfully navigated
- Their ideas for better support for homeless LGBTQI+ youth and for preventing homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people

This format gave interviewees control over the research agenda and the freedom to talk about the issues and experiences they felt were most relevant to their lives. It was also appropriate in view of interviewees' potential vulnerability because it enabled them to decide on the extent to which they wished to engage in the research process and the amount of personal, sensitive information they wished to disclose.

Only LGBTQI+ young people whose housing situation sat within the FEANTSA (undated) definition of homelessness and housing exclusion set out in Table 0.1, or had done so until recently, were interviewed for this research. In addition, only 'out' young people were included. The process of 'coming out' is complex, ongoing and evolving and is particularly key in the lives of young LGBTQI+ young people. For the purposes of this research, we have defined 'out' as someone who has 'come out' to both a significant friend and a family member. Recent Irish research and policy statements on homelessness have defined young adults as aged between 18 and 23 years (e.g. Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013; Mayock *et al*, 2014). However, sexual and gender identity is a fluid and complex developmental process which varies between individuals and young people may come out and/or transition at different ages and life stages (Robertson, 2018). To capture all these experiences, young people aged between 18 and 30 were included in this study.

The researchers also tried to ensure that approximately one-third of interviewees had accessed emergency homeless services (Table 0.2 demonstrates that this objective was achieved). Apart from this, no other sampling criterion was used. This decision reflected the theoretical approach which informed the analysis (see below) and also pragmatic considerations, namely the severe difficulties the researchers faced in accessing interviews.

To access sufficient numbers of interviewees, a variety of recruitment avenues and approaches were explored, including:

- Referrals from homeless service providers
- Referrals from interviewees and other homeless people
- Advertising on social media, including Union of Students in Ireland (USI), in relevant traditional media such as Gay Community News, and posters in relevant social venues such as pubs and clubs
- Advertising and word-of-mouth promotion through BeLonG To Youth Services National Network, comprising 45 youth groups (a national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people)
- Advertising on the social media networks of support groups for LGBTQI+ young people: TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland); LGBT National Helpline; Dundalk Outcomers; NCCWN (National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks)

The process of recruiting the interviewees was incredibly challenging, and recruitment

obstacles delayed the completion of the research by several months. These challenges reflected difficulties in recruiting all categories of homeless people as interviewees for research projects but were aggravated by additional challenges specific to homeless LGBTQI+ young people. Notable here is the high level of stigma and shame internalised by many of them, which made them reluctant to volunteer for interview, their reluctance to use services for homeless people and their invisibility to service providers as a result. These issues are examined in Chapters Three, Four and Five of this report. However, despite these challenges, the 22 interviews with the homeless, LGBTQI+ young people conducted for this research were richly textured and provided valuable insights into the lives and experience of being homeless.

Stage three of the research involved 13 interviews with 14 stakeholders in the homelessness sector in Ireland, conducted between May 2018 and June 2019. These interviewees included: civil servants involved in making policy on homelessness and on young people’s issues; funders and providers of services for homeless people, and representatives of support and advocacy groups for young LGBTQI+ people and young people leaving care.

Table 0.3 · Members of the Research Advisory Group

Name	Organisation	Role
Marian Brattman ¹	Tusla	National Research Manager
Barbara Corcoran ²	DePaul Ireland	Senior Services Manager
Moninne Griffith	BeLonG To Youth Services	Executive Director
Paul Kelly	Focus Ireland	Project Leader Youth Services
Dr Mary Murphy	Maynooth University and Focus Ireland Research Sub-Committee	Expert
Chris O’Donnell	Journalist	Expert by Experience

Note:

- ¹ Collette McLoughlin – Head of Policy and Research, Tusla attended one meeting
- ² Niamh Wynne, Acting Head of Services DePaul Ireland, attended one meeting.

Table 0.4 · Characteristics and Anonymous ID Numbers of the Policymakers, Service Providers and other Stakeholders Interviewed for this Research

ID	Location	Organisation Type	Role in Organisation
A	Dublin	Homeless services provider	Frontline worker
B	Dublin	Homeless services provider	Manager
C	Dublin	Ministry	Senior civil servant
D	Dublin	Ministry	Senior civil servant
E	Dublin	Advocacy group for children in care	Advocacy manager
F	Dublin	Advocacy group for young LGBTQI+ people	Youth work manager
G	Dublin	Advocacy group for TRANS people	Policy and Research Officer
H	Dublin	Local authority	Senior Manager
I	Dublin	Local authority	Senior Manager
J	Dublin	Homeless services provider	Frontline worker
K	Dublin	Homeless services provider	Manager
L	Cork	Homeless services provider	Frontline worker
M	Limerick	Advocacy and service provider for LGBTQI+ people	One manager and one frontline worker

These interviewees were identified in consultation with Focus Ireland, which funded this research, and the project advisory group which oversaw its implementation (see Table 0.3). In addition, several of the policymakers and service providers interviewed referred the researchers to other stakeholders who would be useful to interview. The types of organisations represented by the stakeholder interviewees are summarised in Table 0.4, which also details the anonymous ID numbers used to identify interviewees in the analysis presented later in the report. These stakeholder interviews were all conducted face-to-face and recorded with the permission of interviewees. Participants were assured that their views would be anonymised in the research report.

As with the interviews conducted with the young, homeless LGBTQI+ people, the stakeholder interviews followed a loosely structured format. Depending on the organisation the interviewee represented, some or all of the following broad issues were explored:

- Stakeholders’ views on the extent of homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth and how the size and characteristics of this population should be measured and recorded
- Triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and the key challenges facing this group
- Effectiveness of homeless services in meeting the needs of this group and how their needs could be met more effectively
- Effectiveness of the policy response to LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and how this could be improved

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was identified as the most suitable methodological approach to guide the analysis of these interview data (see Charmaz, 2014). This social science methodology involves the construction of new theories through methodical gathering and analysis of data. The data collected are reviewed by researchers to identify repeated ideas or concepts, which are tagged with codes. These coded data are reviewed again and grouped into concepts, and then into categories, which provide the basis for a new theory. Grounded theory is considered particularly appropriate for conducting research on under-researched and sensitive topics and has been employed in several studies of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness (e.g. Alessi *et al*, 2017; Dickey *et al*, 2012). Grounded theory also enables researchers to remain open to discovery of new ideas throughout the data-analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, it facilitates deeper understanding of the myriad of individual, social, structural and service issues that influence homelessness.

To facilitate the analysis of the interview data using this approach, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analysed using computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (the MAXQDA package). Three rounds of analysis were then analysed sequentially as follows:

- 1 First, the data was examined to identify arguments, concepts and experiences raised most commonly and to identify differences and similarities between different interviewees.
- 2 The results of this first stage were re-examined to identify tentative relationships between interviewees' views and experiences and relevant contextual issues.
- 3 The results of the second stage were re-examined to identify relationships between these different findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The interviews with homeless LGBTQI+ youth and stakeholders were analysed separately in this way, and the results of these exercises were then compared to the findings of the literature review. Further details of these analyses are provided in the Appendix to this report.

Research Ethics

Young LGBTQI+ people have often had to be strong, creative, adaptable and resilient in the face of the challenges they have faced in their lives (Tierney & Ward, 2017; Bidell, 2014; Mayock *et al*, 2009). However, they are also likely to have experienced marginalisation, stigma and minority stress as a result of their sexual or gender identity, and this marginalisation will have been reinforced by their homelessness or lack of secure, appropriate housing. Therefore, they are identified as a vulnerable group across the international literature on youth homelessness and by policymakers in Ireland (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013).

The ethical challenges associated with researching vulnerable people are considerable.

The ethical challenges associated with researching vulnerable people are considerable. As Barnard (2005, p13) cautions, 'harm is the very last thing we want to happen, particularly

where those we research are already socially excluded'. These ethical challenges were considered in-depth prior to the commencement of this research; a detailed plan to address them was formulated, which took account of both University College Dublin's (UCD) and Focus Ireland's research ethics guidelines. This plan was approved by UCD's Human Research Ethics Committee – Humanities on 13 August 2018. It included the following provisions regarding the interviews with homeless, LGBTQI+ youth conducted as part of the research:

- The research was overseen by a research advisory group which included representatives of the research funders, Focus Ireland, and other statutory and non-profit-sector organisations which advocate on behalf of and provide services for homeless people and the LGBTQI+ community (see Table 0.3). The group referred the researchers to potential interviewees and advised on addressing the ethical challenges generated by the research. They met twice during the course of the research.
- All of the interviews were conducted by one of the project's principal investigators, Dr Aileen Quilty and Prof Michelle Norris. Both have extensive experience of conducting research, including researching members of vulnerable groups, and particular expertise in researching the LGBTQI+ community and social housing and homelessness respectively.
- The interviews were conducted in a safe and respectful environment selected jointly by the interviewee and interviewer. In most cases these were in the offices of the homeless service provider that referred on the interviewees (rather than in interviewees' accommodation) or in a dedicated youth advocacy space provided by BeLonG To.
- Interviewees consented in writing to participating in the interview and to having it recorded. They were informed of their right to end the interview at any time without any negative repercussions, take a break or resume the interview at a later stage determined by them, and to decline to respond to any specific questions or topics during the interview. They were informed that their personal data would be anonymised and treated with the utmost confidentiality.
- Sensitive topics and issues were not introduced abruptly during interview. Rather, the interviewers informed interviewees incrementally about new areas of questioning as they arose and asked if they were comfortable to proceed. Particularly sensitive topics were not left to the end of the interview, providing the researcher the opportunity to 'close' the interview sensitively, thus ensuring the respondent did not leave the research setting feeling exposed or vulnerable.
- The importance of individuals taking responsibility for information they might choose to disclose during the interview was emphasised. Reflecting the requirements of the guidance on implementation of the Children First Act, 2015, the interviewer made it clear that, in the event of criminal behaviour being disclosed, in particular the naming of a perpetrator, the interviewer was ethically bound to inform the appropriate state services or authorities, including the Gardaí and Health Service Executive (HSE).
- The interviewer and relevant project staff, as appropriate, remained behind after the interviews were completed to ensure that the interviewee had access to relevant help and information. Details of advocacy and advice groups were provided for those who wished to seek further support with issues raised, and formal referrals to an appropriate mental health agency were initiated as appropriate.

To ensure the timely completion of the research it was decided not to seek further ethical approval from Tusla's research ethics committee which is required in order to interview Tusla staff. However, the research benefited from Tusla's participation on the project advisory committee and from detailed and valuable feedback from Tusla on the draft report.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Strict protocols were followed to ensure that the data collected from research interviewees was kept confidential and was accessed only by members of the core research team.

Organisation of Report

The remainder of this report is organised into five further chapters.

- › Chapter One presents a review of the literature on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland and internationally.
- › Chapter Two examines the results of the interviews with policymakers and representatives of homeless service providers, and support and advocacy organisations.
- › Chapter Three, the first of four chapters that explore key findings and insights from the interviews with LGBTQI+ homeless youth, examines these interviewees' experiences of becoming homeless and also their experiences of 'coming out' and the mental health challenges they faced.
- › Chapter Four examines the young people's experiences of being homeless, including their experience of using hostels and interacting with the staff who work there, and their experience of insecure forms of accommodation such as living in cars and vans and couch surfing.
- › Chapter Five examines the resilience of these young people, their experiences of exiting homelessness and aspirations for the future.
- › Chapter Six sets out the conclusions to the report and proposals regarding responses to the measurement of and further research about LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland.
- › Finally, a set of recommendations are outlined arising from the research.

Strict protocols were followed to ensure that the data collected from research interviewees was kept confidential and was accessed only by members of the core research team.



'It was always not great in the home. It was always at a level where it was really bad, I would have to leave eventually. But when I came out, I just felt like they felt that they didn't know me. And that I was completely alien to them.'

Literature and Policy Review

Introduction

To provide a contextual backdrop to this study of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland, this chapter reviews the relevant national and international research and policies. The goal of this exercise is threefold. It gathers information about: the scale and triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness; the experiences of young people who find themselves in this situation, and the measures that have been adopted to combat LGBTQI+ youth homelessness.

Reflecting the limited research on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness conducted in Ireland to date and the fact that this issue has only recently come to the attention of policymakers in this country, much of the analysis presented here focuses on the international research literature and policy developments abroad. There is a particularly well-developed research literature on LGBTQI+ youth homeless from Canada and the USA, and to a lesser extent the UK. This literature is a key focus of this chapter.

However, the extent and nature of homelessness among young people in Ireland has been extensively researched, and many of the triggers and experiences of homelessness among young LGBTQI+ people are shared with the young population more broadly. Furthermore, although policies and services for young LGBTQI+ homeless people are underdeveloped in Ireland, an extensive policy framework to address youth homelessness in general has been put in place. The above-mentioned research and policy are also examined in the chapter. The conclusions focus on identifying the homelessness triggers and experiences that are particular to young LGBTQI+ people.

Irish Policy

Since decriminalisation of homosexuality in the 1990s and enactment of equality legislation in 1998 and 2000, Ireland has progressively been moving towards providing greater equality for LGBTQI+ people. The successful referendum campaign to legalise same-sex marriage in May 2015 was a monumentally positive moment for LGBTQI+ people in Ireland. As the first state in the world to introduce such legislation by popular vote, Ireland articulated a sizeable civic recognition of and support for same-sex relationships (Healey, 2017).

In July 2015, the Irish Government passed the Gender Recognition Act, which put in place a process whereby transgender people may achieve full legal recognition of their preferred gender and access the necessary legal documentation that reflects this change. In July 2018, a scheduled review of the operation of the Gender Recognition Act proposed amendments that will make substantial gender equality available to Irish transgender, non-binary and intersex Irish citizens. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female, or between or beyond genders. The key recommendations of the review are that, in principle, a system of gender recognition be introduced for individuals under 18 for clarity and in line with the language of the 2015 act subject to the key proviso that the consent of a parent or guardian is required and the process should be administrative rather than medical. Again, in 2018, amendments to the Children and Family Relationship Bill (2015) were introduced to rectify a lack of clarity in the original legislation and to recognise the diverse family types that exist in contemporary Ireland. Same-sex couples will now be able to register both their names on their child's birth certificate and are also eligible to adopt children and be foster carers.

All in all, these legislative and cultural shifts mean that Ireland is increasingly becoming a relatively more accepting and inclusive place for LGBTQI+ youth to grow up in. Nevertheless, inequalities persist across society which mean that young LGBTQI+ people face particular challenges and risks. These problems are heightened because young people's needs are not always recognised or prioritised in homeless policy or research and LGBTQI+ youth are particularly invisible in this regard (Higgins *et al*, 2016; National LGBT Federation, 2016; Oren Pizmony-Levy & BeLonG To Youth Services, 2019.)

The invisibility of LGBTQI+ people is evident in policy on youth homelessness. The first *Youth Homeless Strategy* was published in 2001 by the Department of Health and Children. Its stated goal is:

to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and where a child becomes homeless to ensure that he or she benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at re-integrating him/her into his/her community as quickly as possible (Department of Health and Children, 2001, p3).

The strategy defines youth homeless as:

Those who are sleeping on the streets or in other places not intended for night-time accommodation or not providing safe protection from the elements or those whose usual night-time residence is a public or private shelter, emergency lodging, B&B or such, providing protection from the elements but lacking the other characteristics of a home and/or intended only for a short stay (Department of Health and Children, 2001, p11).

The strategy does not define 'youth' in terms of age, but it does refer extensively to 'children' throughout, which suggests that its focus is on young people aged under 18

years. They are legally defined as children by the Child Care Act, 1991 and this legislation specifies that the State has obligations to provide support for children and to protect their welfare including when they become homeless (although the legislation does extend these obligations in specific cases such as young people leaving care). The *Youth Homeless Strategy* highlights several important differences between youth and adult homelessness. Among these, ‘the key difference is that the vast majority of children under the age of 18 have a place of residence from which to operate’; this suggests that most young people become homeless ‘because they can no longer operate from this base’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2001, p11). To address homelessness among young people aged over 18 years, the strategy proposes a suite of preventative and response measures, together with planning and administrative support. These supports were subsequently established, and they include:

- › family support and supports for schools and communities to prevent youth homelessness,
- › aftercare services for young people leaving foster care, and residential care and,
- › emergency responses for young people who become homeless, including accommodation provision.

Notably, from the perspective of this report, emergency accommodation for homeless young people aged 18+ is provided in adult services, i.e. adult homeless hostels, emergency temporary accommodation, supported temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation and according to Mayock and Parker (2017) supported temporary accommodation places are limited in availability and only available to young people for a limited time frame. Furthermore, the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* makes no reference whatsoever to sexuality or gender identity and their relationship, if any, to youth homelessness.

This oversight has been addressed in the most recent policy statements on youth homelessness: the review of the implementation of the youth homeless strategy published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2013. This review, *Every Child a Home*, acknowledges that the needs of minority youth groups, including LGBT young people, are not understood or catered for in Irish homeless provisions:

LGBT youth, who appear to be overrepresented in the population of homeless young people in international studies, were not often identified as a group with particular needs by service providers consulted in this review, which may reflect a lack of understanding of the issues for this group (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013, p24).

This Government review adopts a more inclusive approach to sexuality, gender identity and age. As well as those aged under 18 years, it also affords more attention to homelessness among young adults aged up to 23 years. The review proffers positive findings about achievements of the *Youth Homeless Strategy* – this reflected the fact that youth homelessness had declined since its publication (although, as revealed in Figure 0.1 it has since increased again) in part because the strategy had facilitated an increase in services for young homeless people and in inter-agency work to prevent youth

homelessness particularly among young people leaving care. However, it also identified some potential for improvement in service provision, quality and planning particularly in the case of young people who become homeless for the first time in their teenage years and young people aged 18+ who use adult homeless services. To achieve these improvements, it makes several recommendations relating to better governance of services for young homeless people and support for multi-agency working; the need for reform of emergency accommodation provision for children, and better supports for young homeless adults. Since the publication of this review, significant progress has been made in further strengthening supports for young people leaving care. For instance, interagency aftercare committees have been established at local level, standardised aftercare allowances for young people leaving care have been introduced, TUSLA has been obliged by law to conduct aftercare planning and funding has been provided to enable non-profit sector social housing providers to provide permanent social housing for young people leaving care (Mayock *et al*, 2014).

Consultations with young Irish people in preparation for development of an LGBTQI+ youth strategy unequivocally raise the increased risk of homelessness in the case of young people excluded from home because of their sexuality and gender identity. The consultation identifies the need for specific housing responses to deal with this issue (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017). The results of this consultation are recommended in Goal 1 of the recently published LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy – the first strategy of this type published by any government worldwide (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018). This strategy aims to ‘create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people’ and identifies homeless service providers as one of the categories of organisations that can contribute to achieving this goal by creating safe and inclusive environments for young people excluded from the family home (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018, p24). Very significant progress has been made on the implementation of the strategy and the vast majority of its actions have already been implemented or partially implemented (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2018).

Research on Youth Homelessness in Ireland

Despite the increased attention paid to LGBTQI+ youth homelessness by policymakers in Ireland, no specific research on this issue has been conducted to date, nor has any evidence on homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth homeless emerged from research on other aspects of homelessness. For instance, Mayock and Corr’s (2013) report on the findings from their landmark six-year longitudinal study of youth homelessness in Dublin city does not flag any findings regarding LGBTQI+ youth. Nor is LGBTQI+ homelessness flagged in earlier publications of related research (Mayock, Corr & O’Sullivan, 2008). Research into the mental health of LGBT people cited pressures on young people at home, in school and in wider society that pointed to particular strains in their domestic relationships (Mayock *et al*, 2009). Nonetheless, even where participants articulated that their parents excluded them from home, homelessness did not emerge as an issue

Despite the increased attention paid to LGBTQI+ youth homelessness by policymakers in Ireland, no specific research on this issue has been conducted to date

in this report. An earlier study into youth homelessness in Cork identified three young gay people among the research participants but did not explore the intersection between sexuality and homelessness (Mayock *et al*, 2008).

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2020) EU wide survey of LGBTQI+ adults which was conducted in 2019 provides data on the experience of homelessness among this community, but it does not provide disaggregated data on young people’s experience. However, as detailed in Table 0.5 below, this survey reveals that comparatively high numbers of LGBTQI+ Irish people have experienced homelessness compared to the EU average.

Table 0.5 Experience of Homelessness Among LGBTQI+ Adults in Ireland and the EU, 2019.

Category	Location	All LGBTQI+ Adults	Gay	Lesbian	Bisexual (men and women)	Trans	Intersex
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Stayed with relative or family	EU average	14	15	14	14	20	20
	Ireland	20	15	17	21	29	46
Stayed in emergency or temporary accommodation	EU average	2	2	2	2	4	6
	Ireland	3	2	2	2	4	8
Stayed in a place not intended to be a home	EU average	3	2	3	3	6	8
	Ireland	7	6	7	6	7	13
Slept rough	EU average	1	1	0	1	3	5
	Ireland	2	1	0	2	5	19

Source: EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2020).

The research on homelessness among the young population at large in Ireland is extensive however, and it is likely that many of its findings are also relevant to homeless LGBTQI+ youth. For instance, Mayock, Parker and Murphy’s (2014) analysis of data from the aforementioned longitudinal study of youth homelessness highlights some valuable findings on the triggers of youth homelessness. Although they emphasise that most homeless young people share experiences such as poverty, disadvantage, housing instability, parental substance use and domestic violence, in terms of the proximate triggers of homelessness, four dominant pathways were evident among the young people they interviewed:

- › Histories of being in residential or foster care for extended periods: including experiences of placement breakdown or disruption during this time and poor preparation for leaving care coupled with weak aftercare support.

- Household disruption and family instability: overlapping adversities in this regard were the proximate trigger of homelessness for some young people. These adversities often precipitated disruptions to schooling and negative coping strategies such as drug abuse, which further undermined already fragile family relationships.
- Family conflict and family violence: for some young people, experiences of childhood neglect, abuse, parental substance misuse and/or domestic violence were the key events that precipitated their premature home-leaving.
- Problem behaviour and neighbourhood stressors: in other cases, substance use and the influence of negative peer associations were significant issues for young people who became homeless.

This and other research from the longitudinal study of youth homelessness helps to clarify the trajectories that young people follow through homelessness and exits from homelessness. For instance, on the basis of an analysis of interviewees' living places when they were homeless, Mayock and Parker (2017) propose a threefold categorisation of these trajectories: linear trajectories, non-linear trajectories and chaotic trajectories/continuous homelessness. They conclude that more linear (and less chaotic) trajectories culminating in exit from homelessness were associated with higher levels of engagement with services and established links with service professionals, stronger relationships with family members and lower levels of substance use and mental health needs. Conversely, difficulties in accessing affordable housing, perceived lack of support and 'service fatigue' inhibited young people's exit from homelessness. This analysis is supported by earlier research published by Mayock, Corr and O'Sullivan (2008). In addition, they identify prolonged homelessness, gaps in support services, use of adult hostels, negative peer associations, involvement in criminal activity and incarceration as factors associated with failure to exit homelessness.

International Research on LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

The Scale and Measurement of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

A substantial literature on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness exists outside Ireland, where studies have been accruing for several decades. There is unanimity across these studies that LGBTQI+ young people are over-represented in the youth homelessness population. Estimated figures fall between 8% and 37% of the total, according to one substantial review of this literature (Ecker, 2016). However, only a small number of studies have attempted to assess the scale of homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth in a comprehensive fashion. As in all efforts to quantify homelessness, this is a challenging task, and there are several reasons why these findings might be seen to be unreliable. Therefore, although the available evidence clearly demonstrates that LGBTQI+ young people are at significantly higher risk of homelessness, the exact scale of this increased risk is impossible to quantify.

In Canada, where data has been more assiduously gathered than anywhere else, a comprehensive source of data on LGBTQI+ youth homeless is provided by the 2015 Canadian National Youth Homelessness Survey. This survey was administered through 57 agencies serving homeless youth in 47 communities across the country. It identified 1,103 young people experiencing homelessness, of whom 29.5% self-identified as LGBTQI+, while 6% self-identified as transgender, two-spirit, and non-binary (Gaetz *et al*, 2016).

In the UK, a national scoping study of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness carried out by the Albert Kennedy Trust (2015) found that 24% of young homeless people identified as LGBTQI+. However, collating these data proved challenging, and the response rate to the survey on which it is based was low. This survey was distributed to 473 housing providers across 30 cities in England, Wales and Scotland, but only 16% (N=76) responded.

Choi *et al*'s (2015) research analyses the results of the 2014 LGBTQ Homeless Youth Provider Survey, a survey of 138 youth homelessness service providers in the USA conducted in 2014. This survey achieved a very high response rate (126 of the agencies asked to provide information responded) and its estimates are based on service providers' estimates of the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness based primarily on their client intake forms or client records, or less commonly on the basis of staff or volunteers' observations. These data indicate that 20% of the young people accessing these services identified as gay or lesbian, 7% as bisexual, and 2% as questioning their sexuality. In terms of gender identity, 2% identified as transgender female, 1% as transgender male, and 1% as gender queer.

Choi *et al* (2015) and other researchers also discuss the challenges associated with compiling robust evidence on the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. For instance, service providers' information on this issue may not always be robust because gender identity and sexuality are not always rigorously recorded. Data may also be skewed by the way that gender identity and sexuality are recognised and defined; more recent studies find that young transgender people are at greater risk of homelessness than are others. At the same time, even when asked directly about their gender identity and/or sexuality, young people may understandably choose to withhold this personal information because of their ambivalence about these identities (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007) or because they fear discrimination in homeless services if they do self-identify as LGBTQI+ (Burwick *et al*, 2014). Durso and Gates (2012) argue that this reluctance to 'come out' to homeless providers suggests that official figures are likely to underestimate the size of the LGBTQI+ youth population.

