Exploring Family Homelessness In Queensland Through A Critical Social Work Lens

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The current housing and homelessness crisis impacting all Australian states and territories is highlighting the complex range of social, economic and environmental factors impacting families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. This paper reports on the findings of two focus groups that were conducted in late 2022 with representatives of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), housing providers and Academics to explore the rise of family homelessness and how social and economic policy responses have been inadequate. Neoliberal approaches to housing and homelessness policy (Flanagan 2020; Parsell et al. 2022) from successive governments over the last four decades have had dire consequences for families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. This research addresses the question: In light of the current housing and homelessness crisis in Queensland, what are the community sectors' priorities regarding family homelessness research? Specifically, this paper explores the consequences for families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in the current crisis and the considerable pressures exerted on the under-resourced housing and homelessness sector. It is argued that families are often an under-researched and profiled cohort of people that experience homelessness. The research argues for an alternative critical social work and human rights approach to housing and homelessness and that more policy attention and research needs to be directed towards supporting families.

KEY WORDS: Homelessness, Family Homelessness, Neoliberalism and Homelessness, Family Homelessness Research

Introduction

Family homelessness is a complex area of social work and social policy practice. It is also an emerging area of scholarly focus across Australia (Flanagan et al. 2019; Spinney et al. 2020; valentine et al. 2020). The current housing and homelessness crisis impacting all Australian states and territories is highlighting the stories of many families across the country who are now at risk of, or who are experiencing homelessness due to a complex range of social, economic and environmental factors including economic and taxation policies such as grants towards private home ownership and negative gearing that favour private home ownership above other forms of social and affordable housing and the utilisation of the housing market as a mechanism for individual wealth creation. Queensland is at the epicentre of this housing and homelessness crisis with an increasing population (ABS 2023) that is generating a high demand for limited housing that is increasingly unaffordable. These supply-side factors coupled with the cost of living pressures and low wages for many Australians is compounding the challenge of accessing safe and affordable housing. Individuals and families in private rental housing have experienced large weekly rent increases (Anglicare Australia 2023). This is impacting individuals and families on low incomes in severe ways including placing these people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. Daily media coverage in Queensland and Australia highlights the impact the current housing and homelessness crisis is having on Australians. For many people, this is their first-time experience of homelessness in their lives and for others it is meaning more intractable, longer term or chronic homelessness (Byrne and Culhane 2015; Chamberlain et al. 2014; Culhane and Byrne 2010). Social work practice that reflects professional ethics and values requires exploration of the causes and effects of family homelessness and the need for critical analysis of policy responses is a priority for social workers, researchers and policy makers.

This paper reports on the findings of two focus groups that were conducted in late 2022 with representatives of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), housing providers and Academics to explore the rise of family homelessness and adequacy of social and economic policy responses. We argue that neoliberal approaches to housing and homelessness policy (Flanagan 2020; Parsell et al. 2022) from successive governments over the last four decades have had dire consequences for families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. These impacts have been felt by greater numbers of families on low incomes and who are experiencing housing stress. Families' voices and those working alongside them have

been often silenced in the neoliberal policy landscape. This research addresses the question: In light of the current housing and homelessness crisis in Queensland, what are the community sectors' priorities regarding family homelessness research? Specifically, this paper explores the consequences for families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness in the current crisis and the considerable pressures exerted on the under-resourced housing and homelessness sector. It is argued that families are often an under-researched homelessness cohort. The research argues for an alternative critical social work and human rights approach to housing and homelessness and that more policy attention needs to be directed towards supporting families. Critical social work approaches provide a lens for both understanding and addressing structural inequities.

Neoliberalism, the Pandemic and the Australian housing and homelessness system

Neoliberalism has pervaded economic and social policy in Australia for the last four decades (Flanagan 2020). This economic approach has seen diminishing investment by governments in social and affordable housing at the expense of policies that promote 'individualism', private home ownership and wealth creation through the housing system (Pawson et al. 2020). Neoliberalism has promulgated the notion that government should not play an active role within the housing market and system. Rather, housing and more broadly economic systems are more efficient and effective when government does not intervene. The current housing and homelessness crisis gripping much of Australia is evidence of the failure of neoliberalism across all policy settings.

