



Exploring homelessness in the classroom: Supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

Professional Master of Education

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Declaration

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Abstract

Homelessness is a societal issue that has been continuously growing in Ireland for a number of years. Now, we find ourselves in the midst of a crisis. Currently there are over 10,000 people experiencing homelessness with almost 4,000 being children. Consequently, teachers are being put in a position whereby they are facilitating children who are facing challenges relating to homelessness and need additional support to ensure equity in education. This study sought to explore the various supports that are being offered to these children to fulfil their complex needs, in an attempt to inform future practice. To achieve this, a small scale qualitative study was undertaken using a phenomenological approach. Six interviews were conducted with primary school teachers of varying experience of working with children who are homeless. In order to elicit data, the researcher transcribed the interviews, utilised open and axial coding and connected the emerging themes to the existing literature. The study found that there are a multitude of supports offered to improve equity in education for children who are homeless, by the class teacher, support staff and the school as a whole. The most beneficial supports are those that are integrated amongst all staff members in a whole school approach. It was found that DEIS schools are particularly well equipped for dealing with complex needs, such as those associated with homelessness due to additional resources that are provided under the scheme. However, there is an absence of data regarding how many children are experiencing homelessness but do not have access to those additional resources due to their attendance of a school who does not have access to DEIS services.

List of abbreviations

BERA.....	British Educational Research Association
CPD.....	Continuous Professional Development
DEIS.....	Delivering Equality In Schools
DES.....	Department of Education and Skills
HSCL.....	Home School Community Liaison
INTO.....	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
MERC.....	Marino Ethics in Research Committee
NBSS.....	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA.....	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS.....	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD.....	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDST.....	Professional Development Service for Schools
SEN.....	Special Educational Needs
SESE.....	Social Environmental and Scientific Education
SNA.....	Special Needs Assistant

List of figures

Figure 1 - Number of people experiencing homelessness 2008 – 2019.....	8
Figure 2 - Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	11
Figure 3 - Continuum of Support for children with complex needs.....	15
Figure 4 - Supports provided under the DEIS scheme.....	20
Figure 5 - Phases of thematic analysis.....	22
Figure 6 - Emerging themes from the research data and analysis.....	24
Figure 7 - Children’s views and experiences of living in Family Hubs.....	43

List of Appendices

Appendix A:	Sample letter to principals
Appendix B:	Sample letter to participants (teachers)
Appendix C:	Sample consent form
Appendix D:	Predetermined interview questions
Appendix E:	Interview schedule
Appendix F:	Thematic coding
Appendix G:	Thematic mapping (sample)

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
RESEARCH RATIONALE AND CONTEXT	1
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	1
RESEARCH DESIGN	2
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	2
DISSERTATION OUTLINE.....	2
CONCLUSION	3
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	3
DEFINING HOMELESSNESS.....	4
<i>Prior to the Celtic Tiger</i>	6
<i>Post Celtic Tiger</i>	6
HOW DOES HOMELESSNESS AFFECT EQUITY IN EDUCATION?.....	8
POSSIBLE SUPPORTS	13
CONCLUSION	16
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	17
INTRODUCTION.....	17
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	17
PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH	18
SAMPLE SELECTION	18
DATA COLLECTION	20
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	22
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	23
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	24
INTRODUCTION.....	23
HOMELESSNESS: A COMPLEX ISSUE	26
SUPPORTS TO IMPROVE EQUITY IN EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN	31
TRAINING AND TEACHER SUPPORT	36
CONCLUSION	37
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	39
INTRODUCTION.....	39
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	39
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE.....	40

RECOMMENDATIONS	41
FINAL CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION.....	42

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In recent years, Ireland has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. As of 2020, there are over 10,000 people listed as homeless with almost 4,000 of these being children. Subsequently, there is an increasing number of primary school teachers who are facilitating children who are experiencing homelessness (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). The purpose of this study is to examine from those teachers' perspectives: supports, which can be implemented to combat barriers produced by homelessness, and thus increase equity in education for students who are facing homelessness.

Research rationale and context

The homelessness crisis is currently a major issue in Irish society, with numbers continuing to increase every month. Therefore it is an extremely relevant time to undertake this study. The researcher has always had an interest in disadvantaged education and would eventually like to pursue a teaching career in a DEIS school. Therefore she hopes that by engaging in this research, she will be able to gain practical knowledge in the area which will help her to improve upon her own teaching practice in the future.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of this research is to explore homelessness in the classroom by considering supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

To achieve this overall aim, the following objectives were decided upon:

1. What are the barriers produced by homelessness and how do they impact on education?
2. What supports can be made available to combat those barriers?
3. How are teachers supported/trained to implement those supports?

Research design

This study can be defined as a small scale, qualitative study. It was conducted within a number of areas around Dublin and focuses on empirical data rather than numerical data. To gain access to this data, the researcher methodised semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with a sample of six participants. All participants are primary school teachers, however they each have a varying degree of teaching experience. Following the interviews, the data was analysed in a structured way which will be further outlined in chapter three. Due to the scale of this study, the research findings are not generalisable.

Ethical considerations

This research study was conducted in line with the MERC ethical guidelines (2015). This ensures the researcher's responsibilities to the participants, the educational research community and other education professionals (MERC, 2015). Further ethical considerations will be discussed in the methodology chapter of the study.

Dissertation outline

This introductory chapter has outlined the research rationale and context, the main aim and objectives for the research study, the research design as well as the ethical guidelines that were followed. Chapter two examines the existing literature relating to homelessness and the impact it can have upon education, from both a national and international stance. Chapter three discusses the methodological approach used in the study, outlines the data collection method, explains the sample chosen, documents the ethical considerations and finally explains how the data was analysed. Chapter four presents the findings from the research study and discusses them in relation to the literature outlined in chapter two. Finally, chapter five concludes this study and presents a summary of findings and recommendations for future research and practice.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research study. It has informed the reader about the purpose of the research, the aims and objectives, the research design and outline as well as the ethical guidelines that the researcher has abided by. In the next chapter, the existing literature that relates to this topic will be explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

“Damage is being done to society and individuals and families because they have to spend time in emergency accommodation. There are too many living in emergency accommodation and it is absolutely unacceptable that people still have to go to hotels” (Murphy, 2019).

This statement was made in January 2019 by the Minister for Housing, regarding the injurious impact of homelessness on the lives of families and children. Family homelessness is a relatively new phenomenon in Irish society, emerging in 2014 as a result of the recession and subsequent housing crisis (Hearne & Murphy, 2017). The adverse effects of homelessness on the lives of these families have since been a focus of concern for the Irish government and the wider public (Ombudsman for Children, 2019). There has also been a continuous growth of literature that discusses the impact of homelessness on children’s education and experience in the classroom (Focus Ireland, 2019; Ombudsman for Children, 2019; Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). This research study aims to explore the various supports which, from a teacher’s perspective, can improve equity in education for children experiencing homelessness. Throughout the course of this chapter, the literature related to this topic will be examined in an attempt to fulfil the overall aim of the study.