Research with four government-funded homeless providers in Colorado, Minnesota, Ohio and Texas examined how agencies collected information about sexual orientation and gender identity (Burwick *et al*, 2014). This was found to vary considerably within and between organisations in terms of rigour, sensitivity and accuracy. While the data gathered was used to inform individualised programmes for clients, there was a perceived need for this data to be more 'systematically and sympathetically' recorded so that services might be better aligned to the homeless population's real needs. Disclosure and monitoring are delicate issues. Homeless people need to be reassured about the uses and sharing of their personal data. Ultimately, the core purpose of collecting data must be to further improve

services for clients (Roche, 2005; Burwick *et al*, 2014). LGBTQI+ homeless youth who don't use mainstream homeless services inevitably remain unrecorded in homeless statistics because their homelessness is unofficial and invisible. It takes the form of rough sleeping or precarious reliance on social networks known as 'couch-surfing' (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Curry *et al*, 2017).

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Triggers for LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

The literature about LGBTQI+ homelessness has consistently identified parental rejection of young people's sexual orientation and gender identity as a key trigger of their decision to leave home (Dunne *et al*, 2002; Durso & Gates, 2012; Ecker, 2016). As early as 1996, one study found that 22% of parents felt angry, 14% felt sick and 9% were disgusted by their child's LGBTQI+ identity (Martin, 1996). More recent research by Lolai (2015) asserts that family rejection remains the primary cause of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness.

However the relationship between coming out and becoming homeless is a complex one – because it is influenced by the specific sexuality and/or gender identity of the young person in question and also because it intersects with other factors that increase the risk of homelessness such as race and ethnicity, poverty and family breakdown (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008). Therefore, rather than LGBTQI+ issues alone, the international research indicates that inequalities of resources, power and status shape the social and affective processes that lead to higher rates of and more persistent homelessness for young people from some marginalised social groups (Robinson, 2018).

Social work professors who worked in a range of capacities in homeless services in New York reviewed information gathered about LGBTQI+ homeless youth in several organisations (Ream & Forge, 2014). They found that between 14% and 39% of LGBTQI+ homeless youth surveyed in these institutions reported being 'kicked out' of the family home for being LGBTQI+. Sometimes a young person's coming out as LGBTQI+ disrupts the family system and the dynamic of wider communities into which the family is networked. The LGBTQI+ young person may leave for reasons that are much more expansive than their identity alone. The researchers observed that, when a young homeless person's LGBTQI+ status was the primary trigger for their leaving an otherwise well-functioning family, they had a relatively good prognosis for exiting homelessness (*ibid*). Conflict with family that was unrelated to their LGBTQI+ identity was the proximate reason for homelessness for 47% of 188 intakes in a New York emergency shelter.

Ream and Forge (2014) found that most homeless youth 'have histories of family disruption, abuse, and family substance use' (*ibid*, p10). Furthermore, they found that it was common for young homeless LGBTQI+ people to have problems with child welfare and foster care systems that were not necessarily related to their LGBTQI+ identity. However, an overt LGBTQI+ identity could lead to young people being discriminated against within homeless services, becoming subject to taunts and violence and ultimately seeking refuge on the streets because this initially appeared less problematic than dealing with the immediate aggressions in foster care or hostel accommodation.

In the research on homelessness, transgender youth are identified as particularly vulnerable. The research evidence indicates that the risk of familial rejection is higher in the case of transgender youth who are subjected to extreme parental pressure to conform to the gender observed and recorded at their birth (Durso & Gates, 2012). Transgender and gender-expansive youth do not all experience family rejection but may experience discrimination on the basis of their gender identity (cisgenderism) as well as racism and social and economic

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inequalities that contribute to their becoming homeless (Shelton & Bond, 2017). Trans young people also face greater likelihood of violence than their cisgender gay male and female peers when they cross the line into homelessness (Lolai, 2015). Transgender youth are more likely to experience taunts and violence in foster care and homeless provision than are other sub-categories of LGBTQI+ youth (Ream & Forge, 2014; Hunter, 2008).

The research literature reveals a substantial over-representation of black and African American, Hispanic and Latino youth in homelessness in the United States (Curry *et al*, 2017). Page (2017) argues that homeless youth of colour are largely invisible in US legislation that addresses homelessness. She observes that they are also neglected in the literature about LGBTQI+ homelessness despite the fact that their multiple minority status means they are at greater risk of harm and disadvantage than their white LGBTQI+ peers (Ibid).

Familial social class and educational background were often identified in the research literature as key influences of the pathways followed by LGBTQI+ youth who entered homelessness (Masten *et al*, 2014). Parents with more time and cultural capital were better able to access identity-affirming professional support and advocacy groups for their child. Poorer families and families of colour that were under stress, concerning dealing with poverty, instability and other inequalities, could not afford this privilege.

Several studies identify family instability as a trigger for LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and an associated raft of complex support issues that volatility at home later engenders. An ethnographic study of the triggers for Latino men becoming homeless in New York City found that focusing on the 'coming out' event alone overshadowed important parallel stressful factors in families with a history of conflict and dysfunction (Castellanos, 2016). Sexual, psychological, emotional and physical violence, alcohol and substance abuse, victimisation, mental and physical health issues and academic under-achievement are all part of the menu of triggers, trauma and support needs that LGBTQI+ youth bring with them into homelessness (Cull *et al*, 2006; Ferguson *et al*, 2015; Robinson, 2018; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Homophobic bullying and taunts at school and in their neighbourhood were a common contributory factor to LGBTQI+ youth leaving home and, in a small number of cases, violence in same-sex relationships was a reason for becoming homeless (Cull *et al*, 2006; Masten *et al*, 2014).

These findings on the role of parental rejection in triggering LGBTQI+ youth homelessness point to the need to work with and educate parents (Toro *et al*, 2007; Gattis, 2013; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). At the same time, it is also important to avoid pathologising the families of LGBTQI+ youth as homophobic and transphobic (Robinson, 2018).

LGBTQI+ Young People's Experiences of Different Forms of Homelessness

As explained in the Introduction to this report, the ETHOS typology devised by FEANTSA (undated) identifies four principal ways in which the absence of a home is manifested: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing. LGBTQI+ young people's experience of these different forms of homelessness is covered unevenly in the international research (Farrugia, 2010). This, in part, highlights the difficulties inherent in reflecting 'hidden' forms of homelessness such as insecure and inadequate housing. For instance, couch-surfing is an 'invisible' form of homelessness that is often not captured in the government statistics on homelessness, in part because people couch-surf and rely on social connections for refuge precisely to avoid becoming labelled as homeless (Curry

et al, 2017). Therefore, the research evidence on couch-surfing by all cohorts of homeless people, including LGBTQI+ youth, is limited. Curry *et al*'s (2017) research on youth homelessness in the United States found that many of those surveyed had experienced couch-surfing as well as shelter and hostel dwelling. They found that couch-surfing was more common in rural areas than in urban or suburban neighbourhoods and among white and Asian youth, whereas lower-income LGBTQI+, black and African American, Hispanic or Latino youth are over-represented in homeless figures and not as likely to survive by couch-surfing. The research highlighted the need to devise methods to better enumerate couch-surfers so that their needs can be identified and supported (Ibid).

Once they enter homelessness, many LGBTQI+ youth join those who try to survive on the street, living precariously and attempting to gain enough cash to pay for a hostel and satisfy basic survival needs. Even for those who have shelter at night, safety is negligible, health risks increase, and persistent homophobia and transphobia mean that the threat of harassment and violence is ever present (Abramovich, 2012; Tunaker, 2015). Psychosocial problems associated with homelessness include negative communication and relationships with family and peers, heightened risk of mental, physical and sexual ill-health, and reliance on alcohol and other drugs (Gattis, 2013). Ream and Forge (2014) found that, although rough sleeping motivated some LGBTQI+ youth to find paths out of homelessness, others became entrenched in damaging relationships that pushed them outside homeless provision and further to the edges of long-term exclusion. Encounters with law enforcement led to youth feeling criminalised rather than protected, and this too could reinforce a street-based identity from which exit was more and more difficult. This was particularly true for migrant youth without legal documentation and transgender youth involved in street sex work (see also Tyler & Schmitz, 2018).

US research found that LGBTQI+ homeless youth began to use alcohol and drugs at an earlier age than non-homeless LGBTQI+ youth and that this substance use coincided with becoming homeless (Rosario *et al*, 2012). This suggested that, rather than causing homelessness, substance abuse is a consequence of homelessness. Comparisons between LGBTQI+ youth and heterosexual youth in the USA and Canada found that, prior to and as a result of becoming homeless, LGBTQI+ young people are more likely to be at risk of mental health issues, substance use and sexual risk behaviour like trading sex and survival sex (i.e. trading sex for accommodation or other support), victimisation and violence (Gattis, 2013; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018).

US research found that LGBTQI+ homeless youth began to use alcohol and drugs at an earlier age than non-homeless LGBTQI+ youth and that this substance use coincided with becoming homeless (Rosario *et al*, 2012).

LGBTQI+ Young People's Experiences of Homeless Services

There is extensive international research evidence on young homeless LGBTQI+ people's experience of using services for homeless people. This research highlights that this experience is often unsatisfactory and at times traumatic. For instance, Cray *et al* (2013) report that LGBTQI+ youth have experienced denigrating treatment by and in the presence of homeless hostel and refuge staff. Lolai's (2015) research describes how LGBTQI+ homeless youth detail denigrating and painful experiences of homophobia and transphobia in school, from biological parents, from adoptive parents in foster homes and foster care institutions where other young people and staff may be verbally, psychologically and sometimes physically discriminatory. Hunter (2008) cites research on US homeless services which reports problems for LGBTQI+ clients ranging from a sense of discomfort to extremes of physical violence by fellow residents, with collusion from staff, and a consequential experience of severe harm.

Just as the triggers for LGBTQI+ youth homelessness interact with other socio-economic factors that increase the risk of homelessness, the international research demonstrates that young LGBTQI+ people's experience of homelessness is also intersectional. Within the LGBTQI+ population, transgender youth and young people of colour are more likely to spend longer periods in homelessness and to be at more extreme risk of harm than are others (Choi *et al*, 2015). Transgender youth are exposed to greater mental and physical health risks through homelessness than their cis-gender LGB peers (Ibid).

Interaction with the Wider LGBTQI+ Community

Reck (2009) has conducted interesting research with five young LGBTQI+ people of colour who were homeless in the Castro district, the heart of San Francisco's LGBTQI+ community. This study explores these young people's desire to fit into a recognised LGBTQI+ community. There was a certain solace for all the Castro research participants and a sense of comfort at being among LGBTQI+ people. At the same time, however, they found the Castro LGBTQI+ community predominantly white, middle-class and male-dominated. The homeless transwomen interviewed by Reck (2009) reported that they felt patronised and excluded, and all of the young people felt that their homelessness meant they had a lower status among the other LGBTQI+ people around them. The participants also reported disappointment at the commercialism, class prejudice, racism, ageism and rejection of their homelessness and obvious street identity by more privileged peers in the LGBTQI+ community in this neighbourhood (Reck, 2009).

Resistance and Resilience of LGBTQI+ Homeless Youth

The experiences of resistance and resilience of LGBTQI+ homeless youth is less widely discussed than their vulnerability (Forge, 2012; Bryan & Mayock, 2012). Nonetheless, the latter issue does emerge in some studies and is an element of this population's experience of homelessness that is important to acknowledge. For instance, Ream and Forge (2014) observed that some LGBTQI+ youth become more health-conscious around HIV and drug consumption. Shelton *et al* (2018: 147) also report that young LGBTQI+ homeless people show exceptional strength and resilience in 'finding ways to survive and thrive while navigating a society that places insurmountable barriers in their path'. This study reports raised self-esteem and agency on the part of transgender youth who develop pride in their identity, especially when they feel supported in society. Homeless LGBTQI+ youth also

exhibit motivation, considerable personal strengths and coping skills. They develop peer supports and create networks of support and survival that enable them to negotiate street life and find paths out of homelessness. Not surprisingly, Shelton *et al*'s (2018) research also found that this resilience diminishes as periods of homelessness lengthen (Ibid). The homeless LGBTQI+ youth examined in Lolai's (2015) research in the USA discuss having learned to use their few material resources to their advantage and knowing how to survive and to be self-sufficient with little or no money in societies that thrive on consumerism. Young LGBTQI+ people learn to stay safe in precarious circumstances, to network and to use public services like libraries to their advantage. They deploy strong strategic skills, set goals and plan for their short- and long-term future. Inevitably, all of these positive traits and behaviours can be reinforced when appropriate supportive interventions are put in place.

International Policy and Service Responses to LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

In Canada and the USA and to a lesser extent in the UK, extensive housing provision for homeless youth has been developed, some of which is specifically designed to serve the needs of LGBTQI+ youth. This provision has not always been systematically and regularly evaluated. This needs to be done on a continuing basis so that we know what works in different contexts and at different moments in time (Toro *et al*, 2007). However, some evaluation research on these initiatives has been conducted, and this highlights some valuable lessons regarding good practice which are relevant to policymakers and service providers in Ireland.

One of most comprehensive policies on LGBTQI+ homelessness has been produced by the province of Alberta in Canada. Alberta has a 10-year plan to end homelessness and, within that, a plan to end youth homelessness – the *Youth Plan* – which acknowledges that LGBTQI+ youth are underrepresented in homelessness and actively seeks to address this (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017). Devised on the basis of research evidence, and in close cooperation with the LGBTQI+ community, the plan envisages the provision of:

- › a range of LGBTQI+ discrete housing options
- › training for homeless service staff which emphasises the relationship between LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and other (i.e. intersectional) homelessness risks
- › government guidelines for shelters that help individuals and homelessness organisations transform the way they connect with LGBTQI+ homeless youth

A telephone study of 19 organisations which provide homeless services to LGBTQI+ youth across the United States gathered information about the perceived gaps in service and recommendations for filling them (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). This study revealed a need for crisis beds to deal with the increasing numbers of LGBTQI+ homeless youth, coupled with supported accommodation for longer-term living and permanent housing to meet the needs of LGBTQI+ homeless young people when they become adults. Supported housing models were identified as particularly important for those whose family conflict was not remediable. It was recommended that these services would best meet the needs of LGBTQI+ homeless youth if they were integrated with mental health, education and other supports that would assist the young person in moving to independent living in the future (Ibid).

Research on homeless services highlights marked differences in the prevalence of LGBTQI+ awareness and sensitivity training for staff of homeless services in different countries.

De Castell and Jenson's (2002) research on the needs of homeless LGBTQI+ youth in Canada emphasises that safety and comfort are core characteristics of home, and young transgender and gender-expansive homeless people articulate a need for a place to live where they can be secure and sustained and able to experience kindness and respect. This is supported by Nolan's (2006) research on supported housing for LGBTQI+ youth in New York city, which notes that this accommodation must create a sense of community where a young person who has lost the stability of a home can feel affirmed in their identity and feel nurtured to grow and to learn.

In view of these findings of the research examined earlier in this chapter, which demonstrates that LGBTQI+ youth commonly have negative experience in homeless services, there are repeated calls in the research literature for training in LGBTQI+ awareness and sensitivity training for staff of homeless services (Wayman, 2008; Shelton & Bond, 2017). In some cases, this might be required where state funding is provided. An institutional culture of respect for LGBTQI+ youth needs to be demonstrable as a condition of receipt of this funding (Ferguson & Maccio, 2012; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). Research on homeless services highlights marked differences in the prevalence of LGBTQI+ awareness and sensitivity training for staff of homeless services in different countries. Only 4% of the UK housing organisations surveyed by the Albert Kennedy Trust's (2015) national scoping study demonstrated an understanding of the unique vulnerabilities and support needs of LGBT homeless youth. This meant that very few homeless providers had appropriate initiatives in place to meet these needs. In contrast, 75% of the staff in the 138 youth homeless services in the USA surveyed as part of the 2014 LGBTQI+ Homeless Youth Provider Survey had undergone training in various aspects of working with LGBTQI+ people (Choi *et al*, 2015). At best, these looked at the intersectional needs of LGBTQI+ homeless youth at the different stages of the homelessness process. However, several organisations did not provide any training, nor did they recognise the need for LGBTQI+ youth to be treated differently to other homeless clients. To address this issue, Page (2017) calls for amendments to the US Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) to include new 'at risk' categories including race, ethnicity and LGBTQI+ youth, and guidelines on how to meet the needs of young people in these categories. Individual action plans to meet the needs of these young people would be linked to homeless funding, while mandatory sensitivity training for staff would address some of the distinct struggles faced by minority homeless youth.

In addition to housing needs, LGBTQI+ homeless youth have a range of other needs in relation to employment, education and healthcare which they need help to meet (Choi *et al*, 2015; Ream & Forge, 2014). The 2014 LGBTQI+ Homeless Youth Provider Survey in the USA differentiated between the needs of cisgender, LGBQ and transgender youth. After housing needs, LGBQ youth stated that acceptance of sexual identity was their

second most important need. Transgender young people's second expressed need was for transition services: access to healthcare specific to transgender youth, access to hormones, emotional support during transition, and legal support (Ibid). Services offered across the 138 organisations surveyed included preventative programmes focused on family support; street outreach and drop-in programmes; emergency accommodation, supported housing, transitional living and aftercare; health support services, counselling, group therapy and suicide prevention; education, vocational and pre-employment training (Choi *et al*, 2015).

As mentioned above, the triggers for LGBTQI+ youth homelessness are frequently rooted in family relationships. Therefore, the literature on responses to homelessness among this cohort includes numerous suggestions for interventions that target their families (Toro *et al*, 2007; Gattis, 2013; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). For instance, Cray *et al* (2013) recommend the establishment of programmes to address communication problems between family members and LGBTQI+ youth, and interventions that support parents to understand their child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Maccio and Ferguson's (2016, p.52) research concluded that staff often feel insufficiently skilled when working with 'foreign-born' parents whose cultural and religious beliefs meant that they were not open to accepting their children's sexuality and/or gender identity. Shelton and Bond (2017) recommend that early interventions with parents of LGBTQ youth merit increased attention and resourcing, not least in that they might mitigate against lengthy periods of housing instability for some transgender and gender-expansive youth.

Cray *et al* (2013) recommend the establishment of programmes to address communication problems between family members and LGBTQI+ youth, and interventions that support parents to understand their child's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed the Irish policy on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness and the related body of research evidence. While the former has expanded in recent years as policymakers have expressed increased concern about homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people, no detailed policy or service plan has been put in place to address this problem. This in part reflects the lack of research on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness conducted in Ireland to date.

Without any Irish evidence of the scale, causes and implications of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness, we have looked to other countries, principally the United States and Canada, where LGBTQI+ youth homelessness has been more extensively researched for evidence about the size, characteristics and experiences of this population. There is unanimity across these studies that LGBTQI+ young people are over-represented in the youth homelessness population. Estimated figures fall between 8% and 37% of the total, according to one substantial review of the literature (Ecker, 2016). Definitive figures on the scale of their overrepresentation in homelessness are difficult to produce, however. This is because many young LGBTQI+ youth are in hidden homelessness rather than in homeless services, there is uneven recording of clients' sexuality and gender identity by homeless service providers, and LGBTQI+ clients may be reluctant to reveal this if asked.

The literature about LGBTQI+ homelessness has consistently identified parental rejection of young people's sexual orientation and gender identity as a key trigger of their decision to leave home (Dunne *et al*, 2002; Durso & Gates, 2012; Ecker, 2016). However, the relationship between coming out and becoming homeless is a complex one. It is influenced by the specific sexuality and/or gender identity of the young person in question, and it also intersects with other factors that increase the risk of homelessness, such as race and ethnicity, poverty and family breakdown (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008). For instance, transgender young people were identified as particularly vulnerable in the research on homelessness, and LGBTQI+ young people from low-income or unstable families were at greater risk of becoming homeless and more likely to remain homeless for longer periods (Robinson, 2018).

LGBTQI+ young people's experience of different forms of homelessness is covered unevenly in the international research (Farrugia, 2010). There is a consensus, however, that they are very likely to experience hidden homelessness, and there is extensive international research evidence on their experience of using services for homeless people – an experience that is often unsatisfactory and at times traumatic.



‘it’s something we have been trying to name for a very long time, working with LGBT young people to understand that [couch-surfing is] homeless, because when they see homeless, they think of somebody on the street.’ (Youth Work Manager)

Views of Policymakers, Service Providers and Advocates

Introduction

This chapter examines the views of the 13 policymakers and representatives of homeless service providers and LGBTQI+ and young people's advocacy groups who were interviewed for this study. As explained in the introduction to this report, the loosely structured interview format enabled interviewees to raise any issues they felt were relevant.

Although the interviews were not designed to probe the issues examined in the literature review, it is striking that many of the issues raised by the policymakers, service providers and advocates who were interviewed echo those raised in the reviewed research on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. These issues (discussed in the opening part of the chapter) include: concerns about how to measure the scale of homelessness among this population; views on the most significant triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness, and the particular vulnerability of homeless LGBTQI+ young people in homeless services. However, the analysis presented in the closing part of the chapter examines several issues raised by the interviewees that are particular to Ireland and/or have not been flagged in the research. These include: the challenges of meeting the needs of LGBTQI+ homeless young people in the context of particular homeless service provision arrangements used in Ireland and the key role that LGBTQI+ staff of homeless services play in supporting LGBTQI+ homeless youth.

Scale of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

None of the policymakers, service providers or advocates interviewed for this research had any robust data on the scale of homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland. There was agreement among a majority of (but not all) interviewees that homelessness is higher among this population than among their heterosexual counterparts. However, because none of the organisations examined in this research systematically collected data on the sexuality or gender identity of their clients (in the case of homeless service providers) or on the extent of homelessness among their clients (in the case of the LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisations), they could offer only anecdotal evidence in support of this view. Furthermore, their estimates of the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness varied significantly.

For instance, a policymaker reported that consultations regarding youth policy formulation revealed anecdotal evidence of higher homeless rates among LGBTQI+ young people:

It emerged in terms of that there was—and it was anecdotal—we didn’t have data to back this up—but it emerged anecdotally in the consultations that it was felt that a higher degree of young people who were homeless were LGBT and that LGBT was contributing to homelessness (Interviewee D).

An interviewee from an LGBTQI+ service and advocacy organisation estimated that ‘7 – 10% of homeless young people are LGBTQI+’ (Interviewee F), while a colleague from a transgender support and advocacy organisation quoted information provided by Belfast Trans Resource Centre which indicates that a third of the clients there would have experience of homelessness of some form (Interviewee G). A frontline staff member in a homeless service provider proffered a much higher estimate of the proportion of the young people who are LGBTQI+, claiming ‘50% of young people coming in [to this service] are gay’ (Interviewee A). However, a staff member in another homeless service provider told us: ‘I’ve been working in these services for years and years and years and I’ve no notion. I couldn’t possibly put a figure on it [the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness], even an estimate. I don’t know’.

A minority of interviewees mentioned that LGBTQI+ youth homelessness had not been flagged to them as particularly prevalent, however. For instance, a policymaker said:

In all our discussions it hasn’t arisen as an issue... we had a discussion on a whole range of homeless issues... between the department, the interagency group, and I think we had 55 NGOs on a full daylong session and we had discussions on family homelessness, single homelessness, what are the issues that can be taken by the agencies, and I’m not aware that was raised by anybody during the day. So, I’m not saying it’s not an issue, but it wasn’t raised (Interviewee C).

Similarly, a local authority representative reported that their main knowledge of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness would be via:

... customers who come themselves and will identify that they would like a single room on the basis of sexuality or gender identity, different things that may arise.... We looked just because we knew we were doing this research. We would have had about five requests we reckon in the last two years, that anyone can remember... So that kind of indicates to me that people don’t actually want to be that open (Interviewee H).

Measurement and Recording of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

The lack of data on the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland reflects the lack of measurement and recording of this population by government and service providers, which in turn reflects substantial barriers to doing this. Three types of barriers to the measurement and recording of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness were identified by interviewees.

The first is the hidden nature of a lot of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. A homeless service provider argued that in this regard LGBTQI+ youth homelessness was similar to youth homelessness more broadly: 'I think one of the things you're probably going to face with any research with youth homelessness is a lot of youth homelessness is undocumented. It's part of the hidden homeless population. So it's couch-surfers' (Interviewee J). This view was supported by an interviewee from a LGBTQI+ support and advocacy group who argued:

We have a youth cohort of LGBT young people who statistically are homeless but don't view themselves as homeless because they're couch-surfing in LGBT friends' houses and apartments and other parents' homes. And it's something we have been trying to name for a very long time, working with LGBT young people to understand that that's homeless, because when they see homeless, they think of somebody on the street. And I suppose for me just something beautiful about the LGBT community that I haven't seen in other communities around is understanding that they can become homeless because of coming out or being outed and the community sort of provides a buffer for safe places to stay. But I suppose for me the negative side of that is them then not coming up in the homeless stats (Interviewee F).

Secondly, homeless service providers in particular suggested that many homeless people are loath to reveal personal information to agency staff, including their sexuality and gender identity; for instance, a manager of a homeless service reported:

So, if someone's coming in, first thing, we don't ask the question, but there's reluctance to answer questions that we ask. So sometimes it's just not something that people tell because at that point in time if they've nowhere to stay, they're in an unsafe environment, I suppose it's not the first thing that's on their mind, if that makes sense... Like, you know, food, water... safety, and then the rest will come afterwards... The only thing people have control of in their lives sometimes is their own story and their own personal story, and you will see resistance to divulge anything, sometimes really small stuff that actually you wouldn't think is important (Interviewee K).

Several other homeless service providers argued that LGBTQI+ people of all ages are reluctant to come out while using homeless services because of safety concerns. One homeless services manager told us that for this reason ‘it’s often not in a young person’s best interests to start talking about their sexuality’:

I mean, there’s still a lot of prejudice out there and if—let’s say, for example, our [name retracted] project. The young people we have in [this] project is very chaotic, troubled, drugtaking, homeless young people. They would be not known for their liberal attitudes shall we say! Put it this way: if I was a young person who ended up coming through the [name retracted] project and I was, let’s say, gay, it would not be something I would advertise (Interviewee B).