Since the second half of 2021, media attention has increasingly focused on the pressures exerted on the housing system throughout Australia. Some 18 months into the global COVID-19 pandemic, house prices dramatically increased throughout Australia, in capital cities like Brisbane and in many regional areas (Yang and Zhou 2022). This trend was in itself at odds with some of the earlier forecasts from commentators when the COVID-19 pandemic commenced that there may be a decline in house prices and the broader economy the longer the pandemic continued (Janda 2020). At an economic level, the effects of a very long run of low interest rates, low inflation, generous taxation arrangements for property investors and government policies such as Homebuilder that favoured private home ownership, combined to generate a perfect storm for high demand for housing in Australia (Yang and Zhou 2022).

The economic conditions changed again in 2022. Global events such as the Russian and Ukraine war and the effects of billions of dollars of stimulus released into the economy during the pandemic exerted pressure on inflation and ultimately interest rates. Twelve interest rate rises from May 2022 to July 2023 has placed many Australian mortgage holders in moderate to severe housing stress. The Australian Government has eschewed direct market intervention to address rising inflation and housing costs. Alternative policy interventions rather than staying with the Reserve Bank of Australia's blunt mechanism of interest rate rises as the sole policy response to rising inflation is required. Definitions of housing stress have tended to be linked to the principle of 30:40; that is where people are paying more than 30% of the weekly income on housing costs, with greater impact on people in the lowest 40% of incomes (Pawson et al. 2020). There have been many authors who have critiqued this approach including Rowley and Ong (2012) who argue that such definitions fail to recognise the impact of all household costs such as food, education, child care, energy and utilities and that such definitions also fail to recognise the lack of choice or options many people on low incomes have when it comes to housing.

National and Queensland Homelessness Rates

The estimation of homelessness undertaken as part of the five yearly National census remains an important source of quantitative data that represents the numbers and experiences of people who are homeless on census night. Nationally, there has been an increase in homelessness from 116,427 people in 2016 to 122,494 in 2021 (ABS 2023). This is an increase of just over 6,000 people, representing a 5.2% increase in overall people experiencing homelessness from 2016 to 2021 (ABS 2023). The operational group that has the highest rate of homelessness is people living in severely overcrowded dwellings.

In Queensland the housing and homelessness crisis has been widespread affecting the state's capital Brisbane and regional and rural communities. Although there has been a numerical increase in homelessness from 21,674 people in 2016, to 22,428 in 2021, the rate of homelessness per 10,000 people of the population has decreased from 46 people per 10,000 population to 44 people per 10,000 population in 2021 (ABS 2023). Queensland has experienced the highest increase in private rents of any jurisdiction, coupled with decreasing housing affordability and increasing rates of homelessness as experienced by front line SHS, noting between 22%-29% increases in people presenting to SHS over the last four years (Pawson et al. 2023). Other key statistical data relating to homelessness in Queensland include:

- Twenty-four per cent of all people experiencing homelessness in Queensland were children and young people aged 0 to 18 years. This is almost one

in every four people experiencing homelessness in Queensland is a child or young person under the age of 18 and an increase of 1.4% from the 2016 census (ABS 2023).

• There have also been increases in rates of women experiencing homelessness (2.4%),

• First Nations peoples experiencing homelessness in Queensland also increased (0.5%) between 2016 and 2021 Census (ABS 2023). First Nations peoples continue to be over-represented in data regarding people experiencing homelessness in Queensland and throughout Australia.

• People experiencing homelessness through living in severely crowded housing continues to be the major group of people experiencing homelessness in Queensland (15.2%). This group is followed by people staying temporarily with others, that is, couch surfing (9.6%) and people residing in supported accommodation services for people experiencing homelessness, that is, crisis shelters (8%). People living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out represented 4% of people experiencing homelessness (ABS, 2023).

These challenges have combined to create a housing and homelessness crisis that is having devastating consequences for increasing numbers of families across Queensland.

Service providers and advocates are clear that the context has changed considerably in Australia since the ABS collected their data on census night in August 2021. From May 2022 to May 2023, there have been 11 interest rate rises. There has also been immense pressure placed on housing systems through demand and supply related factors including internal population movements, including in states like Queensland, inflation making the cost of all goods and services more expensive and general increases in cost of living while incomes, especially for those living in poverty or on low income, have not changed.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to explore the perspective of participants about the causes, nature, dilemmas and solution to family homelessness in an in-depth manner (Padgett 2008; Paton 2002). Participants were drawn from three cohorts: 1) representatives of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) who provide responses to families, at risk of, or experiencing homelessness across Queensland; 2) those who deliver housing services; and 3) QUT social work academics with a record in homelessness research.