Defining homelessness

Defining homelessness can be quite a difficult task because the social interactions and constructions related to the concept are complex, with identifying who is homeless being as difficult a task as counting the number of people experiencing homelessness (Jahiel, 1992). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will be accepting the Housing Act’s (1988) definition of

homelessness which concludes that a person should be named as homeless if he/she has no accommodation available, which in the opinion of the authority, can be reasonably occupied by him/herself as well as any other person who would usually reside with them. A person will also be recognized as homeless if he/she is living in an institution such as a hospital, county home or night shelter due to the same reason as being unable to provide adequate accommodation from his/her own resources (Housing Act 1988). The researcher also acknowledges the Education Welfare Service's inclusive definition of homelessness within three categories; visible homelessness – which refers to those who are rough sleeping with no shelter at all as well as those who are provided with emergency accommodation and shelter. Hidden homelessness is acknowledged by the Service also as those who don't necessarily identify themselves as being homeless but will move around family and friends' homes. Thirdly, the Education Welfare Service recognizes those who may be at risk of homelessness – people who have housing but are at risk of losing it (Focus Ireland, 2019). Although it has been asserted that 1 in 3 homeless people are children, there is no literature that states how many of these children are 'rough sleeping' (Focus Ireland, 2019). However, this does not mean there are no children forced to 'rough sleep' in Ireland as in some circumstances, families are not officially recognized as homeless due to paperwork issues, and therefore are not provided with emergency accommodation (Focus Ireland, 2019). In these cases, families have often been directed to present at their nearest Garda station for overnight shelter (Curtis, 2019). During this study, when referring to homeless children, the researcher is referring to those who have been provided temporary shelter in the form of emergency accommodation unless otherwise stated. However, it is recognized that there may be disparities in the lives of homeless children who live in emergency accommodation and those who are forced to find their own accommodation, eg. in a

Garda station (Focus Ireland, 2019). This is supported by research carried out in the UK which recognized that children from homeless families who were placed in B&B emergency accommodation on a nightly basis suffered the greatest in relation to academic performance (Power, Whitty & Youdel, 1995).

Homelessness in Ireland

Prior to the Celtic Tiger

The homelessness crisis, which is accelerating every day in Ireland, can be considered a problem that has been creeping up on the country and its citizens for decades (O’Sullivan, 2016). In the 1980’s, Ireland’s social housing figures seen a massive drop from 30% in the 1970s to only 5%. Further to this, rent controls were also deemed unconstitutional and therefore abolished (O’Sullivan, 2016). Prior to the 1980s, there was no legislation that acknowledged the role of the Irish government and their responsibility regarding the homeless population (Harvey, 2008). Following numerous policy failures and continuous intensive lobbying by organizations such as The Simon Community; the Housing Act was passed in 1988 (Harvey, 1995). For the first time in the history of the Irish State, the Housing Act (1988) defined homelessness. The Housing Act also outlines the requirement that all local authorities assess the number of homeless in their area every three years and the requirements for these persons, as well as a number of means by which the local authorities are empowered to provide accommodation for homeless persons. However, the act still faces criticism as it places no legal requirement on local authorities or the greater government to house homeless people (Harvey, 1995).

Post Celtic Tiger

As Ireland began to prosper through the time of the Celtic Tiger, the housing problem continued to grow in the Irish capital (O’Sullivan, 2016). The Dublin Homeless Initiative was

established in 1996, followed by the launch of ‘Homelessness: an Integrated Strategy’ in 2000, both of which heralded an increase in funding for homelessness services and the establishment of the Homeless Agency (Brownlee, 2008). In 2005, an Independent Review was commissioned which concluded with a high level of consensus across statutory and voluntary organizations that the Strategy (2000) had been extremely successful, thus leading to a positive attitude in the homelessness sector towards ending homelessness (Brownlee, 2008).

As the homelessness sector worked towards improvement, the dynamics of the housing market continued to deteriorate in a way which put immense pressure on young tenant families with reasons such as high rents, landlords selling up or being repossessed, a shortage of properties in the rental market and a lack of landlords who would accept rent supplement (TSA Consultancy, 2012). Exactly thirty years after the Housing Act was passed, the economic crash of 2008 saw thousands of people lose their homes (Focus Ireland, 2019). In response, the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 was passed. The act amends and extends the Housing Act and aims to provide local authorities with a framework to fulfil their requirement in managing and delivering housing services (Housing [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act 2009). The Framework also provides for the adoption of homelessness action plans and it involves a more developed legislative basis for the provision of rented social housing by means of leasing/contract arrangements with private landlords (Housing [Miscellaneous Provisions] Act 2009). The Act also aims to support low income households through the introduction of an incremental purchase scheme and an equity-based approach to the recovery of discounts granted by housing authorities (Housing

[Miscellaneous Provisions] Act 2009). Despite this legislative intervention, homelessness figures continued to increase by the year:

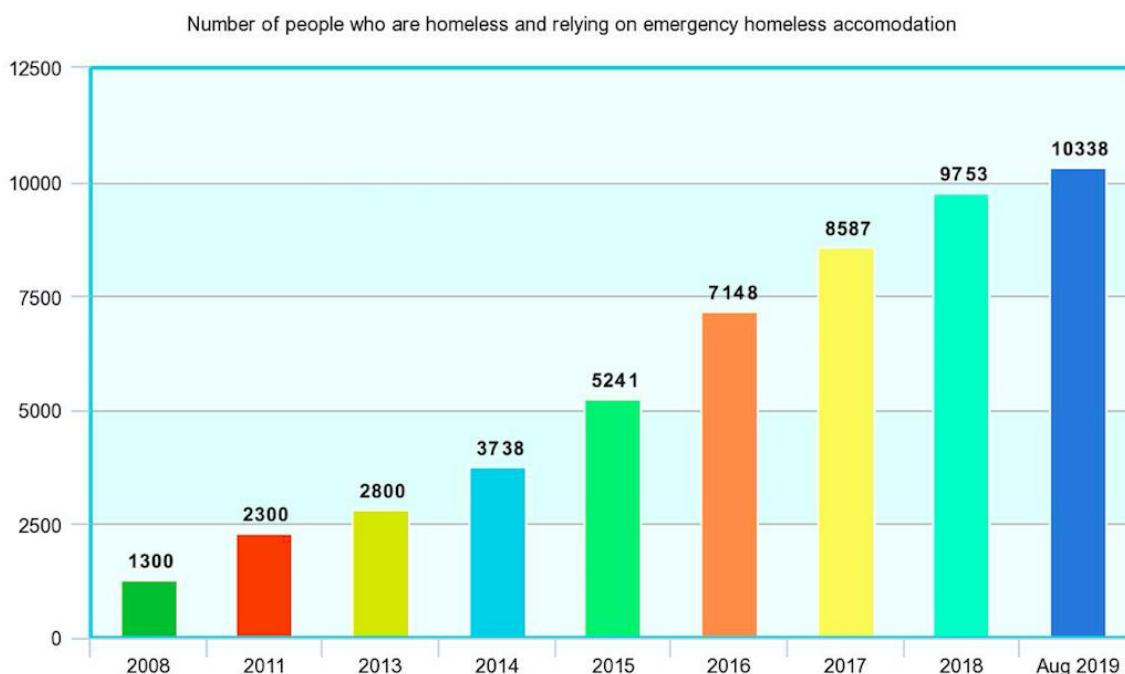


Figure 1: Number of people experiencing homelessness 2008 – 2019 (Focus Ireland, 2019).

Now, more than a decade later, Ireland is confronted with a steep housing shortage, with over 10,000 people – a third of which are children, experiencing homelessness (Focus Ireland, 2019). This has resulted in a number of Irish primary schools and teachers facilitating children who have been displaced from their communities, are experiencing longer commutes to and from school and in some cases, transitioning into a new school altogether (Hearne & Murphy, 2017). Teachers in such cases may be in a position where they can visibly see the effects of homelessness on the pupil and his/her ability to fully engage in learning and school life as a whole (Focus Ireland, 2019).

How does homelessness affect equity in education?

National and international research supports the idea that homelessness can have a serious impact on a child's education (OECD, 2020; National Centre on Family Homelessness, 2009;

Ombudsman for Children, 2019). It is suggested that physical, physiological and practical factors related to homelessness mean that children are not arriving to school ready to learn, or sometimes not arriving at all (Focus Ireland, 2019).

Research demonstrates that homelessness can be a devastating phenomenon for children and their educational engagement and achievement (Tobin, 2014). In relation to educational outcomes, research continuously acknowledges a gap in test scores and grades between children experiencing homelessness and those children who are not (Dworsky, 2008; National Centre on Family Homelessness, 2009; Robertson, 1992; Rubin et al., 1996). The literature highlights a number of possible reasons why this might be the case. These include; engagement and achievement, mental health, attitude towards school, attendance and continuity.