This view was supported by Interviewee F (from a LGBTQI+ support and advocacy group) who reported that their young clients ‘... would say to us “I can’t be out in the service”. And then we would have staff in the homeless services saying it’s not safe for them to be out’.

Thirdly, some interviewees raised concerns that efforts to collate information on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness could breach clients’ right to privacy. For instance, one homeless service manager said:

Then you look at the ethics of it around why are we asking. Are we asking for it because we want to know? But why do we want to know? And us wanting to know, is that of value to the service users? Is that going to change their lives in any way? I would question whether it would or not, based on I suppose the model that we work on and the fact that our aim is to get everyone into a home regardless (Interviewee K).

A policymaker made a similar point:

We do know that a lot of presentations [of homeless young people] arise from family breakdown. I don’t know to what extent that the reasons for that family breakdown would be interrogated or whether somebody would be obliged to go into that level of personal information or whether it would be appropriate to ask. If there’s a situation that somebody can no longer live with their family members or is no longer welcome in the family home, I think there’s probably a level of acceptance at a certain point where that desertion or that breakdown is accepted (Interviewee C).

Many of the factors that trigger homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth identified by the policymakers and representatives of service providers and advocacy groups interviewed mirror those identified in the international literature review

Triggers for LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

Many of the factors that trigger homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth identified by the policymakers and representatives of service providers and advocacy groups interviewed mirror those identified in the international literature review set out in the preceding chapter. However, interviewees emphasised that these triggers are shaped by the relevant context, and the prevalence of different triggers has changed as factors such as the availability of affordable housing and dominant societal attitudes to the LGBTQI+ community have changed. They also identified some triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness that reflect particular Irish contextual factors – these are shaped by the specific intersections between sexuality, gender identity and the other inequalities that increase the risk of homelessness in Ireland.

Coming Out and Transitioning

The international literature reviewed in Chapter One revealed that coming out as LGBTQI+ or transitioning (the process through which some trans people begin to outwardly live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one observed and recorded at birth) are identified as high-risk periods for family rejection and therefore key triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. The policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed for this study agreed that this is also the case in Ireland, but they also provided additional information on the particular nuances of how this trigger operates in the Irish context.

For instance, Interviewee F who works with a LGBTQI+ support and advocacy group reflected that, when she first started working in this field a decade ago, almost all of the young people her organisation supported were ‘young people coming out or being outed and asked to leave the family home, and they would then come to a staff member and say, “Look, I’m after being outed” or “I’m after coming out and my family are after rejecting me, they’re after asking me to leave”. She reported: ‘So we still see that at least once a month’ when ‘LGBT young people, who have never accessed any of our support services turn up at the door and press the buzzer, with their suitcases or with their bags — “I have just been thrown out of home. I’ve been asked to leave”. However, she added, ‘we’re really seeing a big shift in the last three years is people coming to staff [and telling them] ... “Me and my family are going to be homeless”... So, it’s gone less around rejection and more around the housing/homeless crisis’.

Other interviewees provided some valuable insights into how the mechanics of coming out and/or transitioning leads to homelessness. In their experience it is now less common for parents to ask their child to leave the family home (although this does certainly occur).

However, parents can make it intolerable for their out and/or transitioning child to stay at home. Interviewees G and M respectively (who represent trans and LGBTQI+ support and advocacy services) provided the following examples of how this exclusionary behaviour can precipitate LGBTQI+ youth homelessness:

... the experiences... often cluster around the same sorts of reasonings in terms of family members acting hostile or putting conditions on. So, in the same way as parents may allow their young gay child to stay there as long as they don't bring someone back or they—to quote a service user who I was talking to... their dad had said as long they don't dress like a faggot they can stay in the house. Which is a succinct way of putting it, for sure! But it's often the requirements that people don't transition or don't talk to other people about it, which is often impossible for trans young people, especially as they may be required to do so to access medical intervention that may profoundly improve their mental health or save their life or anything on that spectrum.

Some left because like in a few different circumstances the parents weren't like calling them by their preferred pronoun. Just refusing to acknowledge the fact that, you know, they were trans or whatever and—and they weren't allowed to live like that so they had to leave.

Interviewee G echoed the consensus in the international literature that trans young people are particularly likely to face conflict with family members:

So, the things that motivate parents or care-providers or private landlords to kick out LGBT young people are often about morality, 'what do neighbours think?', disagreements politically on things, that sort of stuff, or religious issues. And the same is absolutely true in communities of young trans people; however, something that tends to be seen is because coming out as a trans person often becomes the talk of the town for a much longer period of time because when someone comes out as gay that often sets a ripple in the family and in the local community. That ripple does tend to die down [whereas] for young trans people often that ripple can be sustained.

An interviewee from another LGBTQI+ support and advocacy group argued that 'visibly queer young people have a lot more issues with private landlords and extended family members than people who aren't necessarily read as LGBT people' (Interviewee F).

Some interviewees also flagged the existence of variations in the level and intractability of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness that are shaped by geographical and other challenges related to the intersection of LGBTQI+ identities with ethnic and religious identities. In relation to the former issue, an interviewee from an LGBTQI+ support group said:

I suppose the issue people face coming from rural areas or outside cities is they're also moving away from any support network they have. Not just to their family, that their family's support—they may be moving away from a support network of friends. Whereas if young people are based in Dublin already, they may have a support network of friends... Yeah. So, your landlord kicks you out of your lease, you enter homelessness services... (Interviewee G).

This view was supported by a policymaker who reported that her consultation on LGBTQI+ young people revealed that 'there was a strong rural/urban divide and that rural young people... were more likely to become homeless at the time of coming out, in that they may have been thrown out of home' (interviewee D).

Several interviewees suggested that minority ethnic and religious LGBTQI+ youth were more likely to be rejected by their families on coming out or transitioning. For instance, a homeless services manager reported: 'With young Travellers being gay is still a no-no, and I've seen a lot of young Travellers coming into services because of their sexuality, because they've been rejected by their families' (Interviewee K). The same interviewee reported:

I am seeing people from Muslim backgrounds coming into services, from Evangelical Christian groups like Jehovah Witnesses and stuff coming into homelessness because of rejection. You're not seeing so much from the Catholic communities because let's face it, everyone is Catholic by name in Ireland. There's very few actual practising Catholics.

Leaving Care

The literature review also revealed that being in foster care or institutional care is associated with increased risk of youth homelessness. Ream and Forge (2014) found that it was common for young homeless LGBTQI+ people to have problems with child welfare and foster care systems that were not necessarily related to their LGBTQI+ identity. This view was supported by an interviewee from an advocacy group for children in care. She suggested that LGBTQI+ young people are over-represented in the care system:

We do know anecdotally from young people using our service we would think they [LGBTQI+ youth] are actually over-represented within the care system but we don't have anything to back that up... we don't record it either, because we don't need to record it for advocacy service, the service that we provide. But I suppose generally any research will tell you that they are over-represented in the care system internationally (Interviewee E).

She also reported that her experience indicated that LGBTQI+ care leavers were over-represented in homelessness, but stressed that her organisation had no firm data to support this view nor could she confirm that it was a sustained trend (as mentioned in the previous chapter no research on this issue has been conducted to date).

In terms of the factors that might explain the over-representation of LGBTQI+ care leavers in homelessness, this interviewee pointed out that this cohort of young people are vulnerable in several critical respects:

Well, I suppose they would tell us here that while they would have to deal with almost like a double jeopardy—being removed from care and the fact that they're LGBTI as well—would cause trauma as well. They have the issues that would be expected, issues around accepting themselves, coming out, issues that they've a higher incidence—I know research will tell you they've a higher incidence of mental health and self-harm, higher rates of suicide ideation among young LGBT. I know the LGBTI Ireland study would support that, that was done recently (Interviewee E).

However, she argued that the current severe shortage of affordable housing is a more significant factor in driving LGBTQI+ youth homelessness...

because the homelessness issue wasn't an issue for young people seven or eight years ago, where we had support or had equal or adequate accommodation for young people leaving home regardless of whether they're LGBTI or not (interviewee E).

Interviewee F (from an LGBTQI+ youth support and advocacy organisation) suggested that the provision of support to LGBTQI+ young people's families and foster carers can prevent the breakdown of these relationships and thereby remove a key trigger of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. These family support workers would help families to accept the young person's identity and support them through the process of their child transitioning to enable them to 'move together as a family unit'. This proposal was supported by one of the policymakers interviewed, who reported:

I know that one of the things that the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) are proposing to do is to look at greater outreach, greater engagement with these families, maybe to look at identifying solutions for these people from the family home so that they don't have to spend time in emergency accommodation (Interviewee C).

Several interviewees mentioned the need to recruit more LGBTQI+ foster carers who could provide accommodation for LGBTQI+ youth whose relationships with their family has fractured. This was identified as a much better option than homeless accommodation. Tusla approved LGBTQI+ foster carers and does have a policy of 'targeted recruitment' of foster carers to match the needs and profiles of young people in care.

Housing Supply and Affordability

The contribution of the current severe shortage of affordable housing to rent in triggering LGBTQI+ youth homelessness was echoed by many of the representatives of homeless service providers and LGBTQI+ advocacy groups interviewed. In addition, some interviewees pointed out that the Irish housing market context is creating new challenges for supporting LGBTQI+ youth in exiting homelessness.

For instance, as mentioned above, Interviewee F, who works with a LGBTQI+ support and advocacy group, informed us that her organisation was increasingly requested to provide support to the homeless families of LGBTQI+ young people rather than only to the young people themselves. She mentioned two ways in which this problem manifests itself:

It's really varied how homelessness is affecting LGBT young people, but definitely what's come up for the last twelve months for us is families who are living in hotels or family hubs and their child coming out or being outed, living in such a confined space and trying to support them and the family to process their child being LGBT while living in a one-roomed hotel.

What we're really seeing as a big shift in the last three years is people coming to staff that are in our service— 'Me and my family are going to be homeless. The landlord is putting up the rent. We're after being told refurbishings [sic] are happening'. So that's a big thing that's changed. And staff—we talk about it in frontline the last two years that they're not only supporting a young person who may be at threat or fear of being homeless, it's their family as well.

A policymaker argued that young homeless people who are single or in two-person households find it difficult to access social housing because of the lack of small social housing units. He suggested '... in terms of long-term solutions [to homelessness] we need to develop more one-beds' (interviewee C). An interviewee from an LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisation agreed, but also acknowledged associated political challenges:

... because the homeless crisis is horrific and it's at emergency levels within our society, the likelihood of a single person being given a public home or a social home—they go to the bottom of the list when you've a family and you're presenting... So I would argue there's particulars within the homeless situation that definitely have impacted more negatively on LGBT young people... So the homeless crisis has had a particular negative impact on LGBT young people and probably one that's not spoken about as much because they're trying to find their voice. We have women with five children sleeping in a car overnight and that's very difficult to find a voice in that (Interviewee F).

Suitability of Existing Homeless Services for LGBTQI+ Youth

Many of the policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed for this study raised concerns about the suitability of homeless services for LGBTQI+ homeless youth. This in large part reflected the challenges faced by the client group accommodated by most, if not all, homeless services. However, interviewees also identified some additional challenges faced specifically by LGBTQI+ homeless youth in using homeless services, and highlighted important examples of good practice in supporting LGBTQI+ young clients of homeless services and the key role that LGBTQI+ staff members play in this regard.

Many of the policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed for this study raised concerns about the suitability of the homeless services for LGBTQI+ homeless youth.

Challenges Faced by all Clients of Homeless Services

Many interviewees argued that all categories of clients face challenges in using homeless services that can render them unwilling to do so. These challenges are not unique to LGBTQI+ homeless youth. Two 'generic' challenges of this type were raised repeatedly by interviewees: loss of control on the part of homeless service clients, and safety and security concerns. These points are illustrated by the following quotations from interviews with a policymaker and a homeless service manager:

People don't avoid homeless hostels just because of their orientation. They avoid them because you're under scrutiny of an agency. Everything you do is documented. You're in an environment with you don't know who. You've no choice directly who you're surrounded with. You can't have visitors. You're very isolated. You've no control over your food. You've no control over your life, in essence. Everything you do is managed through support plans. So if you don't want to be in that environment... (Interviewee C).

There is a fear in the community to actually engage in formal services out of fear of discrimination because of being a member of the LGBT community but also the risks that are involved in going into generic hostels, you know, the one-size-fits-all where you could be sharing with someone who's lovely; on the other hand you could be sharing with someone who's an active IV drug-user or an alcoholic and then there could be issues that develop as a result (Interviewee K).

Service Ethos and Sex-segregated Service Provision

However, interviewees did also highlight three additional challenges that particularly affect LGBTQI+ clients. The first of these related to the sex-segregated organisation of most homeless services. This means not only that homeless services are focused on catering for men and women only and don't cater for people with other gender identities, but also that the particular way services are organised creates challenges for any client who doesn't fit into standard social norms regarding gender and sexuality. For instance, a homeless service provider pointed out:

Like the biggest example would be the CPS system, the Central Placement Service [which is used to register homeless people and place them in services]. They register people according to gender. What happens if a young trans man or trans woman presents to a service and they're still classed as a man or they're still classed as their gender at birth rather than their new gender? (Interviewee K).

A local authority interviewee reported that they had plans to change this system and were introducing a 'third gender' option that will allow clients to register as male, female or other (Interviewee H). However, a representative of an LGBTQI+ service and advocacy group pointed out that it was not just the system for registering homeless people and allocating them to homeless service providers that caused challenges – many homeless services cater for *only* men or women. This interviewee explained how this approach creates difficulties for both trans men and trans women:

So, the gender nature of them [homeless services] often leads people to self-exclude on the basis that they assume that they will not be able to access them. So, for example, a young trans woman assuming that she may not be perceived as female and therefore not be allowed into a women's homelessness service, or vice versa, or people not feeling like they would be safe to exist within those services either from staff but also from other service users (Interviewee G).

Notably, this is also an issue in residential care for young people because many residential care centres operated by both the state and non-profit providers cater for only males or females. This can create problems in accessing residential care for young people who don't identify with the gender observed and recorded at birth.

A second, additional challenge that particularly affects LGBTQI+ clients is that homeless service provision is frequently in the form of dormitory-style accommodation. One interviewee argued that in organisations he had visited in the UK 'a lot of their services are single rooms rather than shared dormitory areas, which might give the young gay or lesbian person confidence to actually approach staff and talk about their sexuality' (Interviewee J).

The prevalence of homophobia and transphobia and the challenges this creates for LGBTQI+ homeless people were raised as a concern by almost all of the policymakers, service providers and advocacy groups interviewed for this study.

A third LGBTQI+-specific challenge identified was the actual delivery structures themselves, in particular the perception that many services are provided by faith-based organisations. A representative of an LGBTQI+ service and advocacy group argued:

I think an issue about the services in the Republic is a very large proportion of homeless services are faith-based services. So that brings—and also volunteer participation in service delivery is still very high here. And that brings a suite of challenges for people who are trans, gay (Interviewee G).

Homophobic/Transphobic Bullying of LGBTQI+ Homeless Youth

The prevalence of homophobia and transphobia and the challenges this creates for LGBTQI+ homeless people were raised as a concern by almost all of the policymakers, service providers and advocacy groups interviewed for this study. There was a strong consensus that this behaviour is prevalent in society, among homeless people and therefore in homeless services, and that the perception that they are likely to encounter this type of bullying in services discourages young LGBTQI+ homeless people from using them.

There was a widespread view among interviewees that transphobic and homophobic behaviour is part of a wider pattern of verbal and sometimes physical bullying and aggression between service users, which is linked to their social exclusion. One homeless service provider summarised this pattern powerfully:

So, if you're socially excluded and you find someone who has another difference, you'll have greater hierarchy of exclusion... The drug users have categories of addicts and how they refer to them... So, people will create natural hierarchies to make themselves feel better about their shit. So, within homelessness if you—so if a group of homeless lads are around and discover that someone is gay, they will be further down the food chain. "So, we'll abuse them to make ourselves feel better." That is common. And also, sexual assaults are common—male-on-male violence—and very underreported (Interviewee A).

A colleague from another homeless service agreed:

And sometimes someone might be picked on for their orientation, not because of that but just because it's seen as a vulnerability, it's something that—so they might try it and if it's seen as a vulnerability then people will pick on that vulnerability—because there is that kind of mentality in some services and within certain populations (Interviewee K).

Other interviewees disagree with this analysis. They argued that, unlike other categories of homeless service users, young LGBTQI+ people who are out almost always face aggression and bullying from other services users. In this vein another homeless service manager informed us:

Like if I was heterosexual I would go into any hostel. I'd be fine and I wouldn't be bothered. You know, there'd be no one there to be like, 'Oh, you filthy straight person'... that doesn't happen in society. You know, like there's no— what's the derogatory term for like a heterosexual? There's none. But I can list off loads of derogatory terms for the LGBT community. So there's a huge difference between how LGBTQs can access services and heterosexuals can (Interviewee J).

In addition to creating challenges for LGBTQI+ homeless service users and discouraging them from being open about their sexuality or gender identity when using services, interviewees also strongly agreed that the perception that transphobic and homophobic behaviour occurs in homeless services is a key factor that discourages homeless LGBTQI+ youth from using these services in the first place. For instance, a representative of an LGBTQI+ service and advocacy organisation reported:

Because I know there is a lot of fear... there is a horrendous—I think stuff happens in hostel... So, I'm not sure—I don't know have they evidence of this, but I would know people that they would be afraid to go to hostels because they identify as LGBTI, because of bullying and maybe possibly worse (Interviewee M).

Responses to Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying of Homeless LGBTQI+ Youth

The policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed had mixed views about the prevalence and effectiveness of efforts to combat transphobia and homophobia against homeless LGBTQI+ youth. This probably reflects variable practices in this regard among homeless service providers and the practical difficulties of combatting this type of behaviour among clients.

For instance, one homeless service provider reported: 'So I feel as an organisation we create a non-judgmental kind of very open environment. We have equality statements around the place. We deal quite directly with any kind of discrimination. It's something we're quite zero tolerance on in general' (Interviewee K). Similarly, another homeless service provider reported that homophobic and transphobic bullying is simply not tolerated in the homeless youth service in which he works:

... we certainly don't tolerate it in any way, shape or form. And if any of that comes up and is noticed by staff, they would be on it and saying that it's unacceptable. Whether it's about another young person or about a staff member, it's not on and it's not tolerated (Interviewee A).

However, he recognised that homophobia and transphobia are still there ‘under the surface, and they’re explicitly, from the moment they walk outside services, they [LGBTQI+ clients] could possibly be in a spot of bother’. Furthermore, he argued that if LGBTQI+ youth ‘end up in the mainstream homeless services, especially adult services, that’s a different kettle of fish. They are very exposed. You’re very exposed in everything’. A colleague from another homeless service disagreed and argued that homophobia and transphobia are not addressed effectively in homeless services and are taken less seriously than bullying or aggression with other motivations:

Yeah. I sort of work on the front line of it at the moment. The way homophobia is treated in hostels is that, oh, just shake hands and move on. But if you compare that to racist incidents in hostels, it’s an immediate exclusion from services. So there’s a huge kind of gap there for the support that’s given to service users who experience homophobia or transphobia. But also there’s a fear of reporting those issues because of the lack of intervention that’s done around them (Interviewee K).

To address these problems some of the homeless services providers interviewed argued that the equality policies that have been adopted widely among homeless services providers pay insufficient attention to the specific needs of LGBTQI+ clients. This point was made by a homeless service provider who argued:

Every single charity that deals with the homeless in Ireland has an equality charter but it doesn’t specify anything. There’s no what’s right, what’s appropriate. Whereas if you look at most organisations now they have sexual harassment policies and bullying policies and they outline what’s right, what’s wrong. But there’s nothing saying what’s right and what’s wrong from an LGBTQ perspective (interviewee A).

Interviewee H (from the local authority sector) argued that these policies should provide for the appointment of a designated, trained person in the service to whom LGBTQI+ clients can go for support or advice. Several of the policymakers and homeless service provider and advocacy group representatives interviewed highlighted the importance of actively conveying the message to clients and potential clients that homeless services are welcoming and inclusive environments for LGBTQI+ people. The following ideas about how to achieve this were proposed by interviewees from the civil service, local government and homeless services sectors:

Another one that might be useful is that this year we held a competition for under 24-year-olds to develop a welcome sticker for LGBTI people... There it is, the public recognition marker, but it also crosses over into the communications campaign... And in parallel, there’s a group of young people who are going to be working on developing a charter, which is a self-declaration of support for LGBTI people, that organisations will sign up to

the charter and put the sticker on their door. So, it will form part of a whole, inclusion, communications, awareness-building campaign. But that would definitely be something that could also be used by homeless service providers as a sign of inclusive services and an ethos behind that sticker that reflects the vision of the strategy (Interviewee D).

... we all have a public-sector duty to make our services, I suppose, welcoming places or where you at least allow someone the space to identify. So, I think if we stay invisible to it people are never going to identify with it or never feel it's okay to talk about it, I guess, unless we create some space. In terms of how we change it, I know that here in terms of the building—and I'm talking purely from a staff point of view—when we were trying to make it a safer space for people to come out here, it was simple things like having a flag, having the flag or having some kind of symbols or some kind of contacts (Interviewee H).

We would have posters up in the building that would show that we're a queer-friendly space. We would use the LGBT Ireland posters on who we are. We've the rainbow. So, people will see that, okay, it might be okay to talk about this in here (Interviewee A).

Most of the policymakers, homeless service providers and support and advocacy groups highlighted the need to provide homeless service staff and volunteers with the training required to enable them support LGBTQI+ homeless youth. Indeed, a representative of a LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisation reported: '... the workers in the homeless services... are requesting LGBT awareness training consistently' (Interviewee F). A homeless service manager suggested: 'You'd have some staff who'll be brilliant and very up-to-date on all the issues that are affecting young people and there's others who would be maybe around a long, long time and they wouldn't be altogether *au fait* with that kind of stuff and wouldn't be great around it' (Interviewee A). Another interviewee from an LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisation argued:

... there's no professional training that's standard on LGBT issues in homelessness services anywhere in the UK and Ireland and there's very, very little standard professional training for any public services on LGBT issues, the level of competency within public service—public servants and civil servants but also more generally within public service providers and volunteers is so poor (Interviewee G).

Key Role of LGBTQI+ Homeless Service Staff

An important finding of the consultations with policymakers, service providers and advocacy groups conducted for this study is the key role that LGBTQI+ staff who work in homeless services play in supporting young LGBTQI+ people who use these services or are in hidden homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

One of the local authority officials interviewed suggested that these staff are a vital first point of support when young homeless people come out: ‘What we have found is where people do come out as gay or trans in services, they want to raise this, there is kind of a network of gay people working in [homeless] services around the city [they approach]’ (Interview H). This was confirmed by a staff member in a homeless service provider:

Service users who’ve never talked to anyone about their sexuality feel more comfortable coming to me about it because they know I understand to a certain extent. I don’t know about the homeless thing. I’ve never been homeless myself. I’ve only ever worked in services. So I can only talk about the sexuality, you know, the sexual identity and the gender identity side of things. But the young LGBTQs that I’ve dealt with in services, yeah, they have felt more comfortable with me, even asking, you know, what does the LGBTQ and the rest mean? (Interviewee K).

Perhaps for this reason it was striking that the LGBTQI+ service providers and advocates interviewed reported that the extent of LGBTQI+ youth homeless was higher than did their straight counterparts. The LGBTQI+ youth homeless population may be less visible to the latter.

Notably, in addition to reporting that the homeless service clients were victims of transphobic and homophobic behaviour, the LGBTQI+ staff of these services we interviewed reported that were themselves often subject to abuse of this type.

I’ve dealt with it first-hand as a staff member. There’s not, you know, been a week in [organisation name deleted] where I haven’t been called a faggot or a queer in a derogatory way by a service user. So if that’s a staff member that’s getting it, of course the service users are going to get it more and that’s why there’s a fear (Interviewee K).

