

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form ([see an example](#)) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below. Some articles will have been accepted based in part or entirely on reviews undertaken for other BMJ Group journals. These will be reproduced where possible.

ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	The Role of Gender in Housing for Individuals with Severe Mental Illness: A Qualitative Study of the Canadian Service Context
AUTHORS	Kidd, Sean; Virdee, Gursharan; Krupa, Terry; Burnham, Darrell; Hemingway, Dawn; Margolin, Indrani; Patterson, Michelle; Zabkiewicz, Denise

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Benjamin Henwood, PhD, LCSW Assistant Professor University of Southern California School of Social Work United States of America
REVIEW RETURNED	22-Mar-2013

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>The premise of this study is novel and important – considering the role of gender as it relates to housing for persons with serious mental illness. The authors do a nice job documenting the importance of gender as it relates to illness trajectories. There is a thread of confusion throughout the manuscript (or at least confusion on the part of this reviewer), however, that if addressed would significantly improve the strength of the study. Below are several areas worth further consideration:</p> <p>1) The title specifies that the authors are looking at gender and ‘access’ to housing, but the findings and discussion seem to go beyond issues of access. The abstract specifies ‘housing access and housing needs’ that seems closer. There are no specific research or study questions posed in article – if there were, what would these be?</p> <p>2) The authors seem to take at face value that their sample – made up of ‘experts’ who were on the delivery side of housing and service provision rather than the receiving side – can accurately speak to “gendered experiences of serious mental illness” as it relates to housing. Yet service providers and recipients often see things differently (see, for example, Stanhope, Henwood, & Padgett (2009) on disengagement from services in Psychiatric Services). Further, the provider sample is predominantly women and there is no mention or consideration about how this may impact things. Perhaps these findings say more about the “gendered experiences” of service providers.</p> <p>[The authors may find the discussion of gender differences in homeless men and women of value in: Padgett, D.K., Hawkins, R.L., Abrams, C. & Davis, A. In their own words: Trauma and substance abuse in the lives of formerly homeless women with serious mental illness. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 76,461-467.]</p>
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	<p>3) Related to the previous point, on pages 14 and 15 the findings include a discussion about children and custody where providers seem to have differing opinions. Yet when working with women who have serious mental illness who are homeless, the likelihood of maintaining active custody seems small, whereas the comments seem to indicate that providers could be talking more about issues of family homelessness (usually implying women with children). Although the reviewers must take the data as is the discussion could consider such possibilities.</p> <p>4) On page 11, the premise that lack of housing for women has resulted in them turning to informal supports or couch surfing. There seems to be a “chicken and egg” situation here in which it could be that because women turn to informal supports rather than being visible on the streets results in fewer shelters or programs.</p> <p>5) On page 13, the quotes seem to indicate that the issues women face have less to do with housing policy and more to do with a patriarchal culture since men had the power to violate existing laws anyway. That sections ends with quotes about women internalizing oppression and bearing responsibility for their lot in life. Yet Mitch Deunier in his ethnography (Sidewalks) of homeless men makes the same observation. There seems to be both an underestimating of the import of gender with the former and an overestimation on the import of gender with the latter. Again, this may accurately reflect the data (although it is unclear) but these issues could be taken up in the discussion.</p> <p>6) It seems that the analysis of the 2 scaled items suggest limited gender differences. Doesn't this go against the focus of the paper? If the authors feel these were meaningful questions perhaps they could discuss this; otherwise I don't see the value of mentioning the quantitative measures.</p> <p>7) Qualitative methods and analysis seem appropriate but could the authors say more about who in particular did the coding? Was there more than 1 coder? After how many transcripts did the authors move from open coding to focused coding? Was a code book developed? Was co-coding and consensus used?</p> <p>8) One final point is that this paper is being written in the context of Canada's national effort to implement and evaluate Housing First, yet there is no mention of this. How does the 15 year average experience of those in this sample affect the relevance of these findings within a context of shifting policies in which access to housing is differently conceived? This seems an important point.</p>
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REVIEWER	<p>Geoffrey Nelson Professor of Psychology Department of Psychology Wilfrid Laurier University Waterloo, ON CANADA N2L 3C5</p> <p>I have no conflict of interest.</p>
REVIEW RETURNED	06-Apr-2013