There is a complex relationship between homelessness and well-being, particularly mental well-being (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2018). In some cases, poor health can be a contributing factor to homelessness, and in others it can be as a result of experiencing homelessness (Murphy, Mitchell & McDaid, 2017). The study, *Homelessness: An Unhealthy State* (O'Reilly, Barror, Hannigan, Scriver, Ruane, MacFarlane & O'Carroll 2015) found that 53% of their sample in the Dublin area reported that their mental or emotional well-being was likely to prevent their engagement in normal daily activities, which could include school for a parent, the school run. Family life can be further disrupted due to a variety of rules and regulations that may be enforced in emergency accommodation centres, for example, by having or in some cases, not having set mealtimes and curfews (Lambert, O' Callaghan & Jump, 2018). As a result, the child's routine may be affected, and this may elicit stress and behavioural changes (Baptista, Benjaminsen, Busch-Geertsema & Pleace, 2017). The literature also recognizes that homelessness often comes with a stigma, relating homelessness with failure and a parent's inability to adequately care for his/her

children (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). If exposed to such a stigma in the school context, the child may choose to hide their housing status for fear of social exclusion – thus resulting in lower self-efficacy (Baptista, Benjaminsen, Busch-Geertsema & Pleace, 2017).

If a child's well-being is negatively impacted when experiencing homelessness, his/her attitude and motivation towards school may also suffer. Irregular attendance and challenging curriculum can have a significantly negative impact on their motivation and attitude (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). Teachers may also find it difficult to prioritize the educational needs of students, when their basic needs are not being met (Focus Ireland, 2019). The prioritisation of needs can be understood by using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Maslow recognizes two different categories of needs that can impact on motivation; deficiency needs and growth needs. Regarding the deficiency needs, each lower need must be met before moving on to the next 'level'. If a deficiency occurs at any stage, the individual will prioritize fulfilling this need over anything else (Huitt, 2007). According to Maslow, only when all deficiency needs are met will the child be ready to act upon the growth needs (Huitt, 2007). The needs discussed throughout Maslow's theory can be viewed in the figure below.

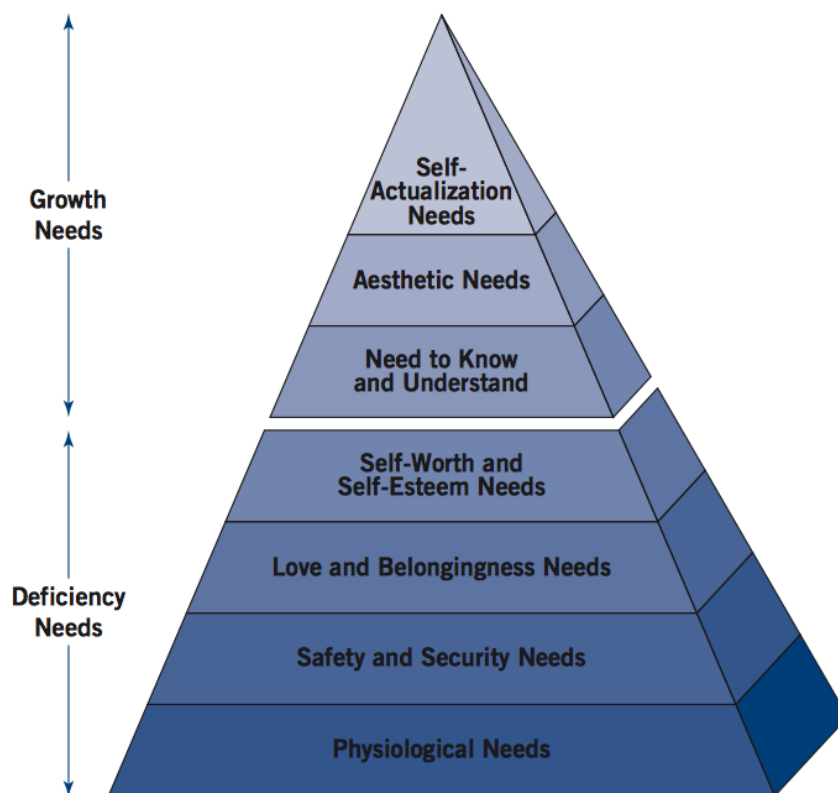


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Martin & Jumis, 2007)

It has been suggested that children who are experiencing homelessness have shortages in some of their deficiency needs (Focus Ireland, 2019). With deficiencies at these levels, it can be suggested that children's motivation to fulfil the growth needs, which are promoted in education (self-actualization, cognitive, self-transcendence), will be negatively impacted (Martin & Jumis, 2007). This idea has been affirmed by parents in an Irish context who have reported that whilst living in homelessness accommodation, their children's fundamental requirements for food, adequate rest and physical health was being compromised due to scarce financial resources, long journeys to and from school, transport costs, lack of appropriate food and preparation facilities and storage, inadequate facilities for sleep and personal hygiene (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). As a result and in line with Maslow's (1943, 1954) theory, the parents claimed that their children were suffering both mentally and physically; displaying irritability, exhaustion, low self-esteem and

feelings of social isolation – all of which impacted on the child’s school attendance at some point (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018).

Once a child’s school attendance is impacted by factors mentioned above, reduced engagement and participation in school life and learning can be the result (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). School can be a source of stability and routine for children who are experiencing homelessness, however it may be extremely challenging for a child and their parent(s) to ensure regular school attendance when in such a crisis (Tusla, n.d.). Families are under an immense amount of pressure whilst living in emergency accommodation, often being placed far away from their home community and support networks but wanting their children to remain in their original school, as a source of consistency for the child during the upheaval. This means that families may have to travel for a long period of time to and from school, often depending on expensive and sometimes unreliable public transport (Focus Ireland, 2019).

The child’s mental and physical health can also impact upon the child’s ability to attend school (Focus Ireland, 2019). Research has often highlighted benefits of good school attendance which includes positive impacts on both teaching and learning (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2014; Claes, Hooghe & Reeskens, 2009). There is also an established link between good school attendance, student engagement and continuity to leaving certificate (Smyth, 1999; McCoy *et al*, 2007; Byrne and Smyth, 2010). In contrast, research also acknowledges the risks associated with poor school attendance which include poor educational outcomes, less possibility of advancement to third level (McCoy, Darmody, Smyth & Dunne, 2007), weak peer and family relationships, engagement in anti-social behaviour (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990; Carroll, 2011) and additional pressure on the child as well as the teacher when key parts of the curriculum are missed by the child (Lupton, 2004; Wilson *et al*, 2008).

These challenges ultimately impact on equity in education for children who are experiencing homelessness. Consequently, teachers are in a position where they must implement additional supports to ensure that all of their students can benefit equally. These supports will now be discussed.

Possible supports

Teachers and other educators play an integral role in the life of a child in their class or school (Rosenthal & Lawson, 1964). They can fulfil a constant role in the life of a child experiencing homelessness (Focus Ireland, 2019). Gilligan (1998) highlights that

“School is argued to [be] a secure base from which to explore the self and the world, an integrator into community and culture, a gateway to adult opportunities and a resource for parents and communities. It is suggested that school can have a special supportive value for children experiencing adversity...”

Whilst it is recognised that teachers and educators cannot meet the many barriers faced by homeless children alone, there are supports, interventions and adjustments to practice which can be utilized when working with pupils who are experiencing homelessness to broaden their access to and achievement in education.

Literature has previously highlighted the importance of a positive connection between the school and the family, with the idea that without communication and joint participation in both settings, the child’s educational benefits may be hindered (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The OECD (1997) added to this concept by stating that parental involvement, particularly when facing socio-economic deprivation, is not just beneficial for the children’s school success – it is a crucial aspect of life-long learning. A programme that aims to promote a partnership between parents and teachers to enhance the child’s learning is the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme (DES, 2019). When working with children who are experiencing homelessness, HSCL

coordinators have a responsibility to coordinate a response to supporting homeless children by initiating an integrated approach which may include; arranging a place for the child in breakfast/lunch/homework clubs, arranging for a subsidy on the cost of school books, uniforms and school trips, raising awareness regarding the varied nature of laundry and cooking facilities in homeless accommodation and supporting the teacher to ensure that any work missed by the child due to attendance is revised (Tusla, n.d).