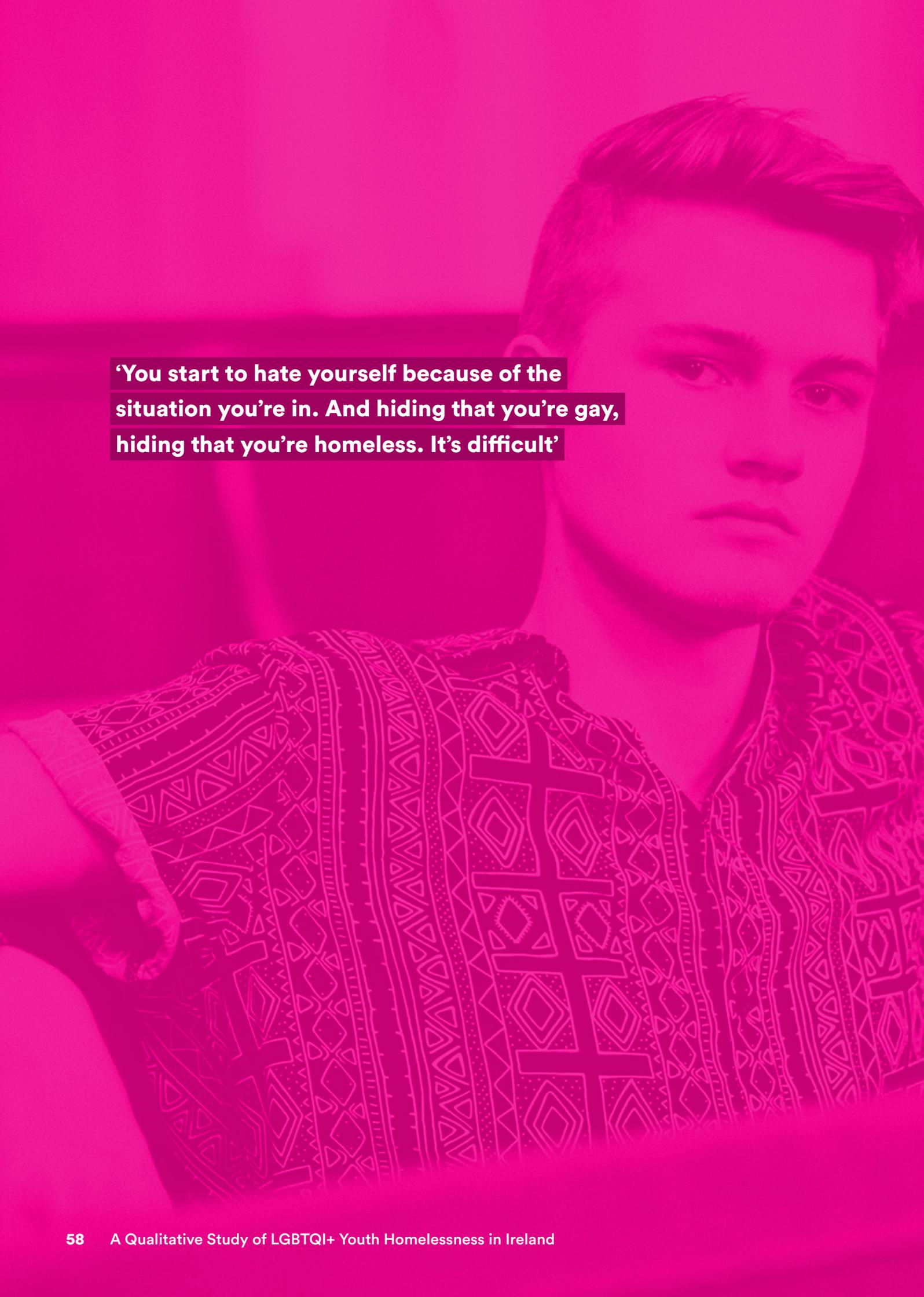
Conclusions

This chapter has reported on the results of interviews with 13 policymakers and representatives of homeless service providers and LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisations. It has revealed little consensus about the size of the population of LGBTQI+ homeless young people in Ireland, this reflects the lack of statistics collected on this population which in turn reflects the challenges associated with collecting these data. However, there is significant agreements among policy makers, homeless service providers and LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisations that this community is often subject to homophobia and transphobia by other users of homeless services. As a result, LGBTQI+ young people can be unwilling to use homelessness services and are more likely to rely on couch-surfing or other forms of hidden homelessness for accommodation.

Interviewees estimated that LGBTQI+ young people account for between 7% and 50% of the youth homeless population. Some of the triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness are common to the entire youth homeless population. They include leaving care, family breakdown and the shortage of affordable accommodation. However, interviewees also highlight some triggers of homelessness that are specific to LGBTQI+ youth, such as coming out and/or transitioning. They also suggested that LGBTQI+ young people living in rural areas and from some minority ethnic and religious backgrounds are at particularly high risk of becoming homeless when they come out or transition.

Interviewees acknowledge that homeless services can be challenging for all homeless people to use but they argued that LGBTQI+ young people face additional challenges because they are likely to be subjected to homophobia and transphobia from other service users. The adequacy of responses to this behaviour on the part of homeless providers varies. Some homeless organisations actively promote themselves as LGBTQI+-friendly spaces and enforce a policy of zero tolerance of homophobic and transphobic behaviour. In other organisations, this type of abuse is not treated as seriously as, for instance, racism. It is also clear from the interviews that LGBTQI+ staff of homeless services play a vital role in supporting their young LGBTQI+ clients.

Interviewees acknowledge that homeless services can be challenging for all homeless people to use but they argued that LGBTQI+ young people face additional challenges because they are likely to be subjected to homophobia and transphobia from other service users.



'You start to hate yourself because of the situation you're in. And hiding that you're gay, hiding that you're homeless. It's difficult'

Becoming Homeless

Introduction

This is the first of three chapters that examine the profoundly insightful and generous first-hand narrative accounts the young LGBTQI+ people shared with the researchers. These chapters seek to centrally locate the voices of these young participants in the analysis, putting forward their responses, comments, insights and stories as legitimate and richly textured research data. These participant voices provide a critical lens into the subjective experiences of youth LGBTQI+ homelessness. It is important at this juncture to recap the diversity of the sexual and gender identifications of the participants. They were aged between 18 and 30 and identified across all points and none of the LGBTQI+ spectrum and in terms of gender, non-binary, trans and cisgender (cis) identifications were represented. While this is a comprehensive and diverse sample of young LGBTQI+ people, their testimonies are not offered as statistically representative. Rather, they offer insights into and contribute to expanding our understanding of this challenging and under-researched Irish homeless issue.

The main focus of the chapter is the research participants' experiences of becoming homeless and the proximate triggers of this homelessness, or, in other words, the factors that prompted them to leave their parental or caregivers' home or the home they had established for themselves, and the factors that created difficulties for them in finding a new home. The analysis presented here focuses on two proximate triggers of homelessness: challenges in interpersonal and family relationships and difficulties in accessing affordable and adequate housing.

Only 'out' young LGBTQI+ young people were interviewed for this research. The next section of the chapter explores the concept and experiences of coming out, how this happened or continues to happen, and in what ways this might have contributed to these young people's narratives specific to their homeless experiences. For some of these research participants, 'coming out' was an important trigger into homelessness. For others their sexuality and gender identity had a significant influence on their experience of homelessness. The chapter closes with a discussion of the mental health challenges reported by the LGBTQI+ homeless youth interviewed. These challenges were very commonly reported by these interviewees and were related to their homelessness, their LGBTQI+ identity and the intersection between the two.

‘Coming Out’

‘Coming out’ is a complex process that takes place across one’s lifetime (Bochenek & Brown, 2001, p.xiii). This process entails becoming aware of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity and disclosing this to others. ‘Coming out’ narratives have been understood over many decades to play a strong role in gay and lesbian historiography and their lives (Plummer, 1995). Indeed, it continues to be the case that for young LGBTQI+ people ‘coming out’ can be a significant experience or series of experiences in and across their lives as part of an evolving and often fluid process of identity formation (Hegna, 2007). While this inevitably begins with some form of ‘coming out to yourself’, the process may be influenced by any number of external factors including attitudes, beliefs and social contexts. In addition, it is increasingly acknowledged that LGBTQI+ individuals may have different investments in the coming-out process, including proactive decisions ‘to not come out’, which challenge the reductive coming-out binary that suggests one is either in or out of the closet (Rasmussen, 2004). As Butler (1993) provocatively asked: so, we are out of the closet, but into what? Increasingly, more nuanced interpretations of coming out, or not coming out, suggest a more complex process of engagement across one’s lifecycle. This more organic, subjectively attuned process involves a range of agentic decision-making processes contingent on one’s psycho-social, cultural and political context, in addition to the varying levels of material resources available.

For the young people interviewed for this research study, coming out featured prominently across the interviews and spanned questions of how, where, to whom, and crucially when, or when not to, come out. Coming-out narratives were shared across both gender and sexuality and reinforced the fact that, despite advances made at socio-cultural, legal and political levels, the coming-out process can still present young people with enormous challenges, particularly in light of persistent homophobia and transphobia (USI, 2013; TENI, 2014; ILGA-Europe, 2015; LGBTI Ireland, 2016). One young person discussed how challenging coming-out can be when encountering people with negative beliefs and opinions:

I was, struggled when I was younger, coming out was really, really hard. I’d meet people that had really strong opinions about it, negative opinions. It was really, really hard (Participant 8).

The personal challenges in coming out to oneself, the first iteration of ‘outness’ and the realisation that you might not be ‘straight’, often follow a same-sex intimate experience. Exposure to previous negative reactions, relating to or based on sexual difference such as homophobic slurs, comments and jokes, can have a causal influence on the development of internalised homophobia. This can have debilitating effects on young people’s lives and wellbeing and directly affect their negotiation of their sexuality and gender identification:

For the young people interviewed for this research study, coming out featured prominently across the interviews and spanned questions of how, where, to whom, and crucially when, or when not to, come out.

Interviewer: And you said at that time, it was a secret that you and she were together. Was that because you were two women?

Participant 21: Yeah. It was. The whole thing kind of happened... I was kind of like, 'Okay. Yeah, that's a thing'. When I came back to Ireland there was, I was aware of that, you know? It was on my mind or something. I felt bad about it, to be honest. I was like, 'This is a huge problem'.

There were interesting temporalities associated with coming out as a non-linear process that defied neat chronological categorisation. For example, one young trans person navigated the anxieties associated with discovering their evolving transness: 'Oh my God, I know I'm trans, but I am so fucked up by all this. What do I do? My life is going to end because of this' (Participant 17). And, as a simultaneous, parallel process, they started to embrace their trans identity as an exciting form of trans euphoria. They were conscious that their transness was really important: 'I was getting stronger and stronger and [...] I knew I was starting to go off on the right path' (Participant 17).

They also recognised how important it was for them to have support in order to be able to come out. They described a powerful experience of attending a particular night club and encountering a famous drag queen, and the powerful impact their validating conversation had on them, even though it was still a challenging personal journey to navigate:

I came here in secret and got all these words of encouragement. I knew this is the right fucking path. And I felt fortified right by that. You know what I mean? This is totally the right thing to do, but this all needs to be secret. So, at that time, I was still trying to let the cat out of the bag a little bit (Participant 17).

The complexity of coming out as a negotiated process involving often unknown people was also evident across the young people's narratives and, in particular, how important it was to 'suss out' people, to gauge their level of tolerance/intolerance before making a decision to come out to them:

Yeah. It's kind of something I just have to weave into conversations, you know. Kind of soon as just... because you don't want to get to know someone really well, as a friend, and then have to come out to them; and they're like, 'Oh, I think that's disgusting. I'm not for that. I have no problem with gay people, but I don't like being around gay people'. So it's something you kind of just want to say, almost as soon as you can, or kind of suss out what they're like as a person, and how tolerant they are, or how open they are to other people that are different than them (Participant 8).

Young people also spoke about how important it was to encounter people who understood their sex/gender identification and nomenclature – described as ‘getting it’ – and accepted it. Indeed, an example directly related to the coming-out process and people ‘not getting it’ was misgendering. The impact of misgendering for these young people was evident not only in terms of the additional stress and anxiety caused and experienced but also in relation to negatively affecting their capacity to flourish in particular environments such as college or university.

So, it is a lot of energy, but I do as well avoid... I don't know, it's bad, but I avoided straight people that are cis as well, because it's under the assumption that I'm going to have to explain a lot of stuff to them. And it's usually true. Like in college I didn't really make friends. But I did try to, but I think as well, they were nice people, but after a while the misgendering was kind of a lot. I don't know, I felt like I had to make sacrifices to be friends with them, and I just didn't want to (Participant 4).

While this relates specifically to a college context, the challenges associated with misgendering were also very important in the context of frontline homeless services.

For another young person, the challenges associated with coming out were compounded by additional intersectional identity-based inequalities, in their case being a member of the Traveller community. They spoke powerfully about the challenges they experienced as a result of coming out within their family. However, they were also keen to point out that their mother was incredibly supportive throughout the process, despite the difficulties involved and the level of homophobia in the Traveller community:

Basically, my family didn't accept it, some of them still don't accept it but, I want to say this, my mother does. My mother stood by me through the whole way like, if you get me... I came out with it when I was about 18 and a half or 19 and when I came out I got a lot of abuse off the Travelling community and settled people and all saying homophobic stuff, I ended up in the psychiatric ward as well for a couple of days (Participant 2).

This young person went on to talk about the sense of strength and solidarity they gained from other Travellers coming out. They gave the example of ‘the Traveller lad that came out on Big Brother’, stating:

... it gave me a bit of courage as well, like for a Traveller boy to come out as well, and then I just came out with it, do you know what I mean (Participant 2).

This same young person spoke with a stoic determination and sense of personal integrity and self-belief in how they dealt with the ongoing presence of homophobia they encountered in relation to coming out:

... people look at you different ways, like I've known since I came out like a lot of people used to talk to me and some of them now has backed off, haven't talked to me, but that's their problem, if they have something against gay people, we'll let them go live their life... and there's no difference in a woman being with a man and a woman being with a woman or a man being with a man like, do you know what I mean (Participant 2).

The enormity of the coming-out process and the particular challenges posed for young trans people was palpable:

My family found it really hard, but my mom found it the hardest and now she's my biggest champion. She's really on my side because we talked and talked about it and it was really fucking hard (Participant 10).

Across the interviews, the young people spoke about coming out in different guises and forms and, indeed, spoke of their frequent decisions 'to not come out'. There was a clear theme across their stories that coming out was complicated in quite significant ways by their homeless experiences, and the sense that being homeless too was a closeted phenomenon. According to Brown, 'the Closet conveys denial, erasure and concealment of queer people, their desires, and their sexual relations' (Brown, 2011, p.124). We might also read the homeless closet as a denial and erasure of a basic human need. When combined, this forms a powerful psychic barrier that suggests you cannot come out as LGBTQI+ within the homeless context, for fear for your personal safety, and simultaneously you cannot come out as homeless within the LGBTQI+ context for fear of ostracisation by your peers. One young person described this 'double closet' (Quilty, 2019a) in the following way: 'You start to hate yourself because of the situation you're in. And hiding that you're gay, hiding that you're homeless. It's difficult' (Participant 1).

Interpersonal and Familial Challenges

Chapter One explained that the international literature identifies how interpersonal and familial challenges are the identified key proximate homelessness triggers for many LGBTQI+ youth homeless. Sometimes this conflict is related to young people coming out and sometimes it isn't. There were specific triggers involving parental relationship conflict and breakdown experienced by 12 of the young people interviewed for this research. This led to these young people being asked to leave home or deciding to leave home because they could not tolerate their home situation any longer or leaving as a response to an impossible ultimatum: 'You can stay, however not as LGBTQI+'. For two people, the trigger was an intimate relationship breakdown, linked to gender or sexuality in both cases. Parental death was the direct trigger in two cases.

There were specific triggers involving parental relationship conflict and breakdown experienced by 12 of the young people interviewed for this research

One young person ended up homeless following the death of his foster mother. The pain and trauma of that time and the consequences on his life were immense:

It was probably the worst year of my life, because I was grieving. I was on my own. I turned to drugs for a while. I was taking drugs for a full seven months and drinking every single day. Like you won't believe how far I have come in the last 18 months. I was really down on my ass for a while when that had happened (Participant 14).

For a second research participant, the family dynamic, particularly the relationship with his father, completely broke down following the death of his mother:

So, we didn't get along because when she passed away things kind of changed. Like wanting more money off me... I was buying my own food. I was doing my fair share of the rent... And I just had enough so I moved out into an apartment with a friend of mine (Participant 13).

That particular accommodation didn't work out for a number of reasons, including challenging flatmates and increases to the rent sought, so he then had to leave – which directly triggered his homelessness:

And I moved into hostels for a while, B&Bs, sometimes I slept on the streets, which was really tough, I never thought I would see that, then I was in college at the time... And one of the staff members they saw me sleeping up on the third floor, constantly, and they kind of helped me to get in here (Participant 13).

The centrality of the ‘family unit’ to young people’s first-hand narrative accounts cannot be overstated. Challenging or troubled family dynamics were spoken of in detail. For some of the young people this included the persistent threat of violence, though not necessarily related to gender or sexuality. When this was the case, the young people spoke of a direct causal link between their agentic response to parental/familial violence and rendering themselves homeless:

I was probably home for about two months, I think, when, basically, my dad was super-violent again. I was, like, okay. So, it’s not ‘you’re a child’ thing, it’s just a thing. I ended up leaving in the middle of the night (Participant 21).

There were also stories shared by the young people that directly linked the violence they experienced as a profound invasion of their personal space and integrity. The following account highlights the role of family violence as a direct trigger into homelessness. While not directly related to their LGBTQI+ identity, the impact of this violence is profound in both material and psycho-social terms:

My dad came in and literally picked me up from the bed and threw me on the floor and then kicked me out. So that was violating. Nothing to do with me being gay. I’m not out to him. I’m actually bi. But I’m not out to him. He’s the only person in my life I’m not out to. And just because he’s quite old-fashioned and religious and you just never know how it’s going to go with him. He could be fully accepting, he could not give a crap, or he could, again, kick me out (Participant 9).

For other young people, there was a direct correlation made between their LGBTQI+ identity and parental/familial reactions leading directly to them being homeless. In these cases, problematic family dynamics related to LGBTQI+ identity and were often linked closely to, or exacerbated by, the coming-out process:

I think it was just after... a couple of months after I came out, I was like nearly 16. I didn’t have a great relationship with my parents, with my mom and my stepdad in the home. So, I had to leave, and I had to put myself into homeless services (Participant 8).

Many young people shared powerful accounts of being ‘kicked out’ or being asked by a parent to leave their family home. The immediacy and suddenness of what being ‘kicked out’ looked like for these young people was troubling and impactful. They communicated a profound sense of being completely ill-prepared for the situation, not knowing what to do, where to go and what supports they might access:

The reason she kicked me out at that time, was because I had come home wearing makeup, after going out on a date with a guy and she went crazy that night. Went upstairs. When I came back down the next day, she basically just told me to leave. I think I stayed at a friend’s house that night and then, I was calling people and I found one friend who had let me stay in her house for a month and then I had another friend, who knew these people who had a spare room in their attic (Participant 5).

For other interviewees, coming out precipitated a slower deterioration of relationships with their parents or caregivers. This was the case for Participant 8, who reported:

It was always not great in the home. It was always at a level where it was really bad, I would have to leave eventually. But when I came out, I just felt like they felt that they didn’t know me. And that I was completely alien to them. She’d always say that she was very positive about the whole thing, but from my experience and from my point of view and my truth, she was disgusted by it and horrified by it. Everything got worse (Participant 8).

Through this mother/daughter coming-out encounter, the stigma associated with being lesbian is palpable; indeed the words disgust and horrified are powerful vehicles to perpetuate a form of public stigma. The impact of inter-generational dynamics and familial challenges was also recounted across the narratives shared. For one young person, the negative, unsupportive nature of the response from grandparents relating directly to her sexual orientation was instrumental in her decision to leave, essentially precipitating homelessness:

Oh, you’re always hanging out with girls and all, and then one day my granddad goes, ‘You want to come back with a child’. And after that I just left home at 16. I felt insulted because they weren’t accepting what I wanted to be... there were no rights or nothing back then. My granddad and nanny were pretty old-fashioned people (Participant 3).

For another person the agonising relationship decision to come out to their intimate partner as trans resulted in the end of the relationship – although, as it transpired, there were multiple other complicating factors – and the young person ended up having to leave the home they shared, due to fear for their own safety. They lived in a car for almost a year before securing stable, affordable accommodation.

To cut a long story short, she turned extremely nasty, threatened me, threatened me with physical violence. So, I waited for her to go to work. I ran and I got, you know those go vans, whatever I could fit into it, I stuffed it in there (Participant 17).

Intrapersonal challenges, which directly triggered a homeless experience, were also recounted across the interviews. Substance abuse was a contributing factor for four young people, leading to periods of protracted homelessness: ‘I was really deep in addiction and lost my home’ (Participant 22). However, it was apparent through the narrative accounts that the substance abuse was intimately connected to their LGBTQI+ identity as evidenced through significant levels of internalised homophobia in three of the four cases.

The Housing Crisis

In addition to interpersonal, familial and intrapersonal triggers, the specificity of the current housing crisis in Ireland was directly implicated in the homeless experiences of many participants. In some cases, the housing crisis was the key proximate trigger of homelessness; in other cases the problems associated with the shortage of affordable housing were exacerbated by transphobia and homophobia.

Six of the young people interviewed identified the trigger as a combination of losing employment and a rent increase that made their rental tenure impossible. As the following participant highlights, the current crisis has meant that it can affect anyone regardless of background:

Some people associate homelessness with people not having a job and being very poor and having no support system. I had it all. I literally had everything on that textbook that should have got me into a home. And I still ended up, even, and I’ve said to other people, like I come from a nice comfortable background, and it still hit me. So, imagine if you didn’t have that, or imagine if you had a mental health problem or an addiction and you had no one, like you’re absolutely banjaxed then (Participant 16).

Six of the young people interviewed identified the trigger as a combination of losing employment and a rent increase that made their rental tenure impossible.

The challenges associated with unregulated, sudden rent increases had a direct material impact on many of the young LGBTQI+ people interviewed. This made their accommodation unaffordable and precipitated housing instability, including being compelled to accept inappropriate and precarious housing and accommodation solutions, as evidenced by the following young wheelchair user:

And the rent was increased by 30%. So, it went to 1300. And I wasn't really able to meet that. So, I ended up moving into the spare bedroom of some friends. It's like a box room. And it was completely inaccessible (Participant 11).

It was evident across the interviews how enraged young people were with the housing crisis and its impact not only on themselves but on so many of those they knew. Many young people brought a sophisticated understanding and critical lens to the current crisis, alongside a distinct sense of frustration at the inherent inequities at play.

I just think the whole situation is awful. So that was my first taste of being homeless. It's awful to be a student in Dublin and have to live here and have to pay the rent. I know I've had friends who have literally had to defer, take a leave of absence from college for a year because they just couldn't find anywhere. I can't wait until I graduate. Can't wait to not have to pay this stupid rent and have the stress of landlords being able to just kick you out because they feel like it. Which is unfortunately the truth of living in Dublin (Participant 16).

The power inequality between landlords and tenants, particularly apparent in the context of the current housing crisis in Dublin, was also acutely felt.

That's another story, a landlord just changing his mind. They have so much power, because they're just not regulated. And I think that's the problem in Dublin, with this specific kind of homelessness. There's no support and there's no regulation. I know there's other routes that can lead to homelessness, but if it's the ability to actually find a home, if that's your problem, that is the source of it, I think (Participant 16).

There were also barriers and challenges associated with reliance on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) payments in Dublin being insufficient to secure accommodation in an inflated and supply-poor market. These structural issues were, for many young people, exacerbated by the suggestions from frontline services that people move down the country.

It's just so difficult. And then even the amount that you get isn't even enough to secure an accommodation in Dublin. Your whole life could be here, your job could be here, your family could be here... And they're like oh just move down to the country. That's completely inaccessible for a lot of people (Participant 8).

The frustrations associated with being priced out and isolated from Dublin where psycho-social networks and friendships existed was also poignantly conveyed:

I lost my job. My partner lost their job around the same time. We couldn't afford to stay in Dublin. But being away from Dublin has been so difficult and so isolating for us as a queer couple (Participants 19 and 20).

For some of the young people interviewed, the challenges of finding housing in the midst of the current housing crisis were exacerbated by the challenges of finding suitable people with whom to share accommodation. The interviewees suggested that the latter were especially challenging for non-binary, trans and queer people. For instance, Participant 18 reported:

A trans girl moved in with me for the better part of a year because she'd just moved to Dublin and the people she moved in with didn't know she was trans before she moved in and then became very, very hostile, and so she ended up staying on a friend's couch for a couple of weeks and then she found out I needed a flatmate to move in, or had a room available, so she moved in with me.

There were particular challenges in the private rental market for non-binary, trans and queer people relating to their personal self-care and unease about other people's actual beliefs:

Yeah, and I was also looking for places with [friend], like a two-bedroom because that could have been better, but I think, I don't know, I would always be afraid to go to the viewings because, A, there would be a lot of people, and we both look really queer. They don't show when it's that, it's kind of like, oh, we look young, and we look not traditional, young, working people. So, we're not going to get this place so after a while we kind of gave up (Participant 4).

Some of the LGBTQI+ homeless youth interviewed had concerns as to the level of homophobia and transphobia they might encounter among their flatmates. Consequently, much time and energy were spent negotiating this and planning strategies to adapt to potential situations that might be likely to arise:

And if I wait until I move in, then I don't necessarily know what I'm letting myself in for. I kind of have that experience now because this couple have moved in with me and I've told them I worked for an LGBT organisation. I told them I'm involved in lots of LGBT activism, but I haven't said, they may be presuming that I'm saying I'm a gay man, and it was only yesterday that I kind of... They just moved in on Tuesday, and yesterday I was getting ready to go on a date, I was putting on makeup and a dress and everything, and I kind of tried to slip out before they saw me because I didn't want to sort of do the reveal right then and there, and I am nervous about coming out because they said they're LGBT-friendly, in their mind, they might mean they're gay friendly, you know? But as regards to non-binary people, trans people, I don't know how far that extends (Participant 12).

Mental Health, Stress and Anxiety

Extensive research evidence points to a strong relationship between homelessness and mental health problems. This relationship is complex and bidirectional, meaning that homelessness may trigger mental issues and mental health issues may trigger homelessness. Furthermore, people who have experienced mental ill-health are more vulnerable to other homelessness risk factors, such as domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug addiction, and unemployment (Brackertz *et al*, 2018). As mentioned in Chapter One, the research evidence also indicates that, prior to and as a result of becoming homeless, LGBTQI+ young people are more likely to be at risk of mental health issues (Gattis, 2013). Among the 22 homeless LGBTQI+ youth interviewed for this study, just over half (13 participants) disclosed mental health issues, with five of them experiencing severe mental ill-health problems, including suicidal ideation. As one young participant commented: 'I deal with suicidal ideation. I have since I was a kid' (Participant 11).

The mental health status of the young people interviewed was aggravated by a range of situational and environmental factors, including physical health challenges; anxiety and the stress of constantly 'being on alert' and concerned for their safety; challenges in trying to secure safe rental accommodation, the development of 'night walking' to avoid having to go to a hostel or street sleeping; the invisible stress and guilt associated with couch-surfing, and the exhaustion associated with constantly not knowing where they might be next week. Participant 12 reflected:

The worst symptoms of anxiety, when I think about housing, when I think about my landlord, when I think about rent, when I think about trying to search for a place or search for flatmates to move in with me, even talking about now, I can feel all the kind of physical symptoms that I would feel when I'm in a particularly anxious place. I can feel my heartbeat now.