The method of focus groups was selected due to the possibility of generating a rich discussion about all aspects of family homelessness in the current crisis. According to Whittaker (2012: 47):

> A focus group is a group of individuals selected to provide their opinions on a defined subject, facilitated by a moderator who aims to create an open and relaxed environment and promote interaction between participants….Focus groups enable discussion between participants …that can enable participants to explore and challenge each other's views and can result in people clarifying and changing their views.

Each participant brought unique expertise, insight and wisdom to contribute to the research. An advantage of focus groups is that they can generate a wealth of quality data and can be less time-consuming than individual interviews (Whittaker 2012). The researchers considered this methodological approach appropriate in light of the time and resource pressures experienced by the SHS participants.

Table 1 represents the participants in this study as they were randomly divided into two focus groups. The focus groups were held at the QUT Kelvin Grove campus in November 2023. The two researchers moderated each of the focus groups. The groups ran between 1 hour and 15 minutes and 1 hour and 30 mins.

Table 1 De-identified Participant Demographics

Focus Group Participant Details	
Group 1	

Participant 1	SHS Inner Brisbane providing a range of responses to individuals and families experiencing homelessness
Participant 2	SHS Inner Brisbane providing a range of responses to individuals and families experiencing homelessness
Participant 3	QUT Academic
Participant 4	SHS Greater Brisbane focusing on families experiencing homelessness
Participant 5	SHS Greater Brisbane focusing on young people and families experiencing homelessness

Group 2	
Participant 6	QUT Academic
Participant 7	SHS North Queensland focusing on families
Participant 8	QUT Social Work Research Student
Participant 9	Neighbourhood Centre and SHS suburban Brisbane focusing on families experiencing homelessness
Participant 10	Neighbourhood Centre and SHS Brisbane and Moreton Bay Regional council area focusing on individuals and families experiencing homelessness
Participant 11	SHS Inner Brisbane responding to families
Participant 12	SHS Greater Brisbane focusing on young people and families experiencing homelessness
Participant 13	Housing and Homelessness Peak Agency
Participant 14	SHS Greater Brisbane responding to women and families experiencing homelessness

Findings

The two focus group interview transcripts were transcribed and coded by the two researchers. Each researcher coded both transcripts to ensure consistency and reliability of coding. Thematic analysis was used to draw out themes and patterns and this helped to answer the research question. The themes that emerged from this process were divided into four thematic categories. These four key themes were:

1. The personal and structural effects of neoliberal housing and social policy

2. The complexity of family homelessness

3. An under-resourced and ageing housing and homelessness service system under immense strain

4. Reimagining policy and practice responses to prevent and end family homelessness.

Each theme will be discussed in turn.

The authors firmly situate the current housing and homelessness crisis at the level of four decades of failed neoliberal housing and social policy that has increased inequality throughout Australian society. This trend was further compounded during the global pandemic due to the nature of government policy intervention favouring the middle classes and property owners. The four overarching themes analysed for this paper will also be framed in a manner consistent with the views of the participants in this study and that is to ensure the research adds value to their struggle for socially and environmentally just responses. The findings are also presented in a manner to stimulate further interest in research to promote stronger policy and practice responses with families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

The personal and structural effects of neoliberal housing and social policy

Participants in this research identified successive government's embrace of neoliberalism was at the heart of the current housing and homelessness crisis throughout Australia. As one participant noted, 'Housing policy is economic policy in this country'. The primacy of property as a wealth creation measure is foremost in the national psyche. Neoliberalism has also led to changes in the structural drivers of homelessness throughout Australia. The cost of living pressures, inflation, lack of affordable housing stock and debt-related issues also contributed to the challenges that people at risk of, or experience homelessness were experiencing accessing housing. A SHS participant reflected on the nature of changes in people presenting to her service, commenting on the shrinking housing stock that is available to families:

> 'There's the things we have known for years, DFV, rent arrears, condition reports, all that sort of tenancy stuff, but what we are seeing now is the massive sell of rental properties and the people we are seeing have been long term renters in properties and they are losing their housing to mum and dad investors taking advantage of the very big increase in housing prices'.