There is a mutually supportive and reciprocal relationship between a child's wellbeing and his/her ability to achieve academically (Hargreaves, Shirley, Wangia, Bacon & D'Angelo, 2018). In their role of the holistic development of the child (NCCA, 1999), schools must prioritise the promotion of children's mental health and well-being. To achieve this, the Department of Education and Skills developed the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (DES, 2018). The policy addresses risk factors that can have a negative impact on a child's well-being, including: absenteeism, school transitions and poor connection between family and school – all of which can be associated with homelessness (DES, 2018). Whilst the role of the teacher is paramount in promoting well-being amongst students (OECD, 2020), the framework requires the promotion of well-being in four key areas: school culture and environment, the curriculum, school policy and planning and relationships – all of which require a whole-school approach (DES, 2018). The DES aims to fully implement the framework across all mainstream schools by 2023 (DES, 2018), regardless of whether the school has a DEIS status or not.

Another support available to all schools are the guidelines for teachers and schools when working with a child who displays behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, which is provided by the Department of Education in conjunction with NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service). These guidelines, similar to the Wellbeing Policy (2018), highlight the need for a

continuum of support for children who have additional needs regarding their emotional well-being. This includes classroom, school and outside school support, depending on where the child falls on the continuum of milder needs to more complex needs (NEPS, 2007). This is detailed in the figure below.

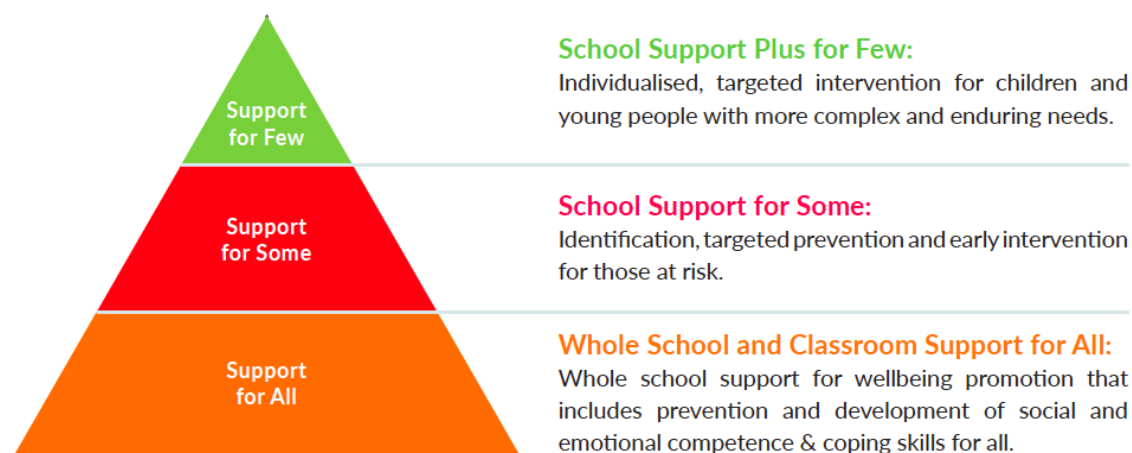


Figure 3: Continuum of Support for children with complex needs (DES, 2018).

Particular problems arise for parents and children who are experiencing homelessness because they are faced with a school system that is designed to cater for children who have a permanent home address (Daly, 1996). Irish policy reflects this with the Education Act 2000 which states that if a child is absent for 20 days of one academic year, the school has a legal obligation under the Act to refer into the Education Welfare Service (Education Welfare Act 2000). In such a case, the teacher may implement supports in the classroom to promote regular attendance, which can provide a useful counterbalance to the instability and uncertainties of living in inadequate temporary accommodation (Power, Whitty & Youdell, 1995). Whilst this can equal positive results, the teacher should take into account that some children's attendance may be compromised by circumstances beyond their control (Focus Ireland, 2019). It is also recommended that teachers

and other educators, eg. principals, should communicate with parents that whilst good timekeeping is preferred, it is more important for the child to be late and present, rather than not present at all (Focus Ireland, 2019).

Conclusion

The literature outlines the challenges that are facing children who are experiencing homelessness in both an Irish and international context. Supports that can be put in place to improve equity in education for homeless children is also made apparent. However, the majority of this literature comes from the perspective of researchers, parents, organizations or the children themselves. This research aims to gain an insight from the primary school teacher's perspective as they witness first-hand the experience of homeless children in the classroom. In the next chapter, the researcher will outline the methodologies used throughout the research study to gain an insight into the perspective of teachers and their experience of supporting children who are experiencing homelessness.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The research process is highly influenced by philosophical ideas and is conducted within a certain style and paradigm (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Research is conducted through the lens of a particular paradigm in an attempt to deliver an analysis of data that meets the aims of the research. This is referred to as research methodology.

The researcher has a responsibility to assert the research methods, which have been applied to the study, and the rationale behind them - due to the major influence that the methodology has on the research study and the findings it produces (Walsham, 1995). As a result of this, this chapter will detail the research methods used to understand from a teacher's perspective; supports that can be implemented in the classroom to combat the barriers of homelessness. It will also provide a rationale for the choice of methods. The design of the study will also be discussed as well as the chosen sample. This chapter will also include ethical issues and considerations that must be accounted for as well as limitations encountered throughout the research process.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves exploring and attempting to understand the meaning individuals take from certain issues in society (Creswell, 2009). Using this method, it is necessary to collect data within the participant's setting and build upon emerging themes whilst interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). Due to the nature of the research aim, it was deemed necessary to use the qualitative approach as it gave the researcher the opportunity to gain insight on teachers lived experience, attitude and opinions of homelessness in the classroom and the supports that can and have been utilised. The qualitative design supported the inductive

style of this research, allowing the researcher to listen to stories and sensitive information drawn upon by teachers involved (Creswell, 2009).

Phenomenological research

All research is carried out through the lens of a research paradigm. A paradigm is considered to be a basic set of beliefs which guide the actions of the researcher (Guba, 1990). To fulfil the aim of this research study, the phenomenological approach was utilised. A phenomenological study focuses on the lived experience of several individuals and the meanings which derive from these experiences (Creswell, 2009). The researcher focuses on individual experiences of a phenomenon and reduces them to a description which can be applied generally (Van Manen, 1990). In this case, the teacher's experience of homelessness is the phenomenon being studied. This is viewed from multiple perspectives (of 6 teachers working in different schools) in order to shed light on the phenomenon, using evidence.

Sample Selection

As this is a qualitative study in which the researcher aims to gain informed knowledge about homelessness in the classroom, it was necessary to use purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is useful in identifying and selecting information-rich cases that relate to the focus of the research (Patton, 2002). It involves identifying, selecting and recruiting individuals who have specialised knowledge or experience in an area which is related to the topic of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As this is a small scale study, six participants were interviewed. The principals of five different schools were initially contacted as the first step of voluntary response sampling – giving participants (teachers) the opportunity to make contact with the researcher. (See Appendix A & B). Due to a change in circumstances caused by school closures and Covid-19, the researcher resorted to snowball sampling to ensure she had access to enough

data for the study. This method relies on referrals from initially sampled participants to other possible respondents with the belief that they may have the experience and willingness to contribute to the study (Johnson, 2005). Thus, contact details for a final participant was accumulated through participant number five. It must be noted that the sample chosen was specifically selected due to their experience working with children who were experiencing homelessness. All of the experiences discussed occurred within a school with a DEIS status.

The researcher was aware of the difficulties that may arise in identifying a suitable sample of teachers who all had experience of working with children experiencing homelessness. For this reason, the researcher made contact with a number of DEIS schools which were located in areas of Dublin with a high level of homelessness. This impacts upon the data, as all experiences discussed were in the context of a DEIS school.