The direct relationship between precarious housing situations and mental health and wellbeing is captured in the following quotation from the interview with Participant 22:

I definitely think that this housing crisis and homelessness crisis has such varying effects on people, and we definitely shouldn't downplay the fact that not being able to pay rent or having to sleep on people's sofas so that you can save up money for a deposit, or... All of that stuff. It also comes into play and also affects your life and your health. For sure.

For many of the young people interviewed, the complexity, anxiety and stress associated with navigating the private rental world was substantial. This was explained in detail by a number of young people who had been navigating this rental tension and in particular the conundrum of when they should come out, balancing their personal safety with the imperative to find a secure lease. There was much stress and anxiety surrounding this process for many of the young people interviewed:

That was always kind of an anxiety that I'd have in my mind around looking for a place and when I would go to view a place. I'm always kind of, whether I make a good decision or not as regards to when to come out to someone that I might be living with, just that's churning over in my mind as I'm searching, and it's adding to the stress of looking for a place (Participant 12).

The young people also drew a direct correlation between their mental ill-health and the precarious nature of their living situations.

I never feel secure. I don't know what the future holds for me because I could be out on the street tomorrow. And as well, for college, is it going to affect my college? Am I going to be in and out of houses and getting up and moving when I'm in college and I already have to stress with exams and stuff? I'm constantly worried about my future. I have extreme anxiety. And this is all caused because of everything that's going on. Like how would you not be anxious when you don't know what tomorrow holds? (Participant 14).

One clear indication of the impact of the intersection of LGBTQI+ lives and homelessness and the constant navigation of shame and stigma was the sense of loneliness experienced by the young people. There were psychological and material implications associated with the loneliness directly associated with being homeless. When taken together, these exacerbated an already vulnerable mental health situation. For one young person, the impact of his deeply felt isolation was the trigger for him to take drugs, which he had not previously entertained, rendering him more vulnerable:

I think it's very easy to get into drugs or whatever if you're homeless, and especially if you're gay. You know. It's like, you're hiding the fact that you're gay and you're in homelessness, and then it can be incredibly lonely when you're homeless. A few months ago, when I was in the hostel I didn't like, I made friends with someone because I was lonely. I ended up taking drugs because I was lonely, and I wanted companionship. I just did it (Participant 1).

For another, it was an aggravating factor in their already precarious mental health:

I was very lonely. I didn't like being alone and I still really struggle with being alone and I'm really bad at being alone, actually, which is probably just a whole part of that. I think that's probably the biggest impact I can think of. One of my biggest fears has always been dying alone or just being alone forever, it's my anxiety thing. Being so isolated, really kind of fucked me up. I don't know if it's because I was homeless or anything, but I've forgotten how to talk to people, in a lot of cases, and I just kind of find myself stumbling through social situations. I've always been like that, but it was, I think, exacerbated by the whole thing. It's kind of just made me more depressed and anxious and made it more difficult for me to trust people, I guess. Don't let them past the wall (Participant 5).

The specific mental health issues that arose particularly for queer, trans and non-binary people related more to ongoing concerns and anxiety associated with having to share apartments or rooms: 'I have an awful lot of anxiety around, and I think possibly a lot of queer people have anxiety about someone coming into their bedroom' (Participant 12).

Indeed, space/place-related anxiety was strongly present across the interviews. It is important to note that, even when young people had managed to secure accommodation, it was often of a poor standard and, because of the prohibitive costs especially in Dublin, they often had to share tiny, cramped space, as the following account reveals. One young person who shares a bedsit with their friend described it as 'a crappy tiny bedsit, one room that contains a bed, toilet and kitchen'. Both are in receipt of a HAP payment, but found it impossible to secure independent accommodation even though, for their mental health, an independent living solution would have been preferable. The impact of living there day to day was described as follows:

It feels like cabin fever. It's hard to get out of bed in there. It's a really oppressive space, there's stuff just sitting on the floor, there's no room for it to go anywhere (Participant 5).

One participant, asked for a word to describe their situation, responded:

'Bleak' [...] I don't know if there's one word, there's a lot of them (Participant 4).

The lack of personal space and being forced to share with other people was strongly articulated as a barrier against accessing hostels by many young people. One participant who had been formally squatting for a number of years described it as follows:

Interviewer: Would you see a point where you would say, 'Okay, look, I'm going to access hostel services. I'm going to step into that space'?

Participant 22: Yeah. I don't know. I don't think so. I would never have my own room. That's really, really taxing on my mental health, to be sharing a room with so many other people.

The real-time implications of this constant interplay with anxiety and stress in their everyday lives can be substantial, and affect college and work as well as their personal and intimate lives:

When I get very anxious, very depressed, I'm inclined to just put my phone on silent, ignore calls, ignore texts, emails, just want to shut myself away from the world and not have to be aware of anything outside the environment that I've kind of created. It's not necessarily a very healthy environment, because I'm inclined to stop managing my diabetes and start not taking my medication and doing all kinds of things that I shouldn't (Participant 12).

The impact of mental health instability on young people's capacity to navigate complex process and systems in order to access homeless services was profound:

I'm going to start trying. I've been, for months and months, just meaning to register as homeless and try to get into the HAP, homeless HAP services, get myself an apartment through homeless HAP. But the steps that you have to do for that, it's also ridiculous. But I've been very mentally unstable. My mental health is very unstable, and my life is very unstable, and it's hard. It's hard to find the time to jump through all the steps that you have to jump through for these things (Participant 22).

Mental ill-health also had serious consequences for maintaining stable employment, given the levels of exhaustion that accompany acute anxiety and trauma. These challenges, especially for young trans people, were acutely present in the narrative accounts shared through this process.

I was very aware of how scary it is to get a job... My housemate is a trans woman and she was trying to get an office job as well but the interviewing as a trans person in the office world is fucking terrifying and she gave up and just decided to work in a bar that has a lot of gay people who go to it (Participant 10).

Managing their anxiety was clearly an instrumental factor in holding down jobs or being able to participate in education. When the trigger for anxiety is their homeless reality, or the threat of being close to homelessness, the impact can be overwhelming. One participant described it as not being able to walk, being on autopilot:

I really suffered with my anxiety and stuff, when I get nervous. Or, so for me, nerves, when I get very anxious, I get physically ill. So, I'd pick up colds, and everything much more quickly. And like I can't get up out of bed and stuff, and I just had that burden for so long. It was affecting me. In the middle of the day I would just break down. I'm out with my friends, I'd just break down. I'm not going to have anywhere to live. I'm not going to have a home. I'm going to be... I've been homeless before but I'm going to be like on the street. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. And I just always had that fear. I just couldn't walk. It was felt I was constantly on autopilot. I wasn't all there in the head completely, for so, so long. Until I actually found a place (Participant 8).

Conclusion

This chapter sought to start the process of placing centre-stage young LGBTQI+ participants' narratives and personal stories. The insights revealed by these interviews are powerful and troubling.

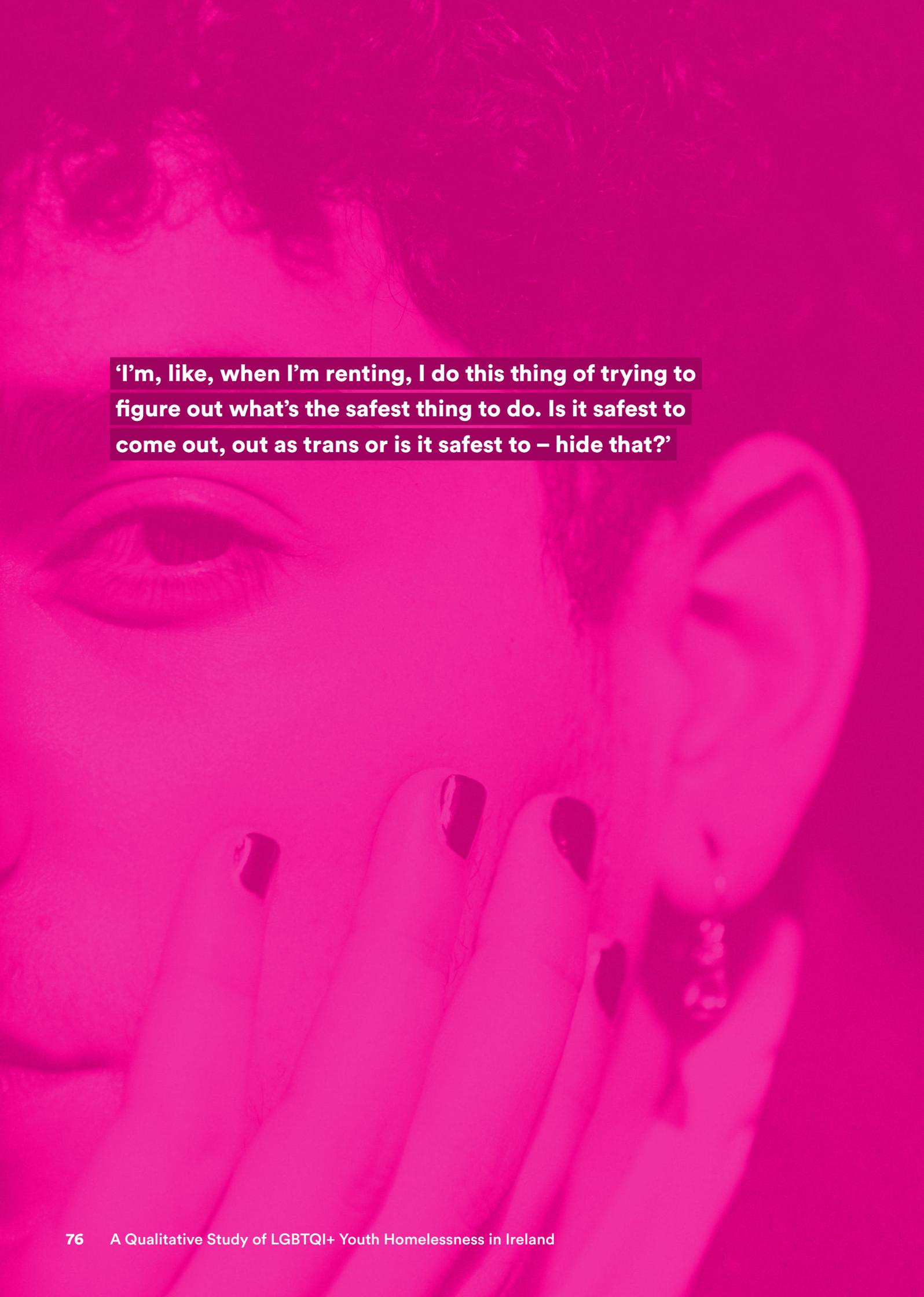
The centrality of dominant homophobic and transphobic backdrops to these traumatising stories was evident.

The chapter explored the concept of coming out relative to the experiences of the young LGBTQI+ people interviewed. Through their stories, the complex relationships between coming out, LGBTQI+ identifications and the process or act of becoming homeless were teased out. The centrality of dominant homophobic and transphobic backdrops to these traumatising stories was evident. That oppression and discrimination related to LGBTQI+ identifications and lives persists in Irish society was clear, as was their profound psychological and material impact in the lives of the young participants. For many of the young people, there was a direct relationship between being LGBTQI+ and becoming homeless. The need for sustained supports systems for these young people, including through LGBTQI+-specific organisations, to help them navigate negative social and familiar contexts was also evident.

As explained in the review of the literature presented in Chapter One, the research evidence indicates that LGBTQI+ youth homelessness is triggered by the complex interplay of inter- and intrapersonal challenges, structural and systemic challenges, and housing and accommodation challenges. Some of these triggers are risks common to all young people, while others are specific to LGBTQI+ youth. The fact that LGBTQI+ youth are likely to face both sets of risks explains their higher rates of homelessness (Ecker *et al*, 2017, 2019). The interviews with LGBTQI+ youth conducted for this study also point to the presence of this complex interplay. Structural inequalities such as homophobia and transphobia are evidenced throughout the transcripts. Interpersonal challenges such as familial conflict, relationship breakdown and intimate relationship breakdown were referenced directly. Intrapersonal challenges such as mental health, suicidal ideation and substance use were also alluded to, either indirectly or indirectly as triggers leading to their homelessness situation, and which often exacerbated subsequent experiences of homelessness. Explicit housing challenges were also referenced, especially in Dublin, in relation to the lack of supply and prohibitive cost – factors that resulted in temporary and even more long-term homelessness.

In addition, these important insights from the research suggest the need for both educational and structural interventions for the young people and as appropriate, based on specific circumstances and situations, for their families. For many young people, their at times oppressive and profoundly discriminatory home lives and familial situations caused direct, sudden, often violent and traumatic triggers into homelessness. An exploration of the triggers that resulted in homelessness fully reinforced the position that, despite the gains made in relation to sex/gender equality in Ireland (for example through the successful campaign for marriage equality in 2015), for many the situation remains oppressive and potentially life-limiting. This attests to persistent levels of homophobia and transphobia across Irish society and the need for sustained work in this area.

The reality of the housing crisis particularly in Dublin as a direct influencing factor on becoming homeless was readily apparent in the stories told. The implications were immense, not only in terms of the challenges associated with securing affordable accommodation but also in relation to the particular challenges that the rental market brings for LGBTQI+ individuals and LGBTQI+ youth. The final major thematic area explored in this chapter was mental health and, more specifically, the profound challenges to mental health and wellbeing conveyed through their sobering accounts. Mental ill-health, including suicidal ideation, was a sustained presence in the stories these young people shared. There was a direct relationship between precarious housing situations and the young people's mental health status. There was also evidence to suggest significant levels of exhaustion and trauma associated with the realities of being homeless and the coping mechanisms young people developed, including night and street walking, hyper-vigilance and survival sex and sex work. These troubling and profoundly impactful accounts by these young people highlight the harsh realities of being young, LGBTQI+ and homeless in Ireland in 2019. A more in-depth exploration of the specificity of their homeless experiences is carried out in the following chapter *Being Homeless*, which examines these challenges in relation to young people's homeless experiences, including the impact of sustained subjection and exposure to homophobia, transphobia and gender/sexuality-related stigma.



'I'm, like, when I'm renting, I do this thing of trying to figure out what's the safest thing to do. Is it safest to come out, out as trans or is it safest to – hide that?'

Being Homeless

Introduction

This chapter seeks to convey the lived homeless experiences of the young LGBTQI+ people interviewed, drawing once again on their first-hand narrative accounts. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, from the outset of this study our interpretation of homelessness was conceived in the broadest terms to encompass all elements of the FEANTSA (undated) conceptualisation of homelessness, including rooflessness, homelessness, and insecure and inadequate housing.

Reflecting the international literature, the young LGBTQI+ people interviewed had varying experiences of homelessness including in hostels, step-down facilities, couch/sofa-surfing, living in cars, vans and tents, and accessing frontline ancillary services. It is important to note that they made no distinction as to the nature of services they accessed. For example, they did not distinguish across core, frontline, emergency or ancillary homeless services; nor did they distinguish across the myriad service providers in the complex landscape of homeless services. They simply shared their experiences of accessing, or actively deciding to not access, homeless hostels and, in some cases, homeless services such as food and clothing banks and medical supports. Consequently, this chapter explicitly reflects their narrative accounts describing their lived experiences of homeless hostels and homeless services, couch/sofa-surfing and car and van living. As the role of frontline staff was a prominent theme across these accounts, this is also discussed.

The ‘Unreality’ of Homelessness

An important phenomenon evident from the interviews with the research participants was the way in which young people perceived ‘homelessness’ across a spectrum or hierarchy of legitimacy or ‘realness’. Their comments about homelessness reflected highly subjective interpretations of homelessness. They also showed a tendency to frequently minimise the gravity of their experiences (even in cases where the facts were extremely distressing) as not ‘real’ homelessness, citing very traditional representations of ‘real homelessness’ as rough or street sleeping. This meant that many young people did not recognise themselves as ‘homeless’ and thus questioned their suitability for inclusion

in the research. Other research on homelessness indicates that these responses are not unusual, as people seek to cope with extreme stress by ‘psychologically distancing’ themselves from it (O’Carroll & Wainwright, 2019).

This tendency is evidenced in the following reflection offered by a research participant:

I stayed one night in a squat, I stayed in a guesthouse one night with a friend, and then I stayed in two different friends’ houses over the course of about two weeks. That’s basically what happened. Does that count as being homeless, as well? (Participant 9).

Reacting to their intolerable home situation, this young person navigated a precarious housing terrain, having been ‘kicked out’ of home. However, they never really believed that they were homeless. Similarly, the following participant who had multiple experiences of homelessness over several years, including couch-surfing and living in a van had not associated those experiences with homelessness until an external trigger prompted them to make the connection:

I guess that’s kind of how I never saw myself as homeless when I was doing that by myself because it would just feel like okay, I’ll go see this as an adventure, and I’ll try to keep surviving. Yeah, up until I was living in a van and I found some old link to a music video that featured someone that was living in a van and they put a content warning for homelessness. And then I was like oh, this person sees that as homelessness. And that made me realise that I was homeless which was helpful because it allowed me to start accessing services (Participant 6).

One of the young people spoke of the insurmountable challenges they encountered in trying to secure student accommodation, especially in Dublin. After two weeks of bed and breakfast accommodation, she then spent four weeks couch-surfing in a friend’s student house before she managed to get a room in a house share through word-of-mouth. However, despite the impact this had on her studies and wellbeing, she did not think about her experience in terms of homelessness:

I never thought about it as homelessness until I was kind of reading about this research, because I didn’t feel like I was homeless. I had a roof over my head, do you know? (Participant 16).

Another young participant spoke of how they simply had not mapped their own persistent experiences of homelessness with being homeless until a friend – having heard the young person’s profoundly moving story of having to move out of home because living there was no longer tolerable and then experiencing many episodes of homelessness – reflected the term homeless back to them:

Interviewer: I'm just thinking about the term homeless. Is that something that you would have mapped to your reality?

Participant 21: No. No, I only thought about it, even when I saw your study, first of all, I was like, 'Oh yeah, that's a noble thing to research'. You know, philosophical or something. And it was like maybe a month ago... I was just telling them [friend] a story about something and then they're like, 'So you were homeless?' And I was like, 'No', because it was, I don't know what it, like it was temporary, and you know what I mean? And, or I think, because I'm not now, so I was like, 'No, because I'm not homeless now'. And then they were like, 'No, but you were', I was like, 'Oh, I suppose like I guess'. But I would still wouldn't think like I'm ... It's not like living on the street. But then I don't know, in one sense I think it's actually almost everyone is almost homeless, because, well, yeah, because if you include living on people's floors or sleeping here a few days and here for a few days or in the airport or whatever. And then that includes so many people.

These interpretations of homelessness reflected a strong perception shared by many of the young people interviewed that equated homeless with being 'on the street'. For instance Participant 1 admitted: 'Even before I got homeless, I thought the same. Sleeping bags, most on drugs or whatever. It's so different'. This tendency to reduce their own experiences of homelessness based on a hierarchy of perceived 'real homeless' is an important and instructive finding and reflects the challenges internationally in encouraging vulnerable young LGBTQI+ homeless people to participate in qualitative interview-based research.

Stigma, Shame and Concealment

Stigma is generally interpreted to comprise two fundamental components: the recognition of difference and devaluation, which when combined result in widespread social disapproval (Goffman, 1963; Dovidio *et al*, 2000). Bos *et al* (2013) offer a useful taxonomy of four types of stigma: public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association and structural stigma. Evidence of a complex web of negotiation across all four domains of stigma was present in the narratives of the homeless LGBTQI+ young people interviewed for this research, who recounted many experiences of homophobia and transphobia. Linked to the stigma was the internalisation of feelings of shame, a 'complex web of affect and emotion' (Clough, 2017), in most cases directly linked to their homeless status.

The young people experienced quite visceral emotions surrounding their state of being homeless and being LGBTQI+, and described how that felt for them. They offered quite profound insights as

Evidence of a complex web of negotiation across all four domains of stigma was present in the narratives of the homeless LGBTQI+ young people interviewed for this research

to the shame and stigma directly associated with being homeless. The researchers asked the young people what it felt like, what emotions were attached to being homeless. Their responses were powerful:

It was horrible. It was terrible. I felt like nothing. Yeah, I was drinking a lot. I was just in the middle of this gigantic spiral of shame because I felt like I had no... Shame is my primary, was my primary emotion at the time (Participant 18).

The above extract captures the impactful and pervasive nature of what their first experience of being homeless felt like, as a 'gigantic spiral of shame', and which might be read as evidence of self-stigma.

The young people spoke candidly about the prejudice and stigma associated with being homeless, something they felt was exacerbated through popular associations between homelessness and drug addiction. This was powerfully felt to the extent that some young people internalised these beliefs, which in turn affected their sense of self-worth, increased self-monitoring and compounded the pressure they felt to keep their reality of being homeless hidden from friends, employers and others:

I wouldn't describe myself as that because then I don't want to be associated with that. I know that I don't agree with the reasoning behind that. I know that that's just prejudice, kind of. But I also still feel like if you said, 'Oh, I was homeless', then what people think you're telling them is that you were on drugs or something like that. And then what I think is also what I would feel. I don't want to give people that impression because like it wasn't that, you know? That I took drugs or whatever. It was just like the world is difficult (Participant 21).

These narratives were not always straightforward, as the following extract suggests:

My life would have been so much worse if I didn't enter homeless services. And that's something that I know now, it would have been so much worse... it's just I wish there wasn't so much stigma around it (Participant 8).

Here, there is evidence of the tensions surrounding the need to access homeless services on the one hand, due to the benefit that can accrue, versus the stigma associated with homeless services on the other. A strategic process of managing stigma and trying to control for homophobia and transphobia was navigated by the young LGBTQI+ participants, while they also actively challenged the in/out binary. This was particularly evident through their negotiation of homeless and frontline support sectors, and also for those who sought to secure housing in the private sector. Rasmussen (2004, p.145-6) makes a cogent argument that people resist coming out for a range of reasons, and the decision *to not come out* can be an agentic act of asserting control over their challenging and potentially harmful and unsafe social location. This agentic positionality was supported across the interviews.

Young people's decision to 'not come out' was strategically considered and balanced against the stigma associated with 'being gay', fears for their own personal safety given their frequent encounters with stigma, homophobia and transphobia, and a desire to 'fit in' so as to secure safe accommodation:

Because my family know that I'm gay, and one of my friends, in the kind of homeless circle, no one actually knows that I'm gay. People, my best friend, he said it to me, 'Are you gay?' Quite a few times. He thinks I'm gay, but I've never actually told him. I've never met anyone else in homelessness who's gay (Participant 1).

Among many of the young people interviewed, there was a deeply felt need to hide their homelessness:

Like hiding that you're homeless from people is actually probably harder than [pause]. Like it's a lot easier to sit in Dublin airport for a night than it is to pretend that you didn't do that (Participant 21).

Similarly, major decisions as to whether or not they should come out as LGBTQI+ in particular contexts were negotiated on an ongoing basis, as they sought to balance another iteration of the 'double closet' explored in Chapter Three and navigate what might be gained or lost in coming out as either LGBTQI+ or homeless. Participants spoke of the different strategies they employed when actively engaging with the rental market to secure a home/accommodation:

I'm, like, when I'm renting, I do this thing of trying to figure out what's the safest thing to do. Is it safest to come out, out as trans or is it safest to – hide that? Yeah, and then even down to how to dress as well. And like if you wear make-up and what kind of make-up. And how you wear your hair that day, and if you wear a hat on top of your head so they don't see how short your hair is. And it depends on the situation (Participant 6).

This constant process of negotiation regarding gender identity and visibility was exhausting and incredibly stressful, as the following attests:

Yeah, renting was a lot harder as a trans person. Or as a visibly queer person. So like one instance, there was this place that was perfect for me, and it was right near right where I was working at the time, and I could afford the rent and the people seemed nice, and it was nice place. But the people, we sat down and we're chatting, and we seemed to be hitting it off, and I thought well, this could work out. But they say that, oh what was it? That I wouldn't fit their culture. That was how they worded it (Participant 6).

The following captures the additional complexities associated with being LGBTQI+, in this case gender non-binary, and the intimacies of navigating homeless services:

So, like in the situation of the homeless shelter when I'm going to access services it's safer not to be out, because then I can use the female showers. That's a privilege that I could have, that trans women might not have, that I can pass as a cis woman and use those bathrooms. And that means I am less likely to be attacked (Participant 6).

This capacity to 'pass' was self-critiqued as a form of cis privilege, and dealing with this privilege was a source of additional stress and anxiety. Cultural and structural stigma aimed at gender and sexual minorities can influence marginalised groups' health outcomes (Schmitz & Tyler, 2019, p.711). Given the sense of vulnerability, stress and anxiety associated with being LGBTQI+ and experiencing homelessness, it is perhaps unsurprising that mental illness was such a prominent theme communicated across the 22 personal narratives shared by these young people, as explored in the previous chapter.

Homeless Hostel Experiences and Perceptions

Several of the young people interviewed had first-hand experiences of using services for homeless people in Ireland. These included accessing emergency accommodation via the free phoneline which is used to allocate beds in these services, staying in a range of hostels with varying experiences both positive and extremely negative, securing stable medium-term supported hostel accommodation, and accessing ancillary homeless services.

Across these varied accounts, there was a strong sense that accessing frontline services in the first instance was quite challenging. For instance, Participant 22 reported:

And it's just as difficult, I think, to access hostel services as it is to just break into a building and sleep there. To access the hostels, you have to be ringing multiple times a day. You usually just get, 'We're full. Ring back next time'. It's not easy to do it that way, either. And the amount of energy that costs you, you might as well just be squatting, I think (Participant 22).

