Voice of the voiceless
Resilience in the context of homeless mothers with accompanying children in Sydney

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Map of Australia

The Beautiful Harbour City of Sydney

Australian demographics

- Population of Australia is approximately 22,000,000
- Population of NSW is 7 million
- Population of Sydney is 4.5 million
- Approximately 4 million children under 15 in Australia
- Around 5 million families in Australia

Issues covered

⌘ An overview of homelessness in Australia.

⌘ Focus of phase 2.
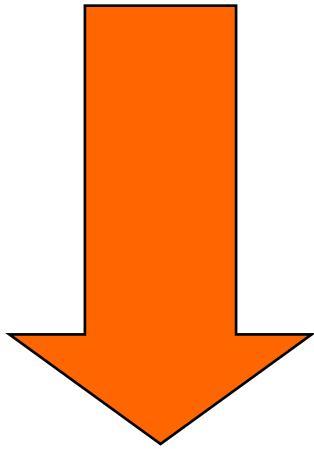
  - Introduction

  - Aims

  - Methodology

  - Results

Why do we care about homelessness families?

- Family homelessness is on the rise. Homeless=100,000.
- Homeless families= 24,000.
- Homeless children= 10,000.
- inter-generational homelessness.
- There is a lack of local information on family homelessness.

Why homeless mothers?

Maternal health/well being

⬇

Child health/well being

Aims

- Identify enabling factors in empowering homeless mothers

- Examine Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence and coping mechanisms in this population

- Policy implications

What is resilience?

Resilience is positive adaptation in the face of adversities. Luthar, 2007

Resilience is a dynamic process that can be developed and/or enhanced throughout individual's life span

Werner and Smith, 2001; Garmezy & Masten, 1986; Antonovsky, 1987; Masten, 2001

Resilient people are not invincible.

Why are some mothers more resilient?

Method

- Based on ethics guidelines (next slide)
- Payment of $20
- Face to face interviews
- Interview guide-based on Antonovsky's theory of salutogenesis
- A range of issues from childhood to adulthood were covered
- Interviews audio-taped and transcribed by a professional transcriber

Method-Recruitment

Homeless mothers with at least 1 accompanying child in temp accommodation services

Having been homeless for 2 weeks

18+

No active psychosis

Recruit through SAAP-mainly

Method-*continued*

⌘ SOC- 29 was administered for cross association and further validation.

What is Salutogenic theory?

⌘ Antonovsky's Salutogenesis is based on the origin of health and not pathology.

⌘ SOC is a construct that refers to the extent to which one sees the world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Antonovsky, 1987

Antonovsky's model is based on three main factors: **problem solving**/finding solutions, identification of **resources** or GRRs* and the mechanism that creates a better sense of coherence (SOC). (Lindstrom and Eriksson, 2005)

* General Resistance Resources (e.g. education, social support, money)

Results

- 30 face to face interviews
- Diverse cultural background (e.g. Aboriginals, Arabic Muslims, Russian, Anglo Australian, Samoan, Middle Eastern, Asian and Italian)
- Pathways to homelessness was mainly triggered by DV but financial difficulties kept women in transient life style
- Average age of mothers = 32
- Average age number of children=3

Results-*continued*

SOC Questionnaire and the interview guide produced similar outcomes. But mothers were divided into three groups based on the interview results:

- Resilient (N=12, SOC<100)
- Somewhat resilient (N=6)
- Non resilient (N=12, SOC>100)

Protective factors

- Religious beliefs/spirituality
- Family support/connectedness (including subjective support)
- Problem solving skills
- Positive childhood experience
- Education and history of employment
- Absence of long term exposure to D&A

Resilient mothers

- Challenges vs difficulties
- Realistic expectations
- Better child-parent relationship
- External and internal locus of control
- Mobilised resources, e.g. shelter's facilities
- Compassionate
- Engaged with their environment
- Had an realistic plan to exit the system

Is SOC 29 appropriate in this context?

⌘ There was a strong association between SOC and interview results

⌘ Modifications/simplification required:
  - Length
  - No of answers to questions

Strength and limitations

- Shelter providers active involvement √
- Triangulated approach √
- Large sample size for a qualitative design√
- Cross correlation with standardized questionnaire √
- Not generalisable, due to qualitative design ×
- Does not include other forms of homeless ×

Strength and limitations-*continued*

- Limited participation of mothers with little command of English ×
- Service providers' influence on sample recruitment ×
- Due to their positive outlook, resilient mothers may have not have reported past life adversities (e.g. childhood experiences) ×

Policy implications

- Facilitating homeless mothers opportunities for employment (e.g. child care, assisting with finding employment)
- Involvement and engagement with shelter activities including decision makings
- Increased access to health/mental health services for both mothers and children or opportunistic programs

Policy implications- *continued*

- Parenting education e.g. link between maternal health and child health, positive parenting
- Life skills for mothers e.g. Budgeting, problem solving skills, ability to use resources
- Early childhood intervention for parents and children at school and pre-school levels

Note: Many of these programs could be delivered at the shelters.

Questions?