The quote illustrates the fierce competition for available housing stock in light of the conditions that have led to huge demand for private housing at the expense of people in rental accommodation. This issue of shrinking affordable housing stock was echoed by a SHS participant from a rural community in North Queensland who noted the following:

This quote highlights the impacts of neoliberalism on the housing market, where the commodification of housing and wealth generation has led to higher costs of private rental housing and lack of affordability for marginalised

groups. In line with research on the pressures experienced in rural and regional communities, there have been added challenges for families and service providers accessing affordable housing in these communities.

These findings are strongly supported by the existing literature on the impacts of neoliberalism on the housing system in Australia. More than four decades of neoliberal housing policy in Australia has emphasised and encouraged the importance of private home ownership as a wealth creation activity (Clarke and Parsell 2020; Flanagan 2020). Defining characteristics, assumptions and attitudes of neoliberal housing policy may be summarised as:

• Government's role is to support economic and fiscal policy that supports Australians towards private home ownership and property investment, including through grants to first home buyers, capital gains taxes, negative gearing and stimulus programs such as the Commonwealth Government's Home Builder scheme that was rolled out during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

• Increasing financial and taxation subsidy for private home ownership and property investment justifies declining investment in social and affordable housing which is seen as wasteful and a burden to the taxpayer as it is viewed as expensive to build and to maintain.

• The contest of public spaces and increasing privatisation of such spaces.

• Programs that traditionally problematise individuals and create precarity by focusing on temporary accommodation.

• Responding to 'rooflessness' while failing to address the structural drivers of homelessness or system issues impacting housing sustainability.

• A service system largely designed to meet the needs of single adults experiencing homelessness at the exclusion of other people's (family) experiences.

• There is an option in the private housing market for all (Flanagan 2020; Parsell et al. 2022).

These features of neoliberalism have been identifiable in the responses of participants in this study.

Participants emphasised the changing demographics of people in their communities impacted by the housing and homelessness crisis. Increasingly people on low incomes, young families, families of people with a disability or mental health concerns, natural disasters and DFV are groups experiencing increased housing insecurity and risk of homelessness. One SHS participant identified that many families were engaged in employment but still experiencing homelessness in the current crisis:

'They're working but they are still homeless and can't get a property and have no family support. I'd say it's changed in the last few years since COVID-19, more people experiencing homelessness for the first time'.

This quote illustrates the structural barriers and challenges of accessing housing when there is no supply of or opportunity to access affordable housing. It also highlights the increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness for the first time in their lives in the current housing and homelessness crisis.

Participants were strong and united in their views that the existing housing and social welfare systems are entirely inadequate, and in many instances further stigmatise and marginalise vulnerable people. The neoliberal and minimalist housing and welfare systems are compounding inequality and disadvantage for marginalised families (Flanagan 2020; Parsell et al. 2022). A specific example of this neoliberal policy approach was governments and organisations reliance upon sourcing motel accommodation as a temporary response for people experiencing homelessness. Two SHS participants noted that instead of investing in proper crisis responses for families experiencing homelessness, government policy had shifted towards motel accommodation, for instance:

'[If families] are navigating crisis accommodation, this means motels. Motels are completely inappropriate for young families. There are no cooking facilities, there's no laundry facilities'.

'The challenge right now…is housing families. We've got 12 families right now in motels. We've managed to get some of them into social housing. We've had about 40 families referred to us and who have been supported by our service in motels. Only three of them have gone into social housing and two of them have gone into the private market. The amount of time and effort to locate those opportunities…it is a huge challenge'.

Although motels are often framed as an immediate solution for many people, as these quotes illustrate they also bring many challenges for families. Temporary and emergency accommodation in the form of motels provides an immediate response to people experiencing homelessness but does little to address homelessness in the medium to longer term if there is not a pathway to housing.

The complexity of family homelessness

Participants in this study were strong in their shared perspectives and experiences that their practice with families experiencing homelessness was considerably different and more complex than working with individuals experiencing homelessness. The complexity of needs of families was a key theme of this research that requires further analysis. The complexity of working with families experiencing homelessness was organised into two main areas: First, the complexity of intersections between multiple systems including the housing and homelessness service system, DFV, mental health and child safety systems. Second, the complexities arising from demographic and cohort-related issues including young families, larger families, First Nations families, and families with people with a disability.