One young interviewee made a direct correlation between the challenges in securing any form of emergency accommodation and people's mental health and capacity, capturing the inherent injustice present:

It's horrible the amount of effort you have to go through to just get a roof over your head. It's actually frightening. How much you need to do. Some people just can't because of their mental health. From them type of situations, like they just physically cannot do what you have to do. It's terrifying. It's just not one single bit right (Participant 8).

The challenges associated with managing bureaucracy in support services and endless form-filling were also discussed:

So it took months, anyway of bureaucracy and jumping through fucking hoops and signing loads of different fucking forms... Filling out forms all the time, which is very difficult to do if you're trying to tackle a spiralling ketamine addiction, and also a massive depressive episode where you want to kill yourself every day (Participant 22).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, most of the accommodation for single homeless people in Ireland, particularly for homeless men, is provided in congregated and sex-segregated settings and generally in communal dormitories called homeless hostels. Many of the young interviewees raised concerns about this form of accommodation. These concerns were sometimes based only on their perceptions of this accommodation, but these perceptions are important because some research participants were loath to use homeless services as a result. Other times, these concerns reflected interviewees' actual experiences of using homeless accommodation. Some of the concerns raised would be shared by many other users of homeless services because they relate to safety and security issues, but other concerns were specifically related to interviewees' LGBTQI+ identities.

Across the narrative accounts shared was a deeply felt and strongly communicated sense that hostels were categorically not for them as someone who was LGBTQI+.

Across the narrative accounts shared was a deeply felt and strongly communicated sense that hostels were categorically not for them as someone who was LGBTQI+. This was directly linked to fear and concern for their own safety and about the physical environment they believed they would encounter, including the presence of drugs. It is unsurprising, against the backdrop of stigma, shame and homophobia and transphobia encountered by these young people (discussed above) that fear and vulnerability associated with hostel environments were manifest across the stories told. For many this was

evidenced through stories of vigilance and the imperative to have to guard their personal possessions, in addition to hiding their identities at all times. The following are some indicative comments that highlight the intensity and negativity with which interviewees described their perceptions (and in some case first-hand experiences) of the homeless hostel environment:

I didn't, thank fuck, didn't end up in a hostel. Sorry, for cursing but I didn't end up in a hostel, no, thankfully (Participant 5).

I felt really lucky because I wasn't on the street or using emergency accommodation, because that would have been a lot worse. So, yeah, I just feel really fortunate (Participant 6).

I'm just really happy that I'm not in hostels and stuff, like as in the free phone and everything because I know a lot of people in there, and it's not good (Participant 4).

Most of the day I come in here [café]. I spend a lot of my money on B&Bs 'cause I don't feel safe in hostels (Participant 7).

Participant 1, who had experience of using homeless hostels, said:

They're dangerous and they're cold and unreliable and dirty and depressing. It's horrible for anybody, for anybody who has to stay at one of those hostels. You can't sleep. You have to sleep with one eye open because your clothes might get stolen or your phone or your shoes or your jacket or your coat or your bag (Participant 1).

A significant concern for this young person, who had been 'kicked out' of the family home for reasons linked to alcohol abuse, was having to share rooms with other service users in hostels:

And then I had to ring the free phone. I didn't really know what to do. On the free phone you're given places each night. So, maybe seven different hostels were taken on the free phone. I was sharing a room with two people. It was awful. It was really bad. If you're gay and you're sharing a room with other men, they're not going to want to share a room with someone who's gay (Participant 1).

The stresses generated by having to share a room for this already vulnerable young person were aggravated by their LGBTQI+ identity. They spoke about the imperative to hide their sexuality when accessing services or hostels due to underlying homophobia and fear. This young gay person spent a number of months navigating a range of hostels and services. His observations are most instructive: for him, sharing a room with strangers was much more traumatic and difficult than sleeping on a mat in a dormitory-style hostel set-up.

It reminded me of a cow shed... you're going at 11:00 at night, and you sleep on the floor on a mat. It's fine though. There's loads of staff, so there's never any problems (Participant 1).

This young person persisted with the services and now has secured a single room in a hostel. He is successfully holding down employment secured through a supported programme linked to a housing agency that offers an employment mentoring service. He acknowledged that these services were valuable and highlighted a distinct lack of awareness as to the range and level of homeless supports available, including medical, food and clothing:

... food vouchers and everything. And they were a really big help. You see there's not really much information out there for services for these sorts of situations. Like these services should be handed out to students of every college and school (Participant 1).

However, for those who were familiar with such services, or at the very least knew that ancillary homeless services existed, there are multiple accounts detailing the challenges associated with the complex navigation required to access these services. Structural impediments included not having an official address and challenges in understanding the HAP system. For those who managed to access these, there were mixed responses and interesting suggestions made for improvement. For example, the following account highlights the challenges in accessing appropriate clothing as a non-binary trans person within the heavily sex-segregated organisation of most homeless services in Ireland:

The homelessness services, they'd offer you underwear. But then they would assume that you would want the girl's underwear and the pink socks and stuff. And then for the men they would offer them thick, warm socks and then boxers. Which didn't really make much sense. Surely, they would offer thick socks to everyone (Participant 6).

The young people spoke passionately of the urgent need for frontline staff to recognise and understand the importance of sexual and gender identity for many service users. One very useful suggestion was made that people be allowed to choose their own clothes. However, the young people felt there was an underlying sense that 'because we're homeless as well that they kind of see us as like they can treat us in that way, and that we should be grateful that they're providing any service at all' (Participant 6). This account raises important questions about how homeless service provision can meet the particular needs of LGBTQI+ clients. It supports findings from the international literature that young people are often subjected to denigrating treatment by frontline staff (Cray *et al*, 2013) and therefore the urgent need for, and importance of, dedicated, effective awareness and training programmes for staff across the homeless sector.

The young people spoke passionately of the urgent need for frontline staff to recognise and understand the importance of sexual and gender identity for many service users.

Frontline Staff and Key Workers

The importance of professional, empathetic and LGBTQI+-aware frontline staff and key workers, and the benefits that strong relationships with these staff can provide was powerfully communicated across the interviews. This is important because, as mentioned in Chapter One, the research evidence links successful exit from youth homelessness to greater engagement with services and strong links with service professionals (Mayock & Parker, 2017). Unfortunately, the corollary was also the case. The following account outlines a positive intervention from frontline staff when they were aware of an LGBTQI+ identity and the potential for increased vulnerability and possible harm. It captures just how important these exchanges can be.

One participant reflected that their trans identity prompted a frontline staff member to move forward their HAP application. This was an important intervention given their already traumatising reality of being ‘kicked out’ of home and finding themselves homeless:

They told me I was going to have to stay in a hostel, if I wanted to get HAP but then, I think when I told the person at the homeless place, that I was kicked out because I was trans, they just fast-tracked it (Participant 5).

The researcher (interviewer) probed further:

Interviewer: When you contacted [organisation] and you said that you got prioritised on the list because you said that you were trans...

Participant 5: I don't know if that's what actually happened but that's what it felt like happened.

Interviewer: What was the response? How easy was it for you to have that conversation with them?

Participant 5: For me, it's easy. I don't hold back my gender for anybody.

Interviewer: How was it for them?

Participant 5: For them, I didn't really... I don't think they had any problems. They seemed to be just pretty okay. I don't think I changed my name at that point, so I don't know how the whole name thing worked out, but they were... As far as I remember, they were fine. That was a traumatic time for me, I try to block it out. As far as I remember, they were good.

It was clear that the quality of these face-to-face encounters with homeless services was especially important for the young homeless LGBTQI+ people interviewed. This sort of proactive intervention is especially important for young trans people, given their particular vulnerabilities to homelessness (Durso & Gates 2012) and increased risk of violence relative to their cisgender peers when homeless (Lolai, 2015). The specific role of key workers assigned to provide one-to-one support to homeless service users was

described by all the young people who had accessed frontline services. Their impact was hugely instrumental in their lives. For those who managed to establish a trusting relationship, there were clear benefits. There were examples of frontline staff, especially key workers, offering significant support to young people, helping them to navigate a successful pathway through their current homeless situation towards a more stable, longer-term place to live. For instance, Participant 14 reported:

If you have drugs or alcohol problems, they'll support you with that. They will actually bring you to your meetings. They will drive you to your meetings and sit there and wait with you. Or counselling, I've had staff come to Pieta House with me and sit in the waiting room and wait with me. Psychiatric appointments, they come, and they sit and they wait. They're very good that way... especially for the people that might not have a lot of family, or don't get on with their family. It really helps to just have somebody that's there. [Name] is my key worker and, honest to God, I don't even look at her as someone that works with me. I consider her my friend. And she'd be close to my age as well. She's only about 27.

Another young person spoke of her experience of living on the streets and how the positive intervention of a key worker was instrumental in getting her a hostel place:

I ended up going into Temple Bar [Dublin city-centre area] and living on the streets. I was on the streets for maybe six or seven months. Some woman came out to me from [organisation]. So, she goes like this, 'I'm no social worker'. I goes, 'Well who are you then?' She goes, 'I'm here to help you'. I goes, 'Where you from? You're just a stranger in my eyes'. She goes, 'I'm from [organisation] and I'm going to be your key worker'. So, she got me off the streets and into a hostel and then from there I moved onto different places (Participant 3).

Participant 15 reflected positively on the support she had received from her aftercare support worker in transitioning from foster care to living independently: 'They did help me massively. I was obviously scared of moving on my own. You know, I was in foster care for six years and I was living in a kind of rough upbringing in my family before I went to foster care.'

However, the experience of the young interviewees varied. This was reflected in differences in the quality of relationships they developed with the homeless service staff and other support staff and key workers with whom they worked with and the extent to which trust developed or not. The importance of having staff who are proactive and can be trusted was emphasised by many of those who had accessed frontline homeless services. Where this was not the case, young people felt let down and angry. One young person interviewed had very different experiences depending on the hostel he was staying in, highlighting the impact, positive and negative, that specific individuals can make. He recalled a quite traumatising situation in one hostel:

I was asking for aid just to change rooms, because I was feeling threatened. And like he (staff member) was going around at night, like the middle of the morning punching walls, punching himself in the face. Staff were like, 'Well I'll talk to a manager'. Nothing happened, so yeah, the staff are very important (Participant 1).

He also recounted an experience where trust had completely broken down with one key worker following that key worker's disclosure to a third party an intimate personal account the young person had shared:

I was angry, because he shouldn't have told it. It was not something small, it was huge, and he shouldn't have said it. Yeah, I was just mad. Because it takes a while then to bounce back from those things (Participant 1).

This account clearly resonates with the international literature outlined in Chapter One, which highlights the unsatisfactory and at times traumatic experiences of young LGBTQI+ people in dedicated homeless services (Cray *et al*, 2013; Hunter, 2008). However, when key worker relationships were effective the impact was profound, as evidenced in this same young person's palpable relief and sense of being supported, after coming out to a different key worker:

Like my sexuality, a relief to tell [keyworker], it was. It's just sitting on your chest all the time. Even when I was able to tell her, I don't know it's just so much easier. It made it so much easier... I guess with [name] like, she's young, and I built up a relationship with her, so I knew I could trust her. But with other key workers, I think they don't understand it because they haven't worked with people who have told them that they're gay (Participant 1).

This reinforces the centrality of frontline staff in these situations and the importance of their capacity to intervene in positive ways when they have some understanding of LGBTQI+ issues and people.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the qualities this particular young person believed were most important included being assigned someone they felt comfortable with and, most critically, someone they could trust: 'Like approachable. I think probably one of the most important things is them being confidential. Like feeling able to tell them things. Like friendly as well and caring. Yeah' (Participant 1). Concerns about confidentiality were also raised by Participant 8 who feared being forcibly 'outed' within the homeless service, especially if they had directly accessed healthcare professionals or healthcare services: 'If you come out to one healthcare professional, every single one of them knows it. Nothing about that is private, so it's like you have to... you're kind of forced to come out as well' (Participant 8). The need for respectful interaction between homeless service workers and service users was mentioned by Participant 4 who emphasised the need for 'someone who treats them like people and listens to them and knows how to communicate with them and would know how to regulate the facility'.

The importance of education and awareness among staff was discussed by many of the research participants. In one supported living project for young people, the young people had encountered much support, especially in relation to their LGBTQI+ identity. However, even in this supportive environment they also encountered ‘a lot of ignorance’ and lack of awareness of transgender issues especially. In this vein, Participant 14 reported:

Straightaway, they changed my name to [chosen name]. They put me down as a boy in the house, and any time new young people come in, they’ll always introduce me as [chosen name] and ‘he’. But there would have been a lot of ignorance. As in, the staff would have not been informed about anything about transgender people. They would, obviously, gay and lesbian. A lot of people would have more knowledge of that anyway. But they had no idea really about anything. I actually had to teach them a lot. And I was always straightforward with them. I told them, ‘If you have any questions, don’t ever feel like you can’t ask me. I’d rather you ask a question and know, rather than feel awkward or uncomfortable’.

Other Homeless Experiences: Living ‘Off-grid’

A number of young LGBTQI+ participants in this research sought other solutions to their homeless realities, including couch-surfing and what Mayock and Parker (2019) term ‘living off-grid’ in cars and vans. These accounts are revealing and instructive as to the challenges, levels of ingenuity and acute levels of stress involved, not to mention what can be described as a pervasive sense of acute tiredness or exhaustion.

What is clear from the stories these young people shared was how challenging couch-surfing can be and the profound impact this can have on young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

Couch-surfing

Many of the young people had some experience of couch- or sofa-surfing. Indeed, one of them commented, ‘Most of the people that I’ve known have been couch-surfing (Participant 11). The prevalence of couch-surfing among the young people is confirmed by the international research, although Curry *et al*’s (2017) research in the USA indicates that it is less common among young LGBTQI+ people.

The young people interviewed for this study had revealing insights into couch-surfing, which challenge the anecdotal perception in an Irish context of it being a middle-class phenomenon, a temporary, very short-term event and ‘not real homelessness’. Their accounts also mirror couch-surfing as a hidden or invisible form of homelessness, not typically captured in formal reporting mechanisms or research. Indeed, this invisibility should also be read in line with the young people’s tendency to minimise very challenging homeless experiences, including couch-surfing, as not real or legitimate homelessness as discussed earlier in this chapter.

What is clear from the stories these young people shared was how challenging couch-surfing can be and the profound impact this can have on young people’s mental health and wellbeing.

And I suppose how it made me feel, like shite, to put it in a word, because my friends wouldn't take money off me for rent, even though towards the end they probably wanted to because I was practically living in their house for free. But they wouldn't take it, that made me feel like I was kind of sponging off them, because I wasn't using their food or stuff, but I was using their space, I was taking their sitting-room, it was my room as such (Participant 16).

This sense of being a burden was strongly present. For instance, Participant 5 reported: 'I felt burdensome because I was staying with my friends and not paying rent or anything. I just felt like I was living off the back of the people'.

One of the most persistent themes associated with couch-surfing was the particular exhaustion many of the young people associated with it:

Participant 22: I was couch-surfing for a few months after that, until October of that year. Then I was exhausted, physically, mentally from that so I went back to [county] to my parents' house. But that's awful in so many other ways that it's not... It's not a home for me. It was... But it was a roof over my head. Then I came back to Dublin last May and I started squatting.

Interviewer: You talked about couch-surfing and that you were just exhausted from it. Can you explain that to me?

Participant 22: It's incredibly exhausting. So much worse than squatting ever has been for me. Just not having any space that's your own. The impact of not having your own space, like a space that you can exist alone and not have to deal with anyone or be expected to perform in any way... The effect that has on you, on every part of you, is really exhausting.

As discussed in more depth later in this chapter, the importance of having a physical environment that is private and no-one can enter was especially relevant as a contributing factor to mental wellbeing. For some of the young trans and non-binary young people, the state of being 'hyper vigilant' and 'hyper-situationally aware' (Participant 12) cast them in a permanent state of exhaustion. This affected their sense of routine and capacity to maintain gainful employment, and took a particular toll on their mental health. For the following young person, their bedroom was their private space in a house-share environment in which they could proactively eliminate external stressors and external causes of anxiety:

Having an environment where I can do that, where I can just kind of go home, close the door, I know no one is entitled to come into this bedroom. I might share the apartment with a flatmate, but this room is mine, and I don't have to interact with anyone if I don't want to. That's incredibly important to me. Situations where that's not being possible, like staying on the couch, I don't have kind of a physical environment where I can separate myself from potential causes of anxiety. If I'm staying in someone's living room, or as well, I'm standing in an environment that I haven't created, I don't feel as comfortable as at home, as safe there (Participant 12).

Clearly, couch-surfing made the self-management and mental wellbeing strategies practised by many of the young interviewees impossible, as there was nowhere they could identify as their own personal space. Young people who experienced couch-surfing articulated an immense sense of guilt, lack of stability and feeling of lack of control over their lives. One research participant communicated this powerfully, as a sense that they had completely messed up, even though they were desperately trying to make sense of their life, their trans identity and what they described as the chaos that surrounded them at that time, which made everything more difficult.

But there is a very grim fucking feeling about, and particularly the first experience I had of staying, not even on a friend's couch... And it's just the kind of sense of, 'God, this is a disaster. Like I have massively messed up. I don't have a place for all my stuff. I'm kind of living out of a suitcase and going to a cafe and sitting there all day going on Daft, trying to write to ads and trying to find a place'. I feel like I've messed up in a major, major way that I haven't gotten on top of this and gotten a place sooner (Participant 12).

Participant 14 communicated a profound lack of stability associated with couch-surfing, which contributed to a sense that things were beyond their control:

I was homeless for six months, couch-surfing between friends' houses... It was probably the worst year of my life, because I was grieving. I was on my own. I turned to drugs for a while... And it was actually probably the [homeless youth organisation] that helped me to come out of that. Because it was the people that I had to stay with, and the people I was around, that would have been drinking and on drugs all the time. So, it was the environment that I was in. And as well, when you're grieving and you're in pain, you would try anything to block that out, so that was my escape.

These experiences of couch-surfing were interspersed with incredibly challenging experiences of street-walking and night-walking, taxing strategies employed by young people to ensure they were not rough-sleeping or to avoid having to enter a hostel. For instance, Participant 13 reported: ‘Living on the streets was pretty tough. I didn’t, I wouldn’t even sleep. I walked the streets, sometimes I would stay up for days’. This ongoing sense of precarity and a compelling drive to forestall danger was aggravated by constantly thinking about finding a solution while trying not to look like they were homeless. However, without supports or options this was immensely challenging:

For the next couple of months, maybe like three months, I just sort of was in Dublin and Cork. First of all, I went to stay with a friend in Cork for a while and then I came back to Dublin. Then for a couple of days, I was just like, I’ll sleep in the airport or just visit a 24-hour McDonald’s at Grafton Street and O’Connell Street. So, just kind of sitting there looking busy, not looking busy, just eating something (Participant 21).

Car/Van ‘Living’

Two of the participants made decisions to live in their car or van as agentic solutions to their homeless realities. Both shared searingly honest accounts of their experiences, which highlight their sense of desperation in the face of limited or no other housing/accommodation choices. However, in parallel they communicated remarkable levels of ingenuity and agency in seeking proactive solutions to incredibly challenging personal circumstances. This sense of resilience is explored in more depth in the subsequent chapter.

Participant 6 summarised the events that led up to their decision to live in a van as follows:

Moving into a van was a solution that, well between having to constantly find a place to live, it was a roof over my head where I wouldn’t have deal with landlords, I wouldn’t have to deal with monthly room maintenance. And I could have a dog, which I couldn’t with renting. And my dog’s been really, really helpful for me [mental health]. So yeah, I had a van. The first van I bought, I didn’t know anything about cars, so I hadn’t even passed my driver’s test yet. But I really needed somewhere to live, so it was an old van. And it was in a right state, and I didn’t know because I didn’t know anything about vehicles, so it needed tons and tons and tons of repairs. And I lived in it in a friend of friend’s driveway for a few months. A few months or a year. I’m not sure how long. But... I got a better van that I can actually drive. And I passed my test, and so then I just started living in parking spaces around the city.

Evident in these young people's narratives was the testing and challenging day-to-day reality of living in a car or van over a protracted period of time and the sheer ingenuity required to maintain car/van living for extensive periods of time.

Like in a van you're a bit restricted to facilities. But I had a camping shell bag that I hooked up to the door, and then a storage box that I used kind of like a bath. Kind of to shower in (Participant 6).

The physical challenges were immense and required constant planning to ensure there was some heat source and that the basic facilities such as water were in place.

To stay warm at night in the car... because I couldn't have the heat on... I'd have to have the window open a little bit because if you are breathing, all the windows fog up and then someone knows you're in there. In a few places, people knew that I was staying in the car. They would give me shit in the morning if they seen me or whatever (Participant 17).

They also paint a chilling picture of their experiences of car/van living where fear, stress and constant tiredness were to the fore. This participant captured the sense of fear and hyper-vigilance that living in a car entailed:

But at night-time, I would drive somewhere outside of the city. It was really dodgy, really nerve-wracking because the first time that I parked, I could hear people knocking around the car while I was in there. It was in a state. I had all the seats folded down like a blanket with clothes pegs held over the top of it so I could slide in underneath it and not be seen. That scared the absolute crap out of me. I moved the car to different places (Participant 17)

When I asked them about their personal safety, they revealed the extent to which they went to protect themselves and said that they were on constant alert.

Yeah, it was a worry. It was useful having a dog, I guess. That made me feel a bit safer. But yeah, so I mean, I'd keep an eye out whenever I was going back into the van to see if people were watching or I didn't know if they looked like they were scheming to kind of hurt us. And then I'd park somewhere else if that seemed to be a thing. And then often when I parked up, I tried to not leave the van. So, I'd park up, and then turn off all the lights. And then I had a curtain as well. And yeah, I just tried to make it look as if no-one's in there. And then jump into the back to go to sleep with [the dog] and not make any noises or use much in the way of light (Participant 6).

‘Survival Sex’

One quite profound consequence of this complex interplay of LGBTQI+ lives, homelessness and mental ill-health and trauma was the necessity to engage in survival sex and sex work. As mentioned in Chapter One, the research literature indicates that trading sex for accommodation or other support is more common among LGBTQI+ homeless youth than among their straight counterparts (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Survival sex was referenced by at least one-quarter of the young people interviewed (although they rarely used this specific term). It was presented variously by interviewees as a necessity, something engaged in on a temporary basis to get through, something that could provide them with money, and therefore increased options, and as a last resort to avoid rough or street-sleeping/walking. This is illustrated by the following excerpt from an interview with Participant 5.

Interviewer: You went from, you come home, you’re kicked out. You go to friend, you do that for a while. What was that like?

Participant 5: Terrifying and I started doing sex work for money. I did it only a few times when I needed the money, but I did feel like I needed to do it. A lot of trans people in Ireland end up doing for the same reason. I’ve had good calls, but it was scary and there was always a feeling like, I could end up on the streets at any point right now.

Interviewer: The notion of survival sex. Do you think that’s an appropriate term?

Participant 5: Yeah. I do. For a lot of people, it’s the only thing they feel they can do, and they don’t feel like working a regular job and they don’t feel like... Maybe they don’t feel they’ll be accepted. In some cases, they feel that it’s all they deserve, you know.

The above exchange highlights the imperative towards survivor sex in the context of dealing with the immediacy of their changed reality, which was experienced as a shock to the system. For another young person, reflecting on their experiences of engaging in survival sex was something that caused a deeply harmful psychological impact:

Interviewer: So where will you be tonight?

Participant 7: I don’t know – hopefully in a friend’s gaff. I don’t, I don’t even ask friends anymore. Cause it’s a burden

Interviewer: So where did you sleep last night?

Participant 7: I didn’t sleep last night. The night before I went home with... It’s really shameful talking about this.

The relationship between employment, money, accommodation and supporting mental health stability was apparent across many of the interviews. Participant 6 observed that ‘a lot of trans people work in sex work because we find it so difficult to nail down other jobs’. The demand for trans women in particular was noted:

Trans women particularly, because it’s the guys that are married they don’t want to say that they’re gay so they’re going for a middle ground or something and they’re fetishising trans women and treating them like shit and using all these gross words for them. There’s a lot of demand for trans women (Participant 4).

Young people spoke about the importance of the financial benefits associated with sex work, particularly in providing a regular, if completely unstructured, source of income. This perhaps unorthodox income source also provided them with a mechanism that facilitated their navigation of a fluid work path around days when work was simply not possible for them to accommodate as a result of their exhaustion and anxiety. There was also strong acknowledgement of the dangers associated with sex work and the parallel set of anxieties that it can cause:

But also like, being a sex worker leads into a huge amount of anxiety around accommodation housing as well, where I’m worried about being profiled because of my gender identity, by the clients or by a landlord or whatever and being made homeless as a result of that (Participant 12).

One quite profound consequence of this complex interplay of LGBTQI+ lives, homelessness and mental ill-health and trauma was the necessity to engage in survival sex and sex work.