THE STUDY	Some questions do not apply, statistical methods, patients For the last question, the answer is no, no further information is needed
GENERAL COMMENTS	Excellent article, except as is

VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer #1

1.Comment: “The title specifies that the authors are looking at gender and ‘access’ to housing, but the findings and discussion seem to go beyond issues of access. The abstract specifies ‘housing access and housing needs’ that seems closer. There are no specific research or study questions posed in article – if there were, what would these be?”

Response: It was agreed that better specification of the study question would strengthen the paper. Accordingly, as suggested by the reviewer, we revised the title to: “The Role of Gender in Housing for Individuals with Severe Mental Illness: A Qualitative Study of the Canadian Service Context.” This better reflects the scope of inquiry which extends beyond access alone. Furthermore, we agreed that the purpose and scope of the paper needed to be more clearly specified and have done so at the end of the introductory section on page 5 noting: “It is in light of this shortcoming in the SMI literature that the present study was undertaken to examine the role of gender in housing Canadians with SMI. This initial qualitative exploration draws upon housing expert perspectives regarding service access and service needs as they intersect with gender, ethnicity, and geographic context.”

2.Comment: “The authors seem to take at face value that their sample – made up of ‘experts’ who were on the delivery side of housing and service provision rather than the receiving side – can accurately speak to “gendered experiences of serious mental illness” as it relates to housing. Yet service providers and recipients often see things differently (see, for example, Stanhope, Henwood, & Padgett (2009) on disengagement from services in Psychiatric Services). Further, the provider sample is predominantly women and there is no mention or consideration about how this may impact things. Perhaps these findings say more about the “gendered experiences” of service providers. [The authors may find the discussion of gender differences in homeless men and women of value in: Padgett, D.K., Hawkins, R.L., Abrams, C. & Davis, A. In their own words: Trauma and substance abuse in the lives of formerly homeless women with serious mental illness. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 76,461-467.]”

Response: This is a very helpful piece of feedback. In the limitation summary at the beginning of the paper and in the discussion we have more clearly addressed sample selection biases such as those noted by the reviewer. We also appreciate the suggested reference to Padgett et al (2006) which added greater nuance to how we can address coercion (to include influence on substance use and criminality). We did not explicitly cite the Stanhope reference as it does not directly compare provider and client perspectives, though as noted above we appreciate the need to call attention to this potential limitation more explicitly.

3.Comment “Related to the previous point, on pages 14 and 15 the findings include a discussion about children and custody where providers seem to have differing opinions. Yet when working with women who have serious mental illness who are homeless, the likelihood of maintaining active custody seems small, whereas the comments seem to indicate that providers could be talking more about issues of family homelessness (usually implying women with children). Although the reviewers must take the data as is the discussion could consider such possibilities.”

Response: It is agreed that the limitation of this study in its effort as an initial probe is clearly evident in this area which is very complex as noted by the reviewer. We have, as suggested, in the discussion included the following prompt for further inquiry: “The issues attending custody and parenting are, however, quite complex and were not fully addressed in this study. It is an area that would greatly benefit from further inquiry that could more intensively examine the intersections (gender, ethnicity, geography) and specific contexts (family versus individual homelessness) therein.”

4.Comment: “On page 11, the premise that lack of housing for women has resulted in them turning to informal supports or couch surfing. There seems to be a “chicken and egg” situation here in which it could be that because women turn to informal supports rather than being visible on the streets results in fewer shelters or programs.”