Families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness may have interactions with a wide range of service systems. In addition to their connection with the housing and homelessness service system (Bassuk et al. 2014; valentine et al. 2020), they also may have direct engagement with specialist DFV services (Flanagan et al. 2019; Healey et al. 2018), child safety services (Healey et al. 2018; Humphreys and Absler 2011), mental health (Costello et al. 2013; Isobe et al. 2020; Johnson and Chamberlain 2011), justice (Parsell 2011), employment (Steen et al. 2012; Stephens et al. 2010) and education (Gibson 2010). The nature of interaction and intersection between all of these systems is a major dimension of the complexity in working with families experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, the causes of this complexity included the tendency of service systems and their respective departments and funded service providers operating siloed approaches to policy and practice. The intersection of homelessness and DFV was raised by participants as an area that needs urgent policy and practice attention to achieve improved responses for women and their family's experiencing homelessness as a result of escaping DFV. One Brisbane-based homelessness and DFV service provider participant noted:

> 'Something we have noticed over the last five years….DFV systems are set up to respond to crisis in that instance, also then go on to create housing crises for women and children…We see those women and children come to our DFV service, and then go to refuge and then a few months later turn up at our housing intake team for a crisis response. They are just stuck in that cycle'.

This quote illustrates the challenges for women and families who experience homelessness as a result of escaping DFV and also SHS that provide crisis accommodation. The systems are challenging to navigate and result in prolonged housing instability for women and their families.

Many participants identified the interface between family homelessness and statutory child safety services as a major area of complexity in service delivery to families. Homelessness and poverty were identified as major reasons in themselves for many families having contact with statutory child safety services, families who would not otherwise have contact with these services. One SHS participant remarked, 'Often we see families that otherwise, apart from their homelessness, would not have child safety involvement.' This evidence highlights the tensions in different philosophies and values that underpin the respective housing and child safety service systems. The former is more person and family centred whereas the latter is intentionally child focused. Sometimes the statutory child safety interventions were perceived by service providers as both unhelpful and unnecessary. Where they were considered appropriate there were often practice issues that led to collaborative relationships between professionals and agencies.

A more recent focus across service systems is the need for recognition of the impact of trauma in people's lives. Trauma-informed practice in the context of family homelessness has been a more recent development in program design and service delivery (Milaney et al. 2019). Examples of this clash of practice philosophy and program objective is reflected in the following participant quote from a Housing and Homelessness Academic:

> 'They're Triple Pd out. Seriously. We've had families that have done eight Triple Ps, that was the idea, you will be a good parent then. I've done it eight times and I'm not getting any better'.

The quote shows the emphasis that Child Safety place upon parenting skills and the perceived acquisition of these through programs such as the Positive Parenting Program without recognition of the structural causes of homelessness and poverty. Participants also recognised the challenges in managing expectations associated with mandatory reporting of child safety concerns. These concerns also included how early developmental trauma in life placed young women in care of the state who also experience homelessness, as exemplified in the following quote:

> There is something around our cohort's experience of early developmental trauma and attachment trauma that means they are seeking connection from an early age….this intersects with young women in the care system.

Participants were strong in their views about the importance of research needing to take into account the complexity arising from the interaction of service systems underpinned by different values and philosophies. One participant commented, 'If you are a homeless person you have to access DV services, you have to access housing services, you have to access mental health services, you've got a child and none of these people are talking to each other. This is not trauma informed, this is just plain trauma'. This quote highlights the challenges in achieving a more family centred service system.

Participants across both focus groups identified other dimensions of complexity influencing family homelessness included:

• The limited housing stock suitable for families, especially larger families of seven or more people;

• The challenges of obtaining housing and temporary accommodation during peak periods;

• The challenge of housing families with pets;

• The lack of focus on tenancy rights at the expense of private home ownership in policy frameworks;

• Specific challenges for different cohorts of families including young families, families of people with a disability, First Nations families and families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds and Refugee families who experience greater barriers and discrimination when accessing services.

In light of the complexities influencing family homelessness, further critical analysis is needed.