The DEIS (Delivering Equality in Schools) plan, which was originally launched in 2005 before being extended in 2017, was implemented to address the educational needs of children who are unable to appropriately benefit from education in schools due to social or economic disadvantage (DES, 2005; Education Act 1998). DEIS schools are identified through the use of census data as well as the HP Deprivation Index (Haase & Pratschke, 2017). Schools are then categorised into DEIS band 1, DEIS band 2 and DEIS rural, depending on their location and level of disadvantage (DES, 2017). Additional supports are then implemented in the school depending on their status:

Resources	DEIS band 1 schools	DEIS band 2 schools	DEIS rural schools
Reduced class sizes –20:1 at junior classes and 24:1 at senior classes.	✓	✗	✗
Allocation of Administrative Principal on lower enrolment and staffing figures than apply in primary schools generally	✓	✓	✗
Additional grant aid based on level of disadvantage.	✓	✓	✓
Enhanced rate of funding under the School Books Grant Scheme.	✓	✓	✓
Access to Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) services.	✓	✓	✗
Priority access to Schools Meals Programme.	✓	✓	✓
Access to range of supports under School Completion Programme.	✓	✓	✓
Access to literacy/numeracy support service to specific literacy/numeracy measures.	✓	✓	✓
Priority access to Centre for School Leadership.	✓	✓	✓
Expansion of NEPS provision in DEIS schools.	✓	✓	✓
Roll out of Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme and Friends Programme.	✓	✓	✓
Priority access to a range of professional development supports	✓	✓	✓

Figure 4: Supports provided under the DEIS scheme (DES, 2017).

At present, approximately 21% of Irish primary schools have a DEIS status (Byrne, 2019).

Therefore, the experiences of the teachers shared in this study are limited and cannot be generalised. This will be discussed further in the limitations section of this chapter.

Data Collection

The method of data collection chosen for this research study was research interviews. The term ‘interview’ refers to many forms of talk which involve the participants engaging in, asking and answering questions with the basic but critical interaction of the question-answer sequence (Roulston, 2010). Interviews can take place over telephone, by means of technology such as Zoom or face-to-face. For the purpose of this study, the original method chosen by the researcher was face-to-face interviews and two of these were conducted. However, due to unforeseen circumstances regarding Covid-19 and a nationwide lockdown, the researcher had to resort to

telephone interviews. All interviews were semi-structured in nature and the average time of the interviews was 17 minutes.

In preparation for the data collection process, the researcher conducted a pilot interview. A pilot interview can be described as a trial run that is conducted to pre-test the format of the interview and the tools which are used (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). This was useful as it allowed the researcher to determine difficult questions that didn't elicit much response, to modify the questions as needed, to determine the time scale of each interview and to practice interviewing techniques (Berg, 2001). Following the pilot interview, the researcher developed a list of predetermined questions for each individual participant to be asked in an order which was most appropriate from the researcher's perspective, whilst also allowing time for other questions and probes which were not predetermined (van Teijlingen, 2014). The predetermined questions as well as the interview schedule can be found in appendix D and E.

Data analysis

The researcher chose a theoretical thematic approach to data analysis for this research study. This required identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within the data in an attempt to minimally organise and describe it in rich detail, whilst being driven by the researcher's analytic interest in the area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved a 6 phase process:

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 5: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Evidence of the codes that were collated in phases 2 - 5 can be viewed in the appendices (appendix F) and the mapping exercise which occurred in the final phase can also be viewed here (appendix G).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics refers to the application of moral principles to prevent harm and instead; encourage good, respectful and fair behaviour towards others (Sieber, 1993). Ethical issues have become a growing concern for researchers in the past number of decades to protect participants who may suffer as a result of the research in which they take part (Flick, 2007). This research study is based on a topic which can be extremely sensitive and this contributed to the researcher's decision to base it on the teacher's perspective. Whilst this makes the research more ethically sound, it does limit the research as the voice of the children and their families who are experiencing homelessness couldn't be included.

The Ethics in Research Policy for Marino Institute of Education were followed for this research (MERC, 2015). The Institute is committed to the well-being, protection and safety of participants whilst upholding a responsibility to conduct rigorous and academic research (MERC, 2015).

Responsibility to the participants was ensured by securing informed consent. This was secured through the distribution of letters seeking consent to the schools, followed by the distribution of letters to the individual participants, in this case; primary school teachers. These can be found in the appendices. Responsibility to the participants is ensured by maintaining complete confidentiality. This has been achieved by non-disclosing the exact setting or location of each school, the name of each participant, or detailed experiences which may reveal the identity of either the participant, their workplace or any personal information shared about their students and their families. The participants were also granted the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without consequence (BERA, 2011).

Limitations of the study

It is important to recognise that all research projects have limitations (Denscombe, 2014). The four main limitations faced by the researcher were; time restrictions – due to the fixed submission date provided by the college, size –due to the ability of the researcher to conduct only a small number of interviews in one area of the country. Thirdly, the study was limited due to ethical implications which made it impossible to interview children who are or have previously experienced homelessness, therefore the research is very much focused on the teacher's perspective of homelessness. Finally, all of the teachers who participated worked in a DEIS band school. Whilst homelessness is extremely prevalent in DEIS schools, it also exists in schools that are non-DEIS. According to statistics in April 2019, 27% of primary schools were catering for children who were experiencing homelessness (Byrne, 2019). With 21% of primary schools being DEIS, it is deducted that there are children experiencing homelessness who do not have access to the schools mentioned in this study and therefore, don't benefit from the supports

discussed, thus further confirming that the findings of the study cannot be generalised for a larger population than those who participated in the study.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the researcher has recognised the importance of the methodology behind this study. Thus, the methodology and the rationale behind it has been outlined. It is clear that the methods used throughout this qualitative study are rooted in phenomenology. The main form of data collection was semi-structured interviews which were then analysed through a theoretical thematic approach. The researcher also considered ethical issues as well as limitations of the study. In the following chapter, an analysis of the data collected will be documented.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussions

Introduction

This chapter will set out the findings from six semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers with varying degrees of experience in working with children experiencing homelessness which were conducted, analysed and coded using the thematic analysis. The key themes which emerged from the data are detailed in figure 4.

Complexity of homelessness	- Unemployment - Domestic violence - SEN - Drug abuse - Single parent family - Defining homelessness
Barriers	- Physical - Mental health - Emotional - Academic
Supports	- Whole school supports: SEN supports - Teacher-led supports
Training	- Experienced training - Staff support - Possible training

Figure 6: Emerging themes from the research data and analysis.

Through discussing these themes, this chapter will show the variety in supports which are offered to students experiencing homelessness to combat the barriers which are often associated with the phenomenon. It will highlight that the majority of these supports are currently implemented under the DEIS scheme and therefore may not be available to all children. The chapter will also discuss the importance of a whole school approach to supporting children who

are experiencing homelessness and the vitality of supportive colleagues. To maintain anonymity, each participant will be referred to as Teacher A – F throughout this chapter.

Homelessness: A complex issue

The first theme which emerged from the data is the complex nature of homelessness and the factors which often co-exist with it which can ultimately impact upon a child's education. When discussing homelessness, it is important to recognise that it is not a unified experience. There are distinct ways in which children and families experience homelessness, and in how they disclose this experience to others.

It emerged from the data that homelessness is often accompanied by other complex societal challenges. These include; unemployment, domestic violence, special educational needs, substance abuse and parental separation. Teacher D recalled her experiencing of working with a child with multiple other issues as well:

I mean she wasn't from the most structured of backgrounds, as far as I'm aware even before the whole domestic violence situation, they had moved houses multiple times. There was a history of drug abuse on the mother and father's part so I don't think it was a very stable environment.

Teacher E mentioned that children experiencing homeless were often coming from a single-parent family which led to them “constantly moving from different types of accommodation” and “experiencing a lot of chopping and changing as it was just the two of them.” As well as this, Teacher F and Teacher D both stated that not only is homelessness “in itself an additional need”, children who are experiencing homelessness often have “learning difficulties” which need to be supported also. The social interactions and constructions which the teachers mentioned as often being related to homelessness make it a difficult task for the teacher to implement supports independently (Jahiel, 1992). The continuum of support which is recommended by the Wellbeing Policy (2019) as well as the NEPS guidelines (2007) may be useful here. This would encourage a

whole school approach with supports implemented within the classroom, around the school, as well as outside of the school, depending on the child's complexity of need (NEPS, 2007).