Response: We completely agree that this may indeed be a type of dynamic that could contribute to imbalances in housing service availability. Regardless of the process, however, it reflects a biased and uncritical examination of need as we argue in the discussion section. This is a good point, but in terms of revision we feel that it is adequately captured in our assertion of a need for a deeper investigation into actual rather than perceived service requirements and an unpacking of exactly what types of living circumstances are considered independent (i.e., overlying coercive contexts).

5.Comment: “On page 13, the quotes seem to indicate that the issues women face have less to do with housing policy and more to do with a patriarchal culture since men had the power to violate existing laws anyway. That sections ends with quotes about women internalizing oppression and bearing responsibility for their lot in life. Yet Mitch Deunier in his ethnography (Sidewalks) of homeless men makes the same observation. There seems to be both an underestimating of the import of gender with the former and an overestimation on the import of gender with the latter. Again, this may accurately reflect the data (although it is unclear) but these issues could be taken up in the discussion.”

Response: This was an excellent prompt to better locate this topic in the broader conversation regarding women’s rights in Aboriginal communities. We have done so in the discussion section and referenced a seminal United Nations report on the topic and noting: “Provider concerns for Aboriginal women revolved around culturally inappropriate care and the pronounced lack of access to housing and limited mobility that attend poverty in remote communities – risks that are enhanced when political and service leadership structures are predominantly male and equitable policy can be undermined through patriarchal implementation. Such observations align with international debate and advocacy regarding human rights violations against Aboriginal women²⁴, violations that need to be understood within ongoing practices and effects of colonialism.”

6.Comment: “It seems that the analysis of the 2 scaled items suggest limited gender differences. Doesn’t this go against the focus of the paper? If the authors feel these were meaningful questions perhaps they could discuss this; otherwise I don’t see the value of mentioning the quantitative measures.”

Response: This was a well-taken prompt to address this question in the discussion section as follows: “While considered in the broadest sense, housing access problems were considered equivalent regardless of gender and geographic context, the types of barriers faced varied greatly.” We then bridge into the detailed discussion of findings. We believe that this is important to included because as a finding it points to the problem of stopping inquiry at the level of consideration of global access being a problem (as is the case in much of the literature). Under this broad sentiment there are unique and very different problems that need to be attended to if we are to develop more effective responses.

7.Comment: “Qualitative methods and analysis seem appropriate but could the authors say more

about who in particular did the coding? Was there more than 1 coder? After how many transcripts did the authors move from open coding to focused coding? Was a code book developed? Was co-coding and consensus used?”

Response: We have expanded the analysis section to address each of these specific questions.

8.Comment: “One final point is that this paper is being written in the context of Canada’s national effort to implement and evaluate Housing First, yet there is no mention of this. How does the 15 year average experience of those in this sample affect the relevance of these findings within a context of shifting policies in which access to housing is differently conceived? This seems an important point.”

Response: The reviewer is correct in noting that Canada has just completed undertaking the largest ever evaluation of the housing first model. This effort, as large scale in the research context as it is, must be placed in the framework of the much larger national context. In each of the participating cities the At Home project is a single circumscribed project that has not necessarily influenced people (beyond their being aware of it). Many have a ‘wait and see’ perspective, many providers see it as irrelevant as they work in contexts which do not have nor in the conceivable future will have access to such resources, and along the lines of the Case Manager paper recommended by the reviewer I think many have a hard time seeing how it is relevant to their practice. This is not to say that this isn’t a very important time in the housing sector, it is just not one that has fully developed so that one might take stock of its impacts. As such, I am hesitant to comment on this topic in the paper as it would be pure conjecture.

Reviewer #2

No response required. Comment: “Excellent article, except as is.”

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Benjamin Henwood, PhD, LCSW Assistant Professor University of Southern California School of Social Work
REVIEW RETURNED	19-Apr-2013

GENERAL COMMENTS	Authors addressed all previous concerns thoroughly.
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