An under-resourced and ageing housing and homelessness service system under immense strain

The current housing and homelessness crisis has placed unprecedented demand on SHS across Queensland. In circumstances where this demand is unprecedented, it can be hard for SHS to identify the success they achieve in their day-to-day practice. In addition to the structural challenges relating to lack of affordable private rental housing, SHS providers are experiencing unprecedented demand for immediate and crisis support. As one SHS participant noted, 'ensuring people know their value. Even if there are 40 people in the waiting room and you house one of them, that's bloody significant'. The historic funding and resourcing of SHS is clearly not adequate in the current environment. Even crisis accommodation services, colloquially referred to as 'shelters' were employing waiting lists as a demand-management tool.

Participants were critical of the perceived rise in 'pop up' or 'mobile' responses to homelessness that had developed high media profile. Participants made the following remarks about these responses to homelessness: 'we've had all these pop ups. They are really down and really inappropriate responses that people are investing in. Like you go to sleep in a hot car park with a portaloo. Have we got to that?' and 'Food vans are a disaster'. Although popular in media, these responses were not viewed as having a meaningful impact on reducing or ending homelessness.

Participants noted other barriers to accessing and maintaining housing. These included the housing market dynamics, especially in relation to private rental housing. SHS participants commented:

'People are paying 12 months rent in advance'.

'Down the Gold Coast, they are paying $30-40K up front'.

These housing market dynamics are making it increasingly difficult for people to access housing in the private rental market. Other participants noted that zoning and building regulations also contributed to the challenges:

'It says something about the building regulations doesn't it… when an older man living across the road would like to move into a small property so that it would be easier for him to manage but the whole suburb is 3- or 4-bedroom houses'.

In this scenario, the older single man in a larger dwelling could be supported to move to a more suitable property within his community thereby making a property suited to a family available. There needs to be greater flexibility in the zoning and building regulations policy to provide a range of housing types and tenures that will best suit the future housing needs of individuals and families.

Reimagining policy and practice responses to prevent and end family homelessness

Participants emphasised the need for new approaches to the design and provision of housing and homelessness services. More services that reflect early intervention and prevention need to be made available. This includes services that help people to maintain their tenancies as reflected in the following quote: 'I think that side by side stuff to help people manage in the home as well because people are losing their tenancies.' These approaches were considered to be even more important in the tight housing markets across Queensland. Other examples of services that need to be expanded targeted rental subsidies for families and the Rent Connect program.

Participants also noted the importance of co-location of housing, homelessness and other community services. This approach was seen to promote more effective collaboration between agencies and also more effective and quality services for families. There also needs to be more emphasis on practical supports for families such as family support, child care, life skills and general household services.

Discussion

The role of research in driving urgent housing and homelessness policy reform

This paper has presented findings from SHS, housing and Academic participants in focus groups about the nature of family homelessness throughout Queensland. Their evidence provides important contextual information about the causes and consequences of homelessness for families and the pressures on SHS. As noted throughout this paper, family homelessness has been an under-researched and profiled area (Rog et al. 2021; Warburton et al. 2018). Their evidence has been organised into four over-arching themes: the personal and structural effects of neoliberal housing and social policy, the complexity of family homelessness, an under-resourced and ageing housing and homelessness service system under immense strain and re-imagining policy and practice responses to prevent and end family homelessness. These themes are an opportunity to promote research and further inquiry that will help bring about equitable housing and homelessness policy and practice reform.

Australia, like many western liberal democracies post COVID-19 pandemic, is experiencing considerable economic upheaval, rising inflation and increasing cost of living pressures. Eleven interest rate rises since May 2022 have placed considerable strain on mortgage holders and on people paying rent throughout the nation. Clearly neoliberal approaches to housing policy are not working and exacerbating inequality. It is clear that more investment in housing and homelessness services is urgently required, however the policy environment is challenging (Clarke et al. 2020). The approach to investment needs to be different from private wealth and market neoliberal investment in social housing and public services, but rather fairer and socially just investment. The housing and homelessness policy challenges are immense and there are many competing pressures and intersecting social and economic policy issues. These include areas such as health care, education, child care, the NDIS, income support, that all have a strong relationship to preventing and ending homelessness. There is an urgent need for evidence to drive policy reform in a challenging fiscal environment.