The additional challenges which often accompany homelessness such as domestic violence, drug abuse and family structure, contribute to the complexity of the phenomenon. The data shows that teachers acknowledge these additional challenges as factors which must be considered when supporting children who are homeless in the classroom to improve educational equity.

Barriers as a result of homelessness

The class teacher is often in a position where they can visibly see the effects of homelessness on the pupil and his/her ability to fully engage with and benefit from learning and school life as a whole (INTO, 2017). This was evident in the data with each teacher referring to a number of barriers which they have witnessed as preventing children who are homeless from engaging with education at the same level as their peers.

A number of physical barriers were mentioned by the participants as having a negative impact on a child's ability to fully engage with their learning on a daily basis. Teacher A and F both discussed longer commutes which according to Focus Ireland (2019) can result in children arriving to school after a long journey, unprepared to learn, or sometimes not arriving at all:

They're up early every morning to travel to school. I have a child in my class now and they lost their house and for the first couple of months she was getting up earlier to travel to school, and she was really upset then and really unsettled.

This data shows the impact which a longer school commute can have on a child's emotional well-being, thus forming an additional barrier for the child to benefit from schooling. Absenteeism and school transitions are discussed in the Well-being Policy (DES, 2018) as being critical areas which need to be addressed through a whole school approach in order to improve children's well-being.

Another physical barrier witnessed by the teachers was lethargy. Five out of the six participants mentioned this as an ongoing factor which can negatively impact on the education of a child who is experiencing homelessness.

I noticed him being exhausted. Now whether that was from worry, from not sleeping as much, from having to travel longer distances to and from school or maybe just the environment of homelessness. You're in a small room and you don't have a place to do your homework, you don't even have the capacity to go outside and get some fresh air without an adult.

This demonstrates how difficult it is to identify the impact of homelessness, when it is interwoven with other factors that affect a child's lived experience. Lethargy can have a direct impact on the child's ability to engage in his/her learning:

They'd often go to bed late because they have other people in the room or they would wake frequently through the night so it definitely affected their learning that way and their concentration.

Other unfulfilled basic needs were discussed by the teachers as having a negative effect on a child's ability to learn. Viewing this through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954), it can be suggested that children's deficiency needs such as nutrition, personal hygiene and security must be fulfilled before he/she can be motivated to fulfil the growth needs which the curriculum aims to develop (NCCA, 1999). Teacher F highlighted the issue of nutrition and "trying to make sure the children are adequately fed but also physical stuff like clothes, uniform maybe." Nutrition and personal hygiene (eg. clean uniform) are both fundamental needs which all five out of six participants commented on as being something which they felt they needed to be on the lookout for when facilitating a child experiencing homelessness. Only when these basic needs are fulfilled, would the teacher be able to focus on the child's learning.

Mental health was another prominent theme highlighted by all six participants. This is in line with the findings of the study: Homelessness: An Unhealthy State (O'Reilly et al., 2015) which

recorded 53% of their sample as displaying emotional and mental health difficulties as a result of homelessness which then impacted upon their ability to engage in normal every day activities, such as school and learning. Teacher B discussed how “mood, in [his/her] opinion is a huge one because it really affects [the children’s] learning. If a child is not having a good day, they’re going to struggle to engage with anything – even play.” Teacher A suggested that children’s mood and their mental health are being compromised because they are “taking on the worries of their parents not having jobs or trying to find accommodation”. As a result, “it’s not their priority to do homework or other schools related things” and their learning is affected.

Self-esteem was an aspect of well-being which Teacher F felt also acts as a barrier for children experiencing homelessness. A lack of self-esteem can have a negative impact on a child’s attendance and thus, can lead to further implications for the child’s learning (Scanlon & McKenna, 2018). In this case, the teacher felt that the children’s “self-esteem was extremely lowered and diminished because a number of them were embarrassed by the fact that they were homeless.” Some children appeared to feel “disempowered because they couldn’t do anything about [being homeless] and there was a lot of anxiety built up around that”. The complex challenges related to homelessness impact upon the child’s education equity due to the effects which it can have on the child’s mental health and well-being. When a child is experiencing poor mental health, he/she is unprepared to learn and, as a result, may be subjected to further academic barriers which will now be discussed.

All participants acknowledged that children who are facing homelessness must overcome barriers to achieve academically (Tobin, 2016). Research continuously acknowledges a gap in test scores and grades between children experiencing homelessness and those children who are not (Dworsky, 2008; National Centre on Family Homelessness, 2009; Robertson, 1992; Rubin et al.,

1996). Four of the teachers expressed concern regarding children's attendance and punctuality as "a major barrier which is affecting their learning" due to its tendency to decline as a result of homelessness:

Even turning up late because its taking them that bit longer to get to school. You might think "oh they've only missed 15/20 minutes of the lesson" but that time could be your direct teaching of the lesson.

Teacher C shared a different experience, expressing her opinion that a child's attendance may not always be negatively impacted, due an experience with a family who "did really well. They always made sure [the children] were in school," showing a determination to ensure some sort of stability and routine for the child (Tusla, n.d.). This might have had a positive outcome for the child's academic achievement which didn't change because "there was structure and a really good routine" maintained. This opinion was also shared by Teacher E who taught a child who was experiencing homelessness whose academic achievement wasn't negatively impacted by the fact that he was experiencing homelessness. "He seemed ok in his written work, I wouldn't have noticed anything particularly concerning in that regard."

It has emerged from the data that barriers such as poor mental health and well-being, low self-esteem and unfulfilled basic needs have the potential to produce additional challenges for academic achievement due to their impact on a child's mood in school as well as school attendance. However, this is not always the case. Through maintaining a structured routine, parents have the power to reduce the impact of homelessness on their children's education. This can be a difficult task in itself though, once again due to the complexity of homelessness and the additional challenges which the family may be facing.

Supports to improve equity in education for homeless children

The main aim of this research study was to explore the different supports that teachers can offer which can help to alleviate any negative impact which homelessness may have on a child's education. From analysing the data, these supports can be categorised into whole school supports and teacher-led supports.

Before discussing interventions which schools have put in place, it is important to recognise that all participants mentioned that before this is possible, a good relationship between the home and the school must be formed to ascertain what supports may be most appropriate and effective. The Home School Liaison officer was consistently mentioned as being the main source of information for the teacher regarding the children's home situation and it would typically be him/her that would inform the teacher that the child was experiencing homelessness. Teacher F highlighted that the service "is very important and a fantastic service when working with children who are homeless [but] not every school has that" because as stated in figure 3, the HSCL scheme is only available to children who attend a DEIS school.

Dependence upon the Home School Liaison services is encouraged by Tusla (n.d.) due to the fact that the basis of HSCL scheme is to build bonds of trust and develop relationships with families in need, and these relationships then act as groundwork for implementing further supports and interventions. In Teacher F's case, these interventions involved "the HSCL teacher arrang[ing] cookery classes and teaching [homeless parents] certain skills so then they were able to bring food home for their kids." A washing machine was also installed "and parents were allowed to come in and use [it] during the day." However, despite the efforts of HSCL teachers in developing supportive relationships between home and the school, Teacher A highlighted that some parents find it difficult to accept the offer of help:

There was a woman who had a young child in a buggy and her child in school and they have to be out of emergency accommodation during the day so she was just strolling around [the local area] and when the HSCL offered for her to come in, she had [food] and was told “come in, use the kitchen whenever you need to” and again she was taken aback by the generosity but also a bit embarrassed that she had to go to her child’s school to be able to cook food for her children.

As well as basic needs, the teachers discussed various services offered by the school to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children experiencing homelessness. One of the participants who was a senior staff member in her school discussed a morning routine which was implemented in her school:

Every morning the principal took one side of the school and I took the other. The idea was to be a presence in the morning for the children that were there. You’d then become aware if any of them were particularly stressed going in and try to see how they were feeling that day.