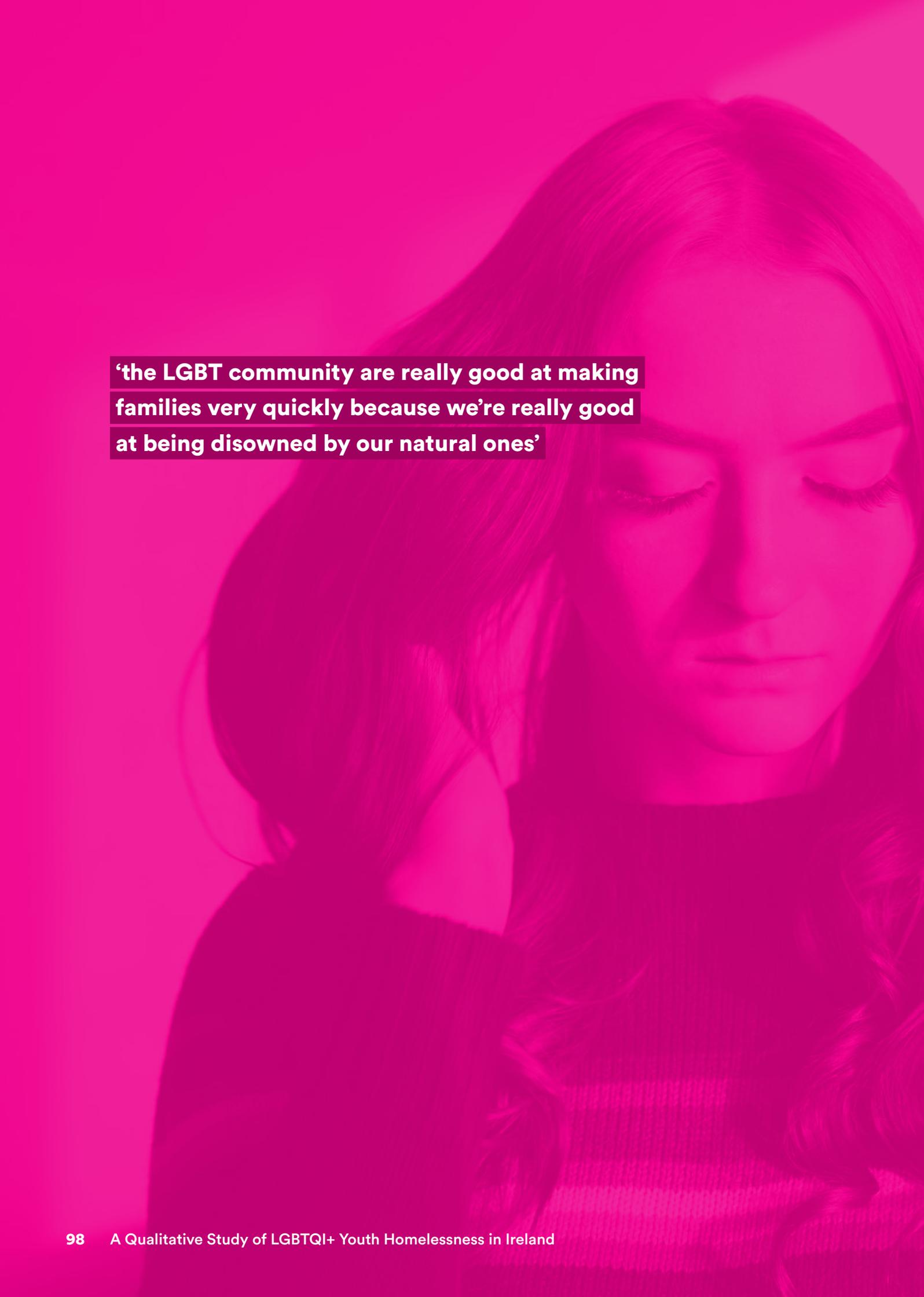
Conclusions

This chapter has examined the young interviewees' experience of being homeless. These young LGBTQI+ people's lives were further aggravated by the presence of both stigma and shame, especially in relation to their homeless context. One particular impact of this emerged through the notion of the 'double closet' and the forced imperative for young people to navigate a double stigmatising force of non-normative gender/sexuality alongside their homeless reality – i.e. having to conceal both their gender/sex identification and their homeless status as appropriate, given the contexts in which they found themselves. This double bind is a powerful example of the specificity of LGBTQI+ youth homeless and warrants particular attention.

This chapter explored the varying 'solutions' employed by young people to address their housing needs and homeless realities. The complexity of the homeless landscape or terrain appears to be an aggravating factor. There was a sense that participants did not know or were unaware of available help and support when they were most in need. Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that the young people did not distinguish between or across services, rather their perception was of one homeless sector/service which is clearly at odds with the specificities across the sector and the tailored supports that are available. This highlights the need for increased awareness as to the range of services available to support those experiencing homelessness. There appeared to be a randomness to how people seemed to navigate these, contingent on happening upon them in the first instance.

The chapter also highlighted the range of complex temporalities that defined the experiences of many young people. Critical here was the speed at which homelessness can happen for this particular cohort and how important it is to acknowledge this reality. Feelings of surprise and horror among young people 'kicked out' by a parent is a phenomenon particular to this cohort, and this aggravates an already traumatising situation for them. Most instructive was the role played by the people they encountered in the services, especially in the early stages. This important role of frontline workers, including key workers, needs to be supported, with sufficient education and training provided as to increase awareness and understanding of the particular needs of young LGBTQI+ people at different stages in their homeless experience and consequently the requirement for a range of time appropriate responses and potential interventions. Time specific accommodation possibilities should be considered in the context of dedicated LGBTQI+ youth homeless support and interventions to include emergency accommodation with staff skilled and informed as to these young people's particular contexts. These might include tailored LGBTQI+ foster family supports, university campus accommodation, short-term LGBTQI+ aware accommodation with wrap around health care services and longer-term LGBTQI+ accommodation. Services need to be designed on foot of consultation with the young people themselves to be available on an opt-in basis by the young people and need to encompass emergency supports, alongside short-term and longer-term solutions across a range of spheres.

Finally, the young people's accounts explored in this chapter demonstrate quite remarkable levels of personal and 'community' related agency and proactive responses to extremely challenging and potentially traumatising circumstances. As evidenced by those living in cars and vans and those couch-surfing for protracted periods of time, great resilience was required. Similarly, the capacity to successfully navigate the formal homeless hostel environment as a young LGBTQI+ person demanded both agency and resilience on the part of these young LGBTQI+ people. Resilience, along with community and future aspirations, will be further explored in the following chapter.



‘the LGBT community are really good at making families very quickly because we’re really good at being disowned by our natural ones’

Leaving Homelessness

Introduction

You got to do what you got to do to survive (Participant 5).

This chapter shifts the interrogative lens from explicit experiences of being homeless and the insights to be gained from the young interviewees' personal accounts of this, to the young people's determination to survive and their future housing and accommodation aspirations. It addresses the concept of resilience, and more specifically its role or function in influencing successful recovery from the varying levels of trauma, as we have seen in the previous chapters, directly associated with LGBTQI+ youth homelessness. Individual agency and capacity are increasingly acknowledged as part of the complex and challenging life terrain navigated by many young LGBTQI+ people (McNaughton Nicholls, 2010; Bryan & Mayock, 2013). However, it must also be recognised that the resilience and agency shown by young LGBTQI+ people are often in the face of extreme adversity, including mental ill-health and suicidal ideation and very real, seemingly insurmountable structural barriers.

Unsurprisingly, this complex interplay between vulnerability and resilience is a theme of increasing relevance and importance in LGBTQI+ scholarship. It was also manifest in this research through young LGBTQI+ people's acts of resilient determination on the one hand and profound vulnerability on the other. This chapter reflects the complexity of this interplay while fully acknowledging the importance of structural change, including policy and political change, in affecting psycho-social and material improvements in the lives of these young LGBTQI+ people. It does not support a 'resilience narrative that can normalise structural inequality as individual shortcomings' (Lamont *et al*, 2016).

The chapter begins with a consideration of resilience and what might be called 'wilful determination' on the part of the young people. It draws out the idea of 'community', a theme strongly referenced across the first-hand narrative accounts. It then turns to young people's comments and insights in relation to exiting homelessness and considers their aspirations for the future, highlighting some of the supports and possibilities young people have harnessed to move forward, in addition to their suggestions for future homeless provision.

Resilience

Drawing on Satterwhite and Luchner (2016), resilience can be defined as the ability to recover, adapt and thrive after experiencing a trauma or stressor. Indeed, they go on to make the important point that, as individuals face more and more stressors and persevere through those stressors, their level of resilience increases (Baumeister *et al*, 2001). This is instructive given the challenges and adverse personal and familial situations encountered by so many of the young people interviewed. One participant's life story was especially pertinent in this regard. Formally in state care since he was a baby, he had experienced abuse, neglect and also the love of a wonderful foster mother. He spoke of his anger and frustration that children in care, through no fault of their own, are particularly vulnerable, a vulnerability aggravated by the housing crisis which impedes their ability to set up a home.

Yeah. I think I look on life, you just have to keep getting back up. What else are you going to do? I just want to help other people out that go through similar situations (Participant 14).

Specific to LGBTQI+ youth, Schmitz and Tyler define resilience as the ability of young people to 'effectively adapt to conflict-laden life experiences such as sexual or gender identity-related struggles, whereby protective factors, including self-confidence and positive emotionality, promote successful development in the face of adversity' (2019, p.711). The stories the researcher was privileged to witness were replete with account after account of inner strength and determination to keep going, against great odds. For instance, Participant 11 said: 'I deal with suicidal ideation. I have since I was a kid. But for some reason I keep going. And I seem to become quite wilful'. Another person currently in a hostel described her sheer determination to not get dragged down by the huge difficulties she encountered on an ongoing basis: 'This place will just drag you down into the gutter if you let it' (Participant 3).

The young people interviewed also displayed resilience through constantly seeking out creative ways to keep a roof over their heads. One young person sought out rental and volunteering opportunities that also provided some form of employment in different counties in Ireland and different countries.

So, what I did in the end was I found this guy who was renting out rooms in an Airbnb in a different city. I moved and I lived in the basement. I'd make the beds and stuff, which was a really good arrangement, actually, because then I just sort of lived (Participant 21).

Manifestations of resilience in the lives of young LGBTQI+ people can also be read in tandem with the notion of what McNaughton Nicholls (2010) refers to as a 'thin rationality of limited choices'. This recognises the vulnerable contexts in which homeless people act and the limited capabilities on which they can draw to act in the world (Matthews *et al*, 2018). For example, the decision by some of the young people to leave their family home because of intolerable family situations can be read through this lens of resilience and thin

rationality as an active choice, one that refocuses agency within their life narratives. One research participant reflected on the lack of choices available to people, stating that for so many 'the only solution that they've had is to leave [home]' (Participant 18).

Throughout the interviews, the interviewer referred the term resilience back to the young people in response to what they heard as incredible accounts of survival and determination. However, none of the young people identified themselves as resilient or indeed used the word. For example, one of the young people interviewed did not identify their actions in terms of resilience, but of survival: 'Being alone and, but you've spoken about how resilient I am, and, but there's no other choice. You just have to keep surviving or you could kill yourself' (Participant 6). Other young people read overt acts of determination and resilience as luck. A common phrase across the interviews was 'I just got lucky', as in the following quotation:

I was really lucky, actually that I knew the people that I did because I would probably have ended up on the streets, if I didn't know the very specific one person that I did know, that happened to have somebody with a roof. I got very lucky, that I knew generous people (Participant 5).

This viewpoint did not take into account the relationship-building that these young people had engaged in over the years, the level of loyalty they had garnered among people who knew them, the incredibly generous acts they had performed over time, etc. Participants were also uber-conscious of their own subjective positionings vis-à-vis the choices that had been available to them. One young person, living in a squat at the time of the interview and politically active on the issue of homelessness, captured well the interplay between privilege and opportunity and how they can interact to generate an extended set of choices and thus mitigate against ending up in a potential homeless situation:

The difference between me and somebody who's on the streets is privilege. Most people on the streets are on the streets because they're addicted to drugs and they have no control over that, and they have no access to services or people or privilege that would help them to escape that. I was lucky to know somebody who had privilege and wealth, and I guess... and had access to things that would help me in ways that... It's just opportunistic that I happened to meet this person. I had access to university. State-funded completely, but... I definitely do feel luck in some ways and through having the experience of university, I learned social cues. I learned how to exist in a world with middle-class people and how to navigate their world, and how to speak their language or whatever (Participant 22).

One of the main sources of support and encouragement articulated by the young people in this study was friendship and community. This reflects the work of youth scholar Ungar (2011) who situates resilience in relation to young people's distinctive social locations and environmental contexts.

‘Community’

The importance of community in youth LGBTQI+ lives took on a particular resonance given the high instances of being disowned by ‘natural families’ and these young people’s obvious vulnerabilities to homelessness. Participant 5 reflected:

Obviously, you know this already because you’re LGBT but the LGBT community are really good at making families very quickly because we’re really good at being disowned by our natural ones. I think, if you give a bunch of LGBT people a space, a comfortable warm space, then there’s stuff to do that and a family will emerge. A good family group will emerge.

The importance of this community was linked to being emotionally and socio-spatially connected to other queer people who would understand what was going on and could therefore help them make sense of themselves and their world:

And I think that like you were saying that resilience, I didn’t know I had it until I had to have it. But I don’t think if I had thought of it as this is going to be really hard, and that it was all on me to get through it... Like if I had been on my own it might’ve gone worse... in fairness, I wouldn’t have gotten through the year without knowing other queer people. I don’t know how people come out with just a bunch of cis/straight friends, that seems really scary... (Participant 10).

These friendships from within ‘the community’ were actively sought out by young people.

For the most part people I meet from the community are very open and welcoming and kind, and also struggling, not all of them, but some of them going through stuff... but yeah... I don’t have a lot of straight friends, I don’t know. I tend to mix more with people from the community (Participant 9).

Access to this network and community sometimes manifest as virtual support and web-based connectivity, and provided a source of practical or material support. This had particular resonance vis-à-vis the LGBTQI+ specificity of homelessness and, as discussed in Chapter Three, the challenges in securing housing or private rental accommodation.

I mean, one thing I’ve dealt with, there is a queer Dublin alternative housing group on Facebook to help people find each other, so that’s one way of LGBT people trying to find each other to live with, which is kind of my preferred situation (Participant 12)

The importance of community connections and supports was powerfully communicated across the young people's narratives.

The interpretation of community can also be extended to encompass sex-gender-specific organisations and support groups. Schmitz and Tyler (2019) note that connections to broader community-based LGBTQ support groups are especially crucial for young people in providing them with accessible resources throughout their lives (2019, p.728). The importance of community connections and supports was powerfully communicated across the young people's narratives. NGO and specific youth services were referred to by a number of the young people as having an impact on increasing their life skills and confidence:

Yeah. When it comes to gender and sexuality-related stuff, I'm actually... I have developed like good skills, and I've been really lucky there like at [name of LGBTQI+ youth organisation] because I was in majority in my friends, you know what I mean? And all my friends were suddenly like queer, and it was great. So that built a lot of confidence in terms of just being fine with myself (Participant 4).

Exiting Homelessness

The LGBTQI+ homeless youth interviewed had varying insights in relation to strategies for exiting homelessness. For some, their articulation of these strategies were aspirational as they were not in a place where they could see their situation changing or improving in the immediate future. Some of the young people interviewed, albeit a small number, had successfully navigated a route out of homelessness. This involved the support of dedicated homeless organisations and key workers and advocates to speak on their behalf. The immediate impact on their mental health and wellbeing was profoundly captured by the following participants:

It's amazing. It feels like you can just live. I just felt like my life was on hold, until I found a permanent place. It's just a weight lifted off my shoulders. I feel like I've got more of a bounce in my step when I walk. I didn't know how bad it was until I found a place. I'm so lucky that I got it. I was so lucky. It's mad. After everything, I am so blessed. But like so many other people aren't, it's horrible (Participant 8).

... they're very supportive of you being gay. And I think that's a good thing to have here, because I don't feel it's all prejudiced here at all, like... You wouldn't even have to tell them you're gay because, like, it's not an issue, do you know. As long as you pay the rent and all that they're okay (Participant 15).

In addition, there were clear material impacts of having secure, long-term accommodation. Stable geographic location resulted in a newfound predictability that improved their daily routine and meant they were better placed to secure and commit to more long-term employment opportunities.

It's a one-bedroom. It's tiny, but it's mine. And it's grand. I have my bedroom, my bathroom, a kitchen and a sitting-room. It's kind of rundown and stuff, but I don't care. It's mine. I have a place to live. Knowing that you're going to go to bed, you're going to wake up there in the morning... ? Someone's not going to come in at 6:00 being like right, this bed needs... Someone else needs to go, so you need out. Do you know that kind of way? It's just simple things that you have never been able to do before, that you can actually do now. I can work fully. I can work 40 hours a week. I can just, I go home and go to bed and now I'm going to wake up in the same place the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year. I know that's where I live now (Participant 8).

Mentors and role models were also mentioned by a number of young people as important factors in supporting and encouraging them to exit homelessness. For instance, Participant 1 said: 'I think peer support. People who are in the same situation, or people who have exited homelessness, I think that would be a huge help'. This interviewee gave an example from his current experience of how he had been influenced and inspired by a friend, also in a homeless hostel, someone he had been strategically introduced to by a very supportive key worker:

'I think peer support. People who are in the same situation, or people who have exited homelessness, I think that would be a huge help'.

He's the one who like he got into a better hostel, and then he got a job. He got me to do the same. Now he's housed, and I'm trying to get housed. Yeah. Because he even told me himself, he looked to other people who got jobs, and he was like, 'They had it, so I wanted it' (Participant 1).

Another young interviewee used the word 'brave' to describe the impact of seeing and knowing other people who had managed to navigate challenging situations:

I think that's [role models] very important. If you see someone else be brave, you're going to be brave as well. It's similar too, I suppose, in Ireland before when there weren't much LGBT people, or many people out. And when more and more people have come out, other people follow (Participant 14).

However, for those who were nowhere close to exiting, despite having their name on housing lists, liaising with services and focusing on staying mentally and physically well, there was a sense of profound frustration about how difficult it was to secure a place to live and call home.

Yeah, there is a lot of people using. I just want to be getting out... I just don't know how to get out. It's just going around in circles. But I don't want it to keep going around in circles. I'm in a hostel too long. I'm fed up with them. I want to see the sun and get in a tent again (Participant 3).

Future Aspirations

Asked to reflect on their ideal situation, or what supports should be in place for LGBTQI+ homeless youth, the importance of 'community' and the need for dedicated, safe and supportive LGBTQI+ space was strongly articulated by several of the young people interviewed.

Interviewer: And you said earlier that what you really wanted was to be just living somewhere properly. Can you tell me what would that look like? Living somewhere properly?

Participant 21: Well, I think it's kind of basic in a way. The basic things are the hardest ones to actually achieve. What I mean is like living somewhere you're not going to get kicked out of. That you're genuinely allowed to be. And that is... That's it, kind of. Yeah. And that you're with people that you like. And that you can afford.

What these young people wanted was fairly basic: a place that was safe and secure, and where they could meet their basic needs in relation to shelter and food and hygiene:

Honestly, I would be happy with just a one-bedroom apartment. Once I have somewhere to cook my food, a bed to sleep in at night, and a toilet, I'd be happy. I just want somewhere that's mine and my own. Where I don't have rules and I can do and have who I want to have at home, and not somebody looking over me all the time, or having cameras in your house (Participant 14).

Reflecting the centrality of community to so many of the young people interviewed, it is perhaps unsurprising that the importance of a dedicated LGBTQI+ space available to those who need it was also strongly present. As they described it, the benefits of tailored provision address many of the challenges outlined in previous chapters, including the stigma and invisibility that homophobia and transphobia promote, misrecognition and lack of awareness and understanding about LGBTQI+ lives, needs and realities:

I just think it will be a home for people that just don't have it, and not a home where you have to go and pretend that you're straight and you're not trans, where you have to hide your body or your voice or your partners, you know, whatever. I think just a space for people to exist in, without worrying about going home or seeing people on the street that they're scared of. Just stuff like that. I guess, yeah, just a place to exist at any point they need to do that at (Participant 5).

The importance of having a place to simply be, without have to censor body movement and gender/sex performances (Butler, 1990) and having freedom to engage in intimate and sexual relationships without fear of disclosure is palpable. Another young university student spoke about their experiences of how campus accommodation was organised in other countries:

They had a floor that was designated. It was just a block in the University of [X]. Just a floor, where it wasn't like a specific thing, and maybe one or two apartments maybe might have been, but if you specified to the college that you're seeking a bit more support or you didn't feel comfortable living with someone because you were lesbian and you didn't want them to judge you, whatever, they have this service available (Participant 16).

The opt-in dimension of how this form of flexible service provision and use of space was operationalised is instructive for how we might imagine dedicated, tailored service provision in Ireland. This does not have to be onerous, as it suggests a pragmatic way forward in the immediate term where positive interventions could be made. Another young person, again advocating some form of tailored, dedicated space, was already anticipating 'pushback':

The obvious solutions that are probably going to spring to mind first are LGBT-specific in some ways, specific are particularly friendly accommodation, whether that's in emergency accommodation or the colleges' residential or campus accommodation. Having to say something you can apply to that, maybe I want to be housed with other LGBT people. But I can see a lot of potential for pushback on kind of both of those things, like, 'Why are you discriminating against straight people?' And all that kind of thing (Participant 12).

Finally, there was an inspiring level of generosity on the part of the young people interviewed and their desire to 'give back', to support in whatever way they could other LGBTQI+ in similar situations to theirs. Their acknowledgement of the support they received from friends and queer others was something they dearly wanted to 'repay'. Conscious of the role friends and dedicated support networks played in their successful navigation out of homelessness, they communicated a desire to emulate that in their newfound stable realities and to make opportunities available to others who might be in challenging or difficult situations. This is illustrated by the following quotation with Participant 21:

Yeah, yeah. Actually, yeah. And actually I forgot to say this a second ago when you were saying what would your ideal living conditions... Honestly, the basic part of it is being able to give people things, being able to be generous and not just give people things but to invite people over or something or to have people stay with you or something like this. Like that to me is your life is, you know, you're good, because in my case anyway, people

have been really nice to me sometimes like at friends and stuff who've been like, 'Come stay on my sofa or live with me or whatever', and right I now don't have the ability to give them something in return. I've never really had that, but I would want to, yeah.

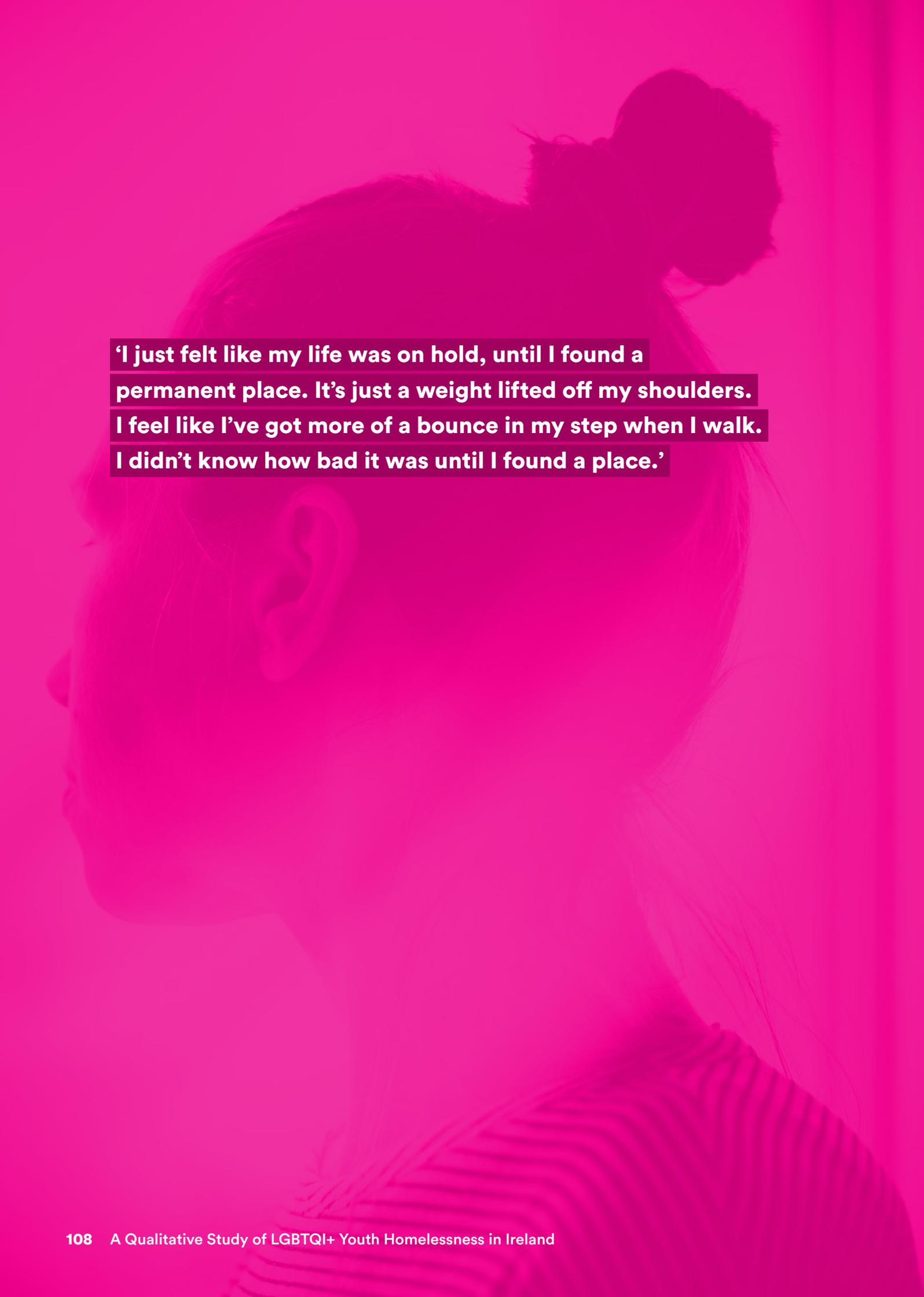
Conclusions

It was clear from the LGBTQI+ Youth homeless interviews that exiting homelessness posed immense challenges which, for many, continued to be insurmountable at the time of interview. Nevertheless there were instances where exiting had been successfully navigated. This chapter sought to highlight some of the strategies employed by these young LGBTQI+ people in trying to both survive and ultimately exit homelessness. Drawing on the concept of resilience, it was clear that, while the young people underestimated their own agentic strategies, they showed exceptional levels of resilience. These highlighted the extent to which they were managing their lives in the best way they could in the face of extreme levels of adversity, vulnerability and chaos. They highlighted the importance of community, friendships and organisations in supporting them navigate their sexual and gender identities, their mental health and wellbeing, their accommodation and housing needs, and their homelessness. This indicates an ongoing need for, and potential for expansion of, a dedicated LGBTQI+ NGO role and service to meet these kind of complex needs.