Family homelessness research is needed to support policy and practice development and reform across the service system. Participants in this research identified that many homelessness services funding has not changed for decades and that their service delivery approaches have also not substantially changed during this same period. The great hope of a policy vision that was offered as part of the landscape of the previous Rudd Labor Government's 2008 *White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness* seems a distant memory for many who have been active in the housing and homelessness sector for a long time. Participants in this study were clear that research is needed to drive the policy reform agenda forward, especially with the opportunity of a new federal Labor Government and election commitments aimed at improving housing affordability. Family homelessness needs to be the central organising feature for research that seeks to redress homelessness.

Family Homelessness Research priorities

The four thematic areas highlighted in this research provide an opportunity for more in-depth analysis and inquiry relating to family homelessness research. These research- based themes: (1) The personal and structural effects of neoliberal housing and social policy, (2) The complexity of family homelessness, (3) An under-resourced and ageing housing and homelessness service system under immense strain, and (4) Reimagining policy and practice responses to prevent and end family homelessness; provide opportunities for critical social work scholars and researchers to contribute to the evidence base for the urgent need for alternative ways of conceptualising housing and homelessness and the associated challenges at a policy level Watson and Hernan 2017; Zufferey and Parkes 2019). Policy, funding and service delivery approaches all need to be re-vitalised to ensure there is the most contemporary and effective suite of responses to assist families, at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. This presents an opportunity to view housing through a critical social work lens that views safe and affordable housing as a universal human right. This approach supports the views of many practitioners and academics who see the immense value in industry and academic research partnerships and alliances (Watson et al. 2021).

Conclusion

Research is urgently needed to explore the causes of homelessness in this current crisis and to identify the most effective responses to assist families at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and or housing insecurity. Importantly, research and evidence are urgently needed to support cases for a more radical and systemic overhaul of the housing and homelessness systems throughout

Australia that reflects a commitment to greater social justice, fairness and equity. Families are a demographic group that have not been served particularly well by the level of inquiry to date. Given the many complexities and inter-sectionalities surrounding family homelessness, and the reality that families constitute one of the largest demographic groups experiencing homelessness throughout Australian society, this scholarly and policy focus is long over-due and critical.

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Authors

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Mr. Adam Barnes is passionate about collaboration, social justice, and keeping the people we work alongside at the centre of what we do. During the last twenty years he has worked as a practitioner and leader in the community sector, as a research assistant and as an active board member of peak social policy organisations.

Soliloquy

I'm fed up; there is no more air left
in my lungs to breathe out.

There's a snail in my head
encamped in me, cramping me out of my mind.

My feet have to lift me off the down-at-heel globe
before my heels crack,
before my soles scarify the day
before death with its exotic accent slices my skin.

My flesh is a grove of olives; in my corneas the amber
of rupture; my pupils are oil
Wells, and in my larynx, the news headlines clot.

I am manic for you;
you are a miniature of the Middle East conflict,
an occident of tropes that rebukes me.

No wonder I grapple gravity,
hang from the gallows—a contortionist

of melancholy. My camouflage
a congestion of fugitives clinging, like me,
to their scaffolds of pendency in the immigration abyss.

In the stream of subalterns
I am an insider, avid to disparage the white knight
savior; I am a time bomb wrapped in velvet bigotry.

Bigots, you have no idea
who I am. I am a rib cage of blades,
the death of a woman, her internal bleeding.

I crack the glass ceiling;
I shake off the handcuff and find my way to the balcony
to curb the cockatoo terrorists
who yawn like ordnance at the windows.

Only then can I settle for life,
only then, conserve my feet
and let them carry me to the kitchen to make a mint tea
for the annihilated lives in the pages I write.

I let my feet take me back
to the text where I sit and fall back in love with the livid flesh.

Suffused with the failure of recovery
from where I fell into a world
with dogmas more vigorous than slaughter
I catapult into annulment
triggered by how belonging is a belittlement factory.

In my liminal room
I pester the pleated skirt till it falls from my waist
and I squeeze all hatred in the world for others
between tanned thighs till it cries for clemency
and dies for justice wishing it had never been born.

Now, the whole day falls
under my sovereignty; I lean a soliloquy against my silhouette.
My endemic perseverance, emancipated from entropy,
purge planar fatigue from my fingertips.
Now, I own the day.

SABA VASEFI

*Commended entry from the 2022 Seeking Asylum Poetry prize