Children experiencing homelessness may experience an improvement in their mental health and well-being from a consistent routine such as the one mentioned above as it adds to their feeling of school as a safe and secure base in a life of adversity (Gilligan, 1998).

By attempting to cater to the family’s basic needs, the school is attempting to facilitate the child’s development of his/her growth needs. Once the child’s basic needs are met, eg. they have food and improved personal hygiene from the use of the school kitchen, their motivation will move from fulfilling their deficiency needs to fulfilling their growth needs, which is the ultimate aim of formal education (Huitt, 2007). Not only does this data highlight the importance of supporting the child’s basic needs, it also shows the significance of the whole school approach. The responsibility to support the child is not placed upon the teacher alone, there are other members of staff and school leadership involved in addressing specific needs of homeless families.

The data showed that SEN staff also have a major part to play in supporting homeless children. The SEN staff involved include resource teachers, special needs assistants (SNAs) and pastoral care teachers. The occasional interaction with outside agencies such as Barnardos was also mentioned by Teacher F, once again supporting the idea that a continuum of support which includes classroom, school and outside school interventions may be beneficial (NEPS, 2007).

Three of the six participants worked in a school which had a 'nurture room.' The nurture room is an intervention for vulnerable children which focuses on the importance of modelling functional and positive adult relationships (Davies, 2011) and the need to create a balance between externalising and internalising behaviours. Teacher E added to the researcher's understanding of the nurture room when discussing a child she had taught previously:

He was going out to a place called the 'nurture room', basically where a qualified teacher who had specific training for working with kids experiencing trauma would work with them in art and play therapy.

Four of the participants also mentioned the involvement of an SNA when working with children experiencing homelessness. This is something which the literature continuously fails to acknowledge. However the teachers mentioned how helpful it can be to have an SNA involved:

This is a need and many of these children have a lot of additional needs so if they could all have somebody [an SNA] that could be available to take the child out for some time to build up a relationship or even help with some homework. That's extremely useful and a great extra support in the class.

Support teachers were also mentioned as being actively involved with children experiencing homelessness. Research previously acknowledged a lack of appropriate emotional therapeutic supports available for children experiencing life-altering crises such as homelessness and there is no legislation or literature which supports the idea that a child experiencing homelessness is entitled to resource hours because of their home situation (Murphy, McKenna & Downes, 2018).

However, Teacher F suggested that homeless children may be offered additional resource hours because:

We're not only dealing with the academic needs of the child. We would also be dealing with the pastoral care and the social needs of the children so that's how they would become involved with them.

Once again, the importance of the whole school approach promoted by the Wellbeing Statement (DES, 2018) is apparent. Whilst homelessness in itself might not qualify as a need which should be addressed through SEN services, the complexity of needs relating to homelessness mean a whole school approach which includes the intervention of specialised teachers is sometimes necessary.

The teachers in this study mentioned a number of interventions which they have put in place in the classroom to help alleviate the negative impact of homelessness on their students. Firstly, all participants agreed that the most important thing they could for the child, was to be considerate of the child's situation and in doing so this can help support the child's mental health and wellbeing. For example Teacher A mentioned how she thinks "the curriculum obviously needs to be covered but it's about the way you're talking to the children about certain things to not upset them or highlight the fact that their homeless." This was mentioned by a number of the teachers who specified the topic of 'Homes' in SESE as being something which can trigger a child's emotional response. Teacher C mentioned how she didn't feel entirely comfortable covering that topic in the class, however she ensured that when she did, "we just had to emphasise that hotels can also be a home and that kind of thing." Teacher A also highlighted that as a teacher, you must be conscious that a child experiencing homelessness "could come in today without his reading book or a pencil" but you have to acknowledge that "the biggest achievement is that they've gotten themselves to school today." However, does this insinuate that teachers should have lower

expectations of all children experiencing homelessness? Teacher B acknowledged that whilst “them getting to school is a massive achievement, just because they are homeless, you can’t not expect them to do their work because that’s not realistic for them either.”

Focus Ireland (2019) suggests however, that teachers may struggle in prioritizing the educational needs of students and assessing them at the same level as their peers, when their basic needs are not being met.

Regarding academic support, a number of the teachers mentioned the importance of differentiation in the classroom for a child who is experiencing homelessness:

I suppose the main thing is to be aware that different children have different needs and sometimes what you see in terms of behaviour or if their work isn’t up to scratch, you know there’s always a reason.

As a way of catering to the different needs of the children, class teachers would often “differentiate their homework” allowing them to “present their homework in a different matter to other children.”

Further to this, teacher F discussed the need for differentiated reward systems:

The children can gain stamps during the day to win a prize throughout the year. One of the stamps is for being on time and one is for attendance but children who are homeless and in difficult situations wouldn’t lose out because that’s out of their control.

This is mirrored in the literature which states that children who are experiencing homelessness are facing a school system which caters for those in a permanent home address (Daly, 1996), and therefore it’s up to the teacher to take into account that some children’s attendance and punctuality may be compromised by circumstances beyond their control (Focus Ireland, 2019). As well as differentiated reward systems, one of the teachers suggested the use of consistent review and recap in the classroom so “if a child was to miss a lot of days of school due to homelessness, they can and you can be made aware of what needs to be done and what needs to be covered.”

Whilst homelessness presents a range of barriers for children in accessing an equal education to their peers, it is clear from the data that there are supports consistently being put in place to help minimise the negative effect that such a home life can have on the child in the classroom and school. The role of the teacher, the role of support staff and a whole school approach to support emerges from the data as being the best approach to improve equity in education for children with complex needs relating to homelessness

Training and teacher support

As previously mentioned, teachers are in a position whereby they have the ability to be a constant in a child's life (Focus Ireland, 2019). As shown, a number of interventions are being implemented by teachers to support children who are experiencing homelessness. The researcher considered it important to enquire about any specific training which is targeted for teachers who are working with children experiencing homelessness, which has contributed to their knowledge and practice in such circumstances.

All of the participants confirmed that despite their experiences of working with children facing homelessness, they had not received any type of formal training. This may be a contributor to a general feeling of helplessness in the teaching community (Focus Ireland, 2019). Teacher B stated:

Just when you asked me if I got any training and we didn't. But I think that might be something that can show people how to teach in those circumstances and how to make the children as comfortable as possible.

Teacher F mentioned that although she had not undertaken any training specific to teaching children experiencing homelessness, she did train in mindfulness and the Friends for Life Programme (NBSS, 2011) and she found this useful when working with children who were victims to the homelessness crisis. This suggests that whilst there may be an absence of targeted training

for working with homeless children, there are CPD courses available which aim to benefit all children, but may be of specific benefit for children facing adverse circumstances such as homelessness.

The majority of the participants mentioned that although they did not receive any targeted training, “the greatest support you could really have are the members of staff of the school you are joining.” Both Teacher D and teacher F reported being “very well supported by the principal and the vice-principal, and some of the SEN teachers [who] were absolutely amazing.” Teacher C had a very different experience in her school as not only did she not “actually get any additional training” she also didn’t get any “support at all”, however she went on to mention that she “actually doesn’t even know what would be beneficial because all cases are so different.” Therefore it may be suggested that in cases with such complex needs which are influenced by a variety of societal factors, the support of your colleagues may be beneficial to an extent but “learning as you go” is essential (Jahiel, 1992).

Conclusion

This research has found that teachers are aware of the many barriers that homeless children are facing which need to be supported in order to improve equity in education. Whilst the role of the class teacher is evidently important, from this research it can be concluded the best approach to supporting children experiencing the barriers to education associated with homelessness is a whole school approach which may require interventions by support staff, SEN staff and school management as well as the class teacher.

It is also clear from the research that there is a disparity between DEIS schools and non-DEIS schools. This is made evident due to the reliance on the HSCL service in the participants’ schools which is not available to non-DEIS schools. In addition, the DEIS plan increases the supply

of services such as nurture rooms and drama/play therapy – once again widening the gap in support between the different types of schools.

