

Homelessness among HE students

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How we did the research....

The profile of the students involved in the research

- 27 responses to email to one school
 - Note this is from one email, and many of those interviewed were aware of other students who are homeless
- 5 in focus group
- 11 in-depth interviews

How we did the research....

- 14 women, 2 men
- 3 white, 12 BC, BA, mixed
- 11 women with children
- Age
 - Five 20-30
 - Seven 30-40
 - Three 40-50
 - One 50+

Findings

We looked at the IMPACT of being homeless and RESILIENCE in the face of challenges

IMPACT on studying?

Mostly in private sector temporary accommodation. Quality of property affected health & ability to study

'we had no water, no taps in the bathroom, the entire flat was damp and wet. We lost clothes, we lost furniture'

Overcrowding was also an issue:

'everything is too much....[my daughter's] speech is delayed because we do not have enough room for her, we can't bring friends so she can interact...I try to take her down the park'

'I get up in the night to cry. I can't let my daughter see me crying about being homeless'

Constant worrying was a consistent theme

'I'd have peace of mind if I had a home to myself, or even a room to put my child in'.

[even when doing presentations] *'I am thinking I have to look on Gumtree'*

They [my children] were crying why Mum, why did we have to come so far?

The only relief was coming onto campus:

Because coming to school right now to see my friends I will be happy, but then when I go home I think 'Oh God I have to go back home again'

You enter inside [name of university] you feel so much different, the pressure is gone, you feel like you are accomplishing something...the moment that you leave the pressure starts

RESILIENCE

We found the four key factors were:

Family pride

Fortitude

Faith

Friendship

Family pride

This was a key theme in almost all interviews

May not be the first to go to university. But the first to go to a *British* university

‘my father talks to people a lot...’my daughter is in England and studying a degree’’ .

Family pride

'I just look at my children and I want them to be proud of me'

'My daughter...wrote me a note and said "Mummy, I'm so proud of you that you are going to uni"'

Key role of children..

Because I was a teenage mum...I know that most teenage mums don't have anything...and I don't want to be one of them statistics.

Key role of children..

I just look at my children and I just want them to be proud of me. I look forward to that day when they can come and see that I have actually achieved something...I'm destined for that really I am

Key role of children..

Two weeks ago, my daughter said to me 'Mum I'm going to say something to you'. I said 'What is it, do you want a fiver? 'No', she said, 'Mum I'm really really proud of you'. It brought me to tears

Fortitude

The students felt they were resilient and able to bounce back- but many of them cried in the interviews

‘I did not know what strong was until it was required’.

‘I’m a woman on a mission’.

And some felt battle hardened by their experience

‘I feel like I have a degree in housing with the stuff I have been through’

Fortitude

This can't hinder me any more, I'm in this situation. I've just got to like go through with it regardless...and I think I'm in control of it now where before it felt in control of me

They had something to aim for:

I want it so bad... Things have always been in the way to stop me doing that and I have always said that I'm not going to stop now.

*I can't stop and I so badly want to graduate and to be honest just leave this country
(laughs)*

I will do everything to finish this course. I am not going to give up. If it means sleeping in the street, I will sleep in the street in order to go to school

But pride was also a burden...none had approached the university, and few had discussed it with friends

I just feel that everyone has own issues and I didn't want other students to look at me thinking I haven't got a home.

I didn't mention it to anyone...I just felt I did not want anyone to sympathise with me

Faith

Not all the students were religious, but for the majority who were, religion was very important

‘God gives his battles to the hardest soldier’

‘I am embarrassed to share it with anyone so I constantly prayed’

Friendship

This is more complex than current research indicates

They enjoyed mixing with peers but did not hang round for social events or leisure.

‘social activities for now- that’s a no-no’.

‘I mean just socialising – takes you mind away from [being homeless], definitely’

Friendship

It's nice having that back up... even if they didn't come from London, you had someone to be lost with...I think my networking was very important and that's what made me stay

Implications

- We need to know how many students are homeless
- We need to focus on key relationships to maintain resilience
- We need to frame student engagement around the students we have now- not the students we had 40 years ago



Thanks

Any questions?