Given the number of young people who were still in precarious accommodation or formal homelessness at the time of interview, it is also important to acknowledge how difficult exiting homelessness is for these young LGBTQI+ people. The supports required span the psycho-social support of mentors and role models and, as we saw in the previous chapter, key workers. Also required are the interventions of informed and strategically placed people prepared to speak with and advocate for these young people as they try to secure employment and long-term housing solutions. These important observations suggest scope for immediate interventions.

The desirability of tailored, dedicated LGBTQI+ homeless service provision and LGBTQI+-specific organisations was strongly communicated across the personal accounts shared. The potential benefit and impact of a safe and supportive tailored LGBTQI+ environment on young LGBTQI+ people's mental health and wellbeing were understood by the young people to be immense. Dedicated LGBTQI+ housing/accommodation services would bring a critical consciousness, understanding and awareness of LGBTQI+ lives to their interactions with young LGBTQI+ people and crucially to the development of tailored, appropriate services and supports. Such dedicated services would create an environment in which they would no longer have to conceal their identities or maintain pretences that can be exhausting and profoundly detrimental to their wellbeing. Such accommodation would provide young LGBTQI+ people with the safety and security required to be the person they were and wanted to be.

The potential benefit and impact of a safe and supportive tailored LGBTQI+ environment on young LGBTQI+ people's mental health and wellbeing were understood by the young people to be immense.



'I just felt like my life was on hold, until I found a permanent place. It's just a weight lifted off my shoulders. I feel like I've got more of a bounce in my step when I walk. I didn't know how bad it was until I found a place.'

Conclusions

Introduction

Youth homelessness, in general terms, is an issue of profound social and spatial injustice given that it 'is one of the most visible signs of social deprivation' (Youth Homeless Strategy, 2001, p.11). Beyond lacking material items, although this continues to be critically important, youth homelessness is linked to mental health risks, educational attainment, youth vulnerability and marginalisation (Rosario *et al*, 2012; Bidell, 2014). LGBTQI+-specific youth homelessness further aggravates this injustice. This research study, commissioned by Focus Ireland, sought for the first time to make visible and give voice to the specificities of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland, with a view to informing the development of policies and services to meet their needs.

The broad goal of this research was threefold. It involved gathering and exploring information and first-hand qualitative experiences about: the scale and triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland; first-hand experiences of young LGBTQI+ people who found themselves homeless, and measures that might be adopted to combat LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland. The research findings across these three spheres were outlined in this report as follows. Chapter One presented a review of the literature on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland and internationally. Chapter Two examined the results of the interviews with policymakers and representatives of homeless service providers and support and advocacy organisations. Chapters Three, Four and Five explored key findings and insights from the interviews with LGBTQI+ homeless youth across three subjective processes: Becoming Homeless; Being Homeless, and Leaving Homelessness.

This final chapter summarises the main findings of this report across the three spheres outlined: LGBTQI+ youth homeless scale and triggers; young LGBTQI+ first-hand experiences, and proposed policy responses and intervention measures.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Becoming Homeless

Scale of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

There has been a paucity of research on LGBTQI+-specific youth homelessness conducted in Ireland to date. However, this issue has been extensively researched in other countries, particularly the United States and Canada. It is important to acknowledge that robust data on all categories of homeless people are difficult to generate, but particular challenges arise in relation to homeless LGBTI+ young people. These include: fear of disclosure and stigma (Rosario *et al*, 2012); the level of hidden homelessness among this cohort, and sexual experimentation and identity confusion and deception (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2007). How one defines someone who is LGBTI+ also raises particular methodological challenges, not least as this can be a matter of changing definition for young people themselves (Tierney & Ward, 2017). Finally, the challenging dynamics in relation to access, time and most importantly the level of trust required to recruit and conduct face-to-face interviews with young LGBTQI+ people are acknowledged across the literature (Abramovich 2012, Ecker 2016). Despite the challenges, there is unanimity across these studies that LGBTQI+ young people are significantly over-represented in the youth homelessness population. The evidence available indicates that they make up between 8% and 37% of the total youth homeless population (Ecker, 2016). While no data are available on the extent of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland, the 14 policymakers, homeless service providers and advocacy group representatives interviewed for this study proffered varied estimates of its scale. They estimated that LGBTQI+ young people account for between 7% and 50% of the youth homeless population.

Triggers into LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

Despite the data challenges summarised above in relation to conducting research with young LGBTQI+ people, a total of 22 richly textured, insightful and incredibly moving interviews were conducted with LGBTQI+ young people for this research study. They generously provided valuable insights into the lives and experience of being LGBTQI+ and homeless in Ireland. One of the key contributing factors leading to such high levels of homeless among LGBTQI+ young people is because this particular group is affected by a dual set of factors that can trigger their homelessness. Not only are they vulnerable to those triggers experienced among the young population-at-large, LGBTQI+ youth also face particular triggers associated with their sexuality and gender identity that may increase their exposure to homelessness (Mayock & Corr, 2013). Some of the triggers of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness identified by these interviewees and reflecting their own personal experiences are common to the entire youth homeless population. These include: leaving care, family breakdown and the shortage of affordable accommodation. In addition to interpersonal, familial and intrapersonal triggers, the specificity of the current housing crisis in Ireland was directly implicated in the homeless experiences of many participants. However, in addition to the above, which were all evidenced through this research, interviewees highlighted some triggers of homelessness that are specific to LGBTQI+ youth such as the complex experiences relating to coming out and/or transitioning.

Coming Out Triggering LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

Coming out is a complex process that takes place across one's lifetime and entails becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and disclosing this to others (Bochenek & Brown, 2001, p.xiii). As discussed in Chapter Three, coming out featured prominently across the youth LGBTQI+ interviews and spanned questions of how, where, to whom, and crucially when, or when not to, come out. These complex, moving narratives were shared across both gender and sexuality and reinforced the fact that the coming-out process continues to present many young people with enormous challenges. The importance of having access to appropriate, informed support in order to be able to come out, and the profound, negative impact when this was not available was also highlighted by the majority of participants. Transgender young people are also consistently identified as being at particularly high risk of homelessness (Robinson, 2018) during this coming-out process, and the young people in this study were no exception to this pattern. There was significant evidence to link the process or acts of coming out within intimate family spheres with subsequent homeless experiences.

Parental/Familial Rejection Triggering LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

Parental rejection of young people's sexual orientation and gender identity is consistently identified across the literature as a key trigger of their decision to leave home and by extension of their homelessness (Dunne *et al*, 2002; Durso & Gates, 2012; Ecker, 2016). For the most part, the young peoples' experiences in this report reflected these international trends. They recounted moving and challenging accounts of being 'kicked out' of home in a context of conflict and lack of acceptance of their preferred sexual and/or gender identifications. For 12 of the young people interviewed, their specific trigger involved parental relationship conflict and breakdown. Their accounts suggest a combination of being asked or made to leave the family home alongside more subtle forms of rejection where parents made it intolerable for their 'out' and/or transitioning child to stay at home: 'You can stay, but not as LGBTQI+'. These findings on the role of parental rejection in triggering LGBTQI+ youth homelessness point to the need to work

Many young LGBTQI+ people remain vulnerable to a range of alienating and discriminatory practices and experiences, including homelessness.

with and educate parents (Toro *et al*, 2007; Gattis, 2013; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). They also highlight the sobering reality that – despite significant developments in Ireland vis-à-vis sexual and gender equality – homophobia and transphobia persist. Many young LGBTQI+ people remain vulnerable to a range of alienating and discriminatory practices and experiences, including homelessness.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Being Homeless

Unreal and Concealed Homelessness

Participants conveyed particular insights into their subjective meanings attached to and perceptions of homelessness across a spectrum or hierarchy of 'realness', citing very traditional representations of 'real homelessness' as rough or street sleeping. This meant that many young people perhaps engaged in processes of 'psychologically distancing'

themselves from those they recognised as homeless (O’Carroll & Wainwright, 2019). As a consequence, they did not recognise themselves as ‘homeless’ and minimised their at times deeply distressing experiences of what could be interpreted as classic homelessness, and which map directly to the ETHOS typology devised by FEANTSA. This distancing process is an important and instructive finding. It may be seen as an aggravating factor leading to their broader invisibility and under-representation within the raft of homeless services available. It also reflects the challenges internationally in encouraging vulnerable young LGBTQI+ homeless people to participate in qualitative interview-based research.

Mental Ill-health, Stigma and Shame

As discussed throughout this report, there is extensive research evidence that points to a complex and bidirectional relationship between homelessness and mental health problems. Among the 22 homeless LGBTQI+ youth interviewed for this study, just over half (13 participants), disclosed mental health issues, with five of them experiencing severe mental ill-health situations, including suicidal ideation. This level of mental unwellness and its implications for stable living are immense. Through these first-hand accounts we can see the extent to which they were heavily bound up in complex and imbricated experiences of stigma and shame. Examples included self-stigma associated with internalised homophobia and transphobia relating to their sexual and gender identifications, and internalised shame relating to their homeless status. This dual process of self-imposed silencing and invisibility that resulted from what the young people had internalised as shameful, stigmatising realities is manifest in the ‘double closet’. It is hugely instructive for how we understand and therefore address the complex realities for LGBTQI+ youth homeless people.

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Being Homeless – In Place/No Place

The young LGBTQI+ participants in this research study evidenced a range of homeless experiences. For some, these were within the formal homeless sector. Others sought more informal solutions to their homeless realities – what Mayock and Parker (2019) term ‘living off-grid’ in cars and vans. Interestingly, all participants had at some point experienced couch-surfing. It is clear from their stories how challenging couch-surfing can be and the profound impact this can have on young people’s mental health and wellbeing. Regardless of the place or context of their specific experience, their accounts are revealing and instructive as to the challenges, ingenuity and acute levels of stress involved in being homeless. For some, their stories recalled the necessity to engage in survival sex as a mechanism to cope. For others, a consistent challenge to coping and being well while being homeless was the acute tiredness, exhaustion and hyper-vigilance required to stay alert, safe and out of harm. Interestingly, these experiences were not limited to one particular homeless place or experience. They spanned formal, informal and invisible homeless realities.

Homeless Hostels and Key Workers/Frontline Staff

The young people's decision to access or not the formal homeless sector was heavily influenced by the complexity of the homeless landscape or terrain, and the lack of awareness of what was available to help or support them when they were most in need. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the young people did not distinguish between or across services. This highlights the need for greater awareness and communication on the part of service providers as to the nature and level of service provision available.

There was an acute sense across the narrative accounts of deeply seated fear and apprehension about 'hostels' as being unsafe and dangerous for LGBTQI+ people. These fears were based for some on first-hand experience of homophobia and transphobia within the sector; for others, these fears were based on powerful perceptions and anecdotal stories shared among their peers and family members. In addition, concerns about their personal safety in shared accommodation settings, the sex-segregated nature of these hostels and the exposure to drug and other abuse were acute. The majority of young people interviewed were unwilling to enter a space they associated with lack of understanding or blatant homophobic and transphobic attitudes among both other service users and staff, the potential for misgendering and fear of further isolation. There are important messages here for the sector in terms of its role in LGBTQI+ youth homeless provision.

However, what was also clear was the potential impact key workers and frontline staff could have. While the young LGBTQI+ people spoke of both incredibly positive and negative encounters, where these interactions were positive – based on support, trust and open engagement – the impact on the young person was overwhelmingly positive. This important role of frontline workers, including key workers, needs to be supported with sufficient education and training provided so as to increase awareness and understanding of the particular needs of young LGBTQI+ people.

LGBTQI+ Youth Homeless Experiences: Leaving Homelessness

In the third dimension of the young LGBTQI+ people's experiences explored in the research, the interrogative lens was shifted from explicit experiences of becoming and being homeless to the young people's determination to survive, and their future housing and accommodation aspirations. Drawing on the concept of resilience, it was clear that, while the young people underestimated their own agentic strategies, they showed exceptional levels of resilience. Interestingly, not one young person actually used this term; rather they spoke of luck, having to get on and make do and survive. It is, however, critically important to note that many of the young people were still in precarious accommodation or formal homelessness at the time of interview. It is also important to acknowledge how difficult exiting homelessness is for these young LGBTQI+ people.

Those young people who had successfully navigated an exit strategy voiced notable insights. The importance of community, queer networks and friendships in supporting them through their homelessness experiences was powerfully communicated. The range of supports referred to spanned helping them navigate their sexual and gender identities, supporting them in their mental health and wellbeing, assisting them to find suitable

accommodation and housing needs and, for those with the material resources available, making a sofa, bed or room available to young LGBTQI+ friends where at all possible.

The second range of supports identified were within the LGBTQI+ NGO sector, in particular the provision of safe spaces and an environment in which people understood the lived reality of LGBTQI+ lives. The impact of a safe and supportive tailored LGBTQI+ environment on young LGBTQI+ people's mental health and wellbeing should be acknowledged and supported.

Third, those who had exited the formal homeless service identified key workers and advocates as crucial for how they navigated their pathway out. This highlights once again the importance of a dedicated education and training programme for frontline staff and organisations.

For those still experiencing homelessness, their aspirations reflected the desirability of tailored, dedicated LGBTQI+ homeless service provision and LGBTQI+-specific organisations. The potential benefits were understood by the young people to be immense, involving understanding, knowledge and awareness of LGBTQI+ lives and needs in the context of housing, services and homelessness supports. The young people interviewed sought dedicated services and accommodation, which they believed would provide them with safety and security, thus enabling them to be the person they were and wanted to be.

Measuring and Recording of LGBTQI+ Youth Homelessness

There was a strong consensus among the policymakers, service providers and advocates interviewed for this research that understanding the triggers, dynamics and experience of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness needs to be improved in order to develop more effective supports for this community. One homeless service manager argued that we need to 'start to gather the data so we can finally get to grips with, okay, what is the problem, what is the real issue here?' (Interviewee A). A colleague from another homeless organisation echoed this view: 'In order to develop a national policy, in order to develop a national youth strategy, we need proper figures' (Interviewee K). However, there was less consensus about how this can be achieved.

Chapter Two noted that there are plans to include a third gender option in the Central Placements System database, which is used to allocate places in homeless services. However, there was much more concern about collecting more detailed data on all LGBTQI+ identities. A policymaker (and several other interviewees) raised concerns about the privacy implications of collecting detailed data on this community: 'I don't think they feel it would be appropriate to look for this information. When you're in the business of providing an accommodation solution, I don't know that this is the type of question you can legitimately ask' (Interviewee C). This view was supported by a local authority representative who flagged the existence of 'potential risk issues' if LGBTQI+ homeless service users are asked about their sexuality or gender identity, and added, 'There's also the issue that people may not want to discuss this and it may breach trust with them' (Interviewee H). A representative of an LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisation echoed these concerns, but also flagged other concerns about the complexity of measuring and recording LGBTQI+ youth homelessness:

I think a lot of that is confusion in language... where when recording information we have to tick boxes, and that doesn't work for someone who doesn't identify as one of the tick boxes... It's, yeah, it's a difficult one. And then it's also the fact that there's a whole vocabulary that maybe we're not all aware of these days. So I might ask someone are they gay. That's not really relevant anymore to everyone because there's a spectrum of how people identify. So you'd need to have that—I suppose because you could have someone coming in identifying one way but not another way and you're asking them one thing—they're answering honestly and you're not collecting—the data isn't true... Then you look at the ethics of it around why are we asking. Are we asking for it because we want to know? But why do we want to? (interviewee M).

To resolve these challenges, there was agreement among these interviewees that data on LGBTQI+ homeless youth would have to be anonymised, and that young people would sensitively be invited to volunteer this information. The small amount of evidence available from the international research on this issue suggests that self-reporting is the most appropriate and effective means of collating these data (Shelton, *et al*, 2018a). There was also a preference that data on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness would be collated as part of regular rounds of research rather than as part of formal assessments of homeless clients' needs. For instance, a homeless services manager suggested that Ireland should follow the approach used in the UK whereby 'they have... gone in and asked for LGBTQ service users to come forward in order to take part in the survey... I think more investment in research needs to happen' (Interviewee K). Another interviewee from an LGBTQI+ support and advocacy organisation proffered a similar suggestion:

In an ideal situation you would have the money to do an advertisement campaign around targeting the LGBT community around what is homeless, and then secondly it would be then you would have to, you really would have to have an outreach team on the ground going out and meeting organisations, going into—because if they're afraid to be out—like we're talking, you know, the voice of the unheard. There are so many reasons why these young people's voices aren't being heard and it would take money to reach them, (1) in advertising and (2) in physical workers on the ground going out to different services to identify them (Interviewee F).

However, implementing some of these proposals would be likely to prove challenging. Apart from the counts of rough sleepers, the Irish Government does not currently provide funding for regular rounds of research on homelessness. Furthermore, substantial investment would be required to regularly implement research similar to the *Canadian National Youth Homelessness Survey* or the *US LGBTQ Homeless Youth Provider Survey*, which Chapter Two identified as the most robust efforts to assess the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homeless that have been undertaken to date in other countries (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016; Albert Kennedy Trust, 2015).

The lack of investment in regular surveys of homeless in Ireland in part reflects the fact that Ireland has strong arrangements for tracking homeless people using administrative data via the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS), a national bed management system for homeless services (Allen *et al*, 2020). Following an initial assessment in which demographic and other profiling data are recorded, homeless people are assigned a unique identifying number which means that their use of services and entry and exit from homelessness can be tracked. Therefore, the inclusion of questions on sexuality and gender identity in the initial assessment conducted when newly homeless young people are first registered to PASS would be the most straightforward way to achieve a comprehensive assessment of the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in the Irish context. As several of the stakeholders interviewed for this research recommended, this information would have to be supplied on a voluntary basis and requested sensitively, with due concern for clients' privacy and safety while using homeless services and data protection requirements. Furthermore, in order to provide the most comprehensive possible assessment of the scale of LGBTQI+ youth homelessness, data-gathering via PASS would ideally be supported by regular surveys intended to identify homeless young people who are not engaged with homeless services because, for instance, they are in hidden homelessness or rough sleeping (Allen *et al*, 2020).

Recommendations

The publication of this research which is the first major qualitative study on LGBTQI+ youth homelessness in Ireland is timely. The programme for government which was published in May of this year contains a commitment to publish a strategy on youth homelessness. This study has the potential to inform the content of this strategy and to inform the implementation of the Irish government's ground breaking *LGBTI+ Youth Strategy* and the specificity of homelessness.

With this context in mind, the research recommendations set out below were designed to take account of the three overarching goals outlined in the *LGBT+ Youth Strategy*. These are:

- Goal 1: Create a safe, supportive and inclusive physical environment for young LGBTQI+ people
- Goal 2: Improve the physical, mental and sexual health of young LGBTQI+ people
- Goal 3: Develop research and data environments to better understand the lives of young LGBTQI+ people

These recommendations also reflect the key findings of the research and the analysis of the young LGBTQI+ people who were interviewed for this research on the experience of becoming homeless, being homeless and leaving homelessness and the way in which their LGBTQI+ identities and the homophobia and transphobia they experienced shaped these experiences. In addition, the recommendations also take account of the way in which services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness are funded and delivered in Ireland. While policy is devised by government and services are predominantly publicly funded, they are delivered by non-governmental organisations both in the private and non-profit sector. However, in the case of homeless people who are aged 18+ and are not part of a household with children, most emergency accommodation and support services are provided by the non-profit sector.

Preventing homelessness among LGBTQI+ young people

- 1 The 'Youth Homelessness Strategy', committed to in the Programme for Government 2020, should include a 'homelessness prevention' pillar with specific reference to the particular risks and pathways into homelessness which LGBTQI+ youth are likely to experience. The Strategy should put in place educational, family and youth service supports to help prevent homelessness among LGBTQI+ youth.
- 2 This youth homelessness preventative pillar should include consideration of the role of conflict with parents and caregivers regarding emerging LGBTQI+ identities in young people's departure from home and thereby their homelessness.
- 3 As an immediate step, Tusla should increase funding to extend the lifetime of the existing Youth Homeless Prevention Mediation Service. Focus Ireland should also ensure that specialist training is provided for its mediation workers related to supporting families where a child or young adult is LGBTI+ or is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 4 The Strategy should also address the specific challenges which may face LGBTQI children in foster care and residential and review and build on the valuable work already conducted by Tusla to ensure that these challenges are addressed.
- 5 The strategy should ensure that specialist support, information and training is available to teachers and youth workers to enhance their interaction with and support for LGBTQI+ youth.

Information, training and communication on the front line

- 6 As part of phase 2 of this project, Focus Ireland should develop and produce a youth LGBTQI+ homeless services infographic that identifies the key access points and services across the statutory and voluntary sectors, including prevention and outreach services.
- 7 Focus Ireland, along with the Homeless Network, which includes non-profit sector providers of homeless services in the Dublin region, and in collaboration with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, should identify and commission appropriate specialist training from LGBTQI organisations for staff working in the key access points and services. This training should include specific modules, devised in collaboration with appropriate organisations, to assist frontline workers in supporting young LGBTQI+ people from minority ethnic groups.
- 8 Focus Ireland should request the Homeless Network to develop a frontline 'LGTBQI+ Friendly Space' visual for display by those service providers who have evidenced that they provide LGBTQI+ friendly spaces through their training, education and mission statements.
- 9 The Homeless Network should consider establishing a network of key workers who have experience of working with LGBTQI+ homeless youth to share experiences and learning.

Education and awareness raising across the sector

- 10 Focus Ireland should deliver a series of webinars to publicise the key findings and recommendations of this research among policy makers, local authorities, non-profit homeless service providers and providers of other relevant services.
- 11 Focus Ireland should work with the Homeless Network and LGBTQI+ organisations to develop an awareness raising programme that highlights the presence and specific needs of young LGBTQI+ people including appropriate language and gender pronouns.
- 12 Focus Ireland should establish a process to monitor the implementation of recommendations from this research involving engagement with relevant government departments and statutory agencies with responsibility within those organisations.

Health

- 13 In reviewing and evaluating the mental, physical and sexual health services which are available to young homeless people, the forthcoming Youth Homeless Strategy should specifically consider the particular issues experienced by LGBTQI+ homeless youth.

Emergency accommodation

- 14 As part of phase 2 of this project, Focus Ireland should work with the Homeless Network to develop privacy and safety strategies for young LGBTQI+ people using emergency accommodation, informed directly by LGBTQI+ youth, which could be implemented by the homeless service providers who are involved in the Network.
- 15 Focus Ireland should further research the international evidence on the impact of dedicated LGBTQI+ emergency accommodation within homeless services.

Data and measurement

- 16 The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government should establish a group to review the process of collecting and publishing data on homelessness, including data on risk factors and at-risk groups, including LGBTQI+ youth. All data collection decisions should be informed by GDPR protocols, international best practice, the experiences of homeless service providers and should consider and evaluate the purposes to which the data will be put.
- 17 The review group should consider initiating a pilot data-gathering project using PASS¹, building on the learning from the review process, with a sample of frontline services.
- 18 Dublin's Central Placement Service and non-Dublin local authorities should consider introducing a third 'other' category when asking people who are seeking emergency accommodation their gender.

¹ The Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS) is an online shared system utilised by every homeless service provider and all local authorities in Ireland.

Appendix: Analyses of Interviews

Analysis of Interviews with Policymakers and Representatives of Homeless Service Providers and Advocacy Groups		
Code Name	Number of references	Code Description
1 Care Leavers/ Care System	63	Comments pertaining to care leavers who are homeless and the care system in general
1.2 Transgender People	78	Some care leavers were perceived as having additional vulnerabilities, such as those who are trans-gender
1.3 Travellers	7	Travellers leaving the care system were also perceived as having additional vulnerabilities
2 POLICY		
2.1 Policy Recommendations/ LGBT Strategy	64	References to Irish policy, the LGBT Strategy and Policy Recommendations
2.2 Data Deficit	67	References to a data deficit with regard to young LGBTQI+ people who are homeless
3 HOMELESS SERVICES		
3.1 Fear of homophobia / transphobia	65	References to fear of homophobia/ transphobia in homeless services
3.2 Homeless Service Structure/ binary/ faith-based	47	Comments on the structure or ethos of homeless services, especially the male/ female structure of services
3.3 Staff awareness/staff training/inclusivity	91	Comments pertaining to staff awareness of LGBTQI+ needs in homeless services, including the perceived need for staff training and more inclusive services
3.4 Dedicated LGBTQI+ homeless services	70	Discussion and comments on the need or desirability of dedicated LGBTQI homeless services

4	Survival strategies	11	Comments on the survival strategies adopted by young LGBTQI youth who are homeless
5	Struggles with identity/sexuality	40	Comments on the challenges and struggles of young LGBTQI people in relation to their sexuality and identity in general and in homeless services
6	Sexuality as a trigger for homelessness	84	Comments in relation to sexuality as a trigger for homelessness for some young people

Analysis of Interviews with Homeless LGBTQI+ Youth

Main Tree Code	Indicative Sub Tree-Code
1 Aspirations	future, exit, solution, support, wish
2 “Closet”	
3 “Coming Out”	
4 Context	home, family, school, work
5 Emotion/Affect	shame, stigma, loneliness, isolation, fear, anxiety, joyfulness, sadness
6 Exhaustion	tiredness, apathy, energy, vigilance
7 Exit Strategies	challenges, supports, frontline, networks, people, system
8 Health	physical, mental, depression, suicidality, abuse, substance abuse, medication
9 Homeless Services	hostel, service, NGO, key worker, support
10 Homophobia	violence, verbal abuse, misunderstanding, hate, stereotypes
11 Place	space, home, room, sofa, bedroom, hostel, street, B&B, street, car
12 Resilience	determination, tenacity, solution-seeking, strength, vigilance, personal security
13 Transphobia	violence, verbal abuse, misunderstanding, hate, stereotypes
14 “Triggers”	

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