Chapter 5: Conclusion & recommendations

Introduction

As the homeless population in Ireland continues to grow, the researcher wished to gain an insight into the teacher's experience of homelessness in the classroom, and supports which are available to alleviate the impact of it on education equity. The researcher hoped that in doing so, she would add to her knowledge of the complex issue and discover methodologies which will add to her future practice as a primary school teacher. This chapter presents final conclusions based on the research findings. The researcher will provide recommendations for further research as well as recommendations for further interventions which could be implemented in the school setting. Finally, the researcher will personally reflect on the research process as a whole and on the significance of the findings for practice.

Purpose of the study

When conducting this research study, the researcher aimed to explore homelessness in the classroom and the supports which can be utilised to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective. To achieve this aim, it was essential to identify:

1. The barriers to education for children who are experiencing homelessness.
2. The supports which can be made available to combat those barriers.
3. How teachers are supported/trained to work with children experiencing homelessness.

Based on the findings from participants presented in chapter 4, it was discovered that common barriers to education associated with homelessness are physical, academic and emotional based. Considering homelessness as a barrier to learning has been well documented (OECD, 2020), however this research found that through direct experience of working with the children, teachers encounter different barriers for different children depending on complex societal factors such as the child's family status, employment, family relationships etc.

The data shows that there are a multitude of supports available to children experiencing homelessness. This support is provided on a continuum and depending on the child's individual needs. They may receive support in the classroom from the mainstream teacher, SEN support from an SNA, support teacher or pastoral care teacher, or from the school as a whole. Regardless of where the support comes from, teachers concur that a whole school approach works best when supporting children who are homeless to achieve the overall goal of improving the child's access to education.

Whilst teachers and school staff have become experienced in supporting children who are living with homelessness, the data highlights a lack of specific training for working with children faced with homelessness. Instead, teachers are benefitting from the support of other teachers and learning as they go – which some might suggest is beneficial due to the complexity of each individual child's needs.

Implications for policy and practice

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher acknowledged a number of consistencies which she feels must be mentioned as they have significant implications for policy and practice.

Firstly, as mentioned in chapter 3, data were gathered from six participants who all have experience teaching children who are homeless, in a DEIS school setting. The DEIS status of the schools in question meant that a lot of additional supports were made available through the DEIS scheme and therefore would not be available in other mainstream primary schools, eg. the HSCL service, additional grant aid which allows for a lower student:staff ratio and increased NEPS services to support children who may have additional complex needs which need to be supported.

Therefore, the researcher would argue that DEIS schools are better equipped to facilitate children who have complex needs, including those which stem from homelessness.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that in the midst of a major homelessness crisis in the country, it should be essential for all mainstream primary school teachers to be provided with continuous professional development by the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers) regarding homelessness to inform them of the possible barriers it can produce, the supports which they can put in place and outside agencies which they could possibly refer parents to for additional support outside of the school.

It is also recommended that schools who have a high population of children experiencing homelessness develop a support group for staff to allow them to share their experiences and help each other to improve upon practice whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the parents and children. This would contribute to the whole school approach of tackling equity in education for homeless children.

Thirdly, a continuum of support seems to be the most beneficial when working with children who are experiencing homelessness. This includes support within the classroom, additional SEN support and school-led support. The school should also communicate with outside agencies such as Barnardos where appropriate for additional guidance, knowledge and support.

The researcher wanted to focus on the mainstream primary school teacher's perspective of homelessness as she hoped that this would improve her own practice in the future. However, from carrying out the study, it is very clear that there are other school staff who may have a lot more knowledge of the ongoing situation in schools regarding homelessness, specifically the home school community liaison teacher (HSCL). Therefore, further research on the impact of

homelessness on a child's education and how to support those children should incorporate the perspective of the HSCL. it might be an area of further research to explore the impact of homelessness on a child's education from the HSCL's perspective.

As already mentioned, all participants of this research study were teachers in a DEIS school. It is recommended that comparative research be undertaken in a non-DEIS school with teachers who have taught children in the same situation, if possible. This would contribute to educator's knowledge of homelessness in the classroom and the challenges faced by children from a different context, children from a school who are not given the same opportunity for equality to their peers. In addition to this, the researcher believes it is crucial for the Central Statistics Office to collect data regarding the number of homeless children who are attending a school that does not have a DEIS status. This would help to determine whether children are being adequately supported when facing the adversity of homelessness.

Final conclusion and reflection

The overall aim of this research study to explore homelessness in the classroom and supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective has been achieved. The participants were able to identify a number of barriers which coincided with the literature and outline supports both formal and informal to combat those barriers. The participants also discussed how they acquired their knowledge they used to inform the provided supports and highlighted a need for official continuous professional development on the concept of homelessness.

Throughout the research process, it was surprising to see the figures of homelessness in Ireland rise dramatically month after month. This added to the researcher's motivation to raise awareness about the issue we are facing as a society. When the school closures occurred due to the government's emergency response to Covid-19, not only did the researcher have to adjust her

research methodology, she found it increasingly more distressing to analyse the data with the understanding that children were no longer in receipt of the same support from schools. However, this contributed to many new research skills which I have acquired and hope to utilise in future academic study. It was also refreshing to meet participants who were passionate about their work and so forthcoming to discuss their experiences. The researcher was provided with an in depth perspective of the challenging, yet critical role of the primary school teacher in the face of adversity.

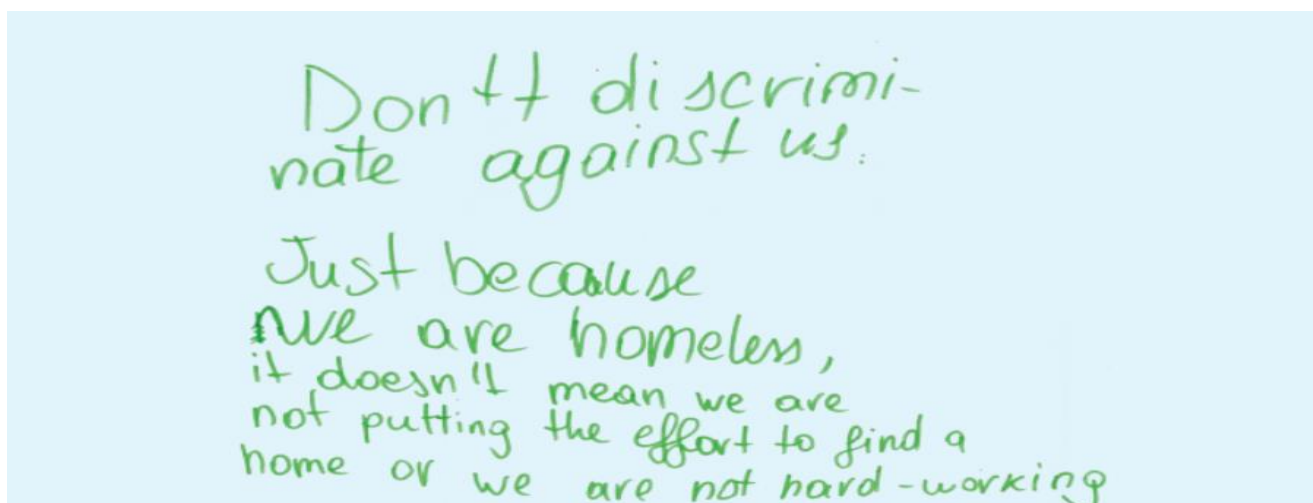


Figure 7: Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs (Ombudsman for Children, 2019).

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Appendix A



Research Study

Information sheet

Exploring homelessness in the classroom: Supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

Dear principal,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a PME student in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I am completing a research study as part of my Professional Master of Education Programme in Primary Teaching under the supervision of [REDACTED]

All data will be collected anonymously which means that neither you, your school nor any of the participants will be identified in the study. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party, with the exception of my dissertation supervisor. A pseudonym will be assigned to all to maintain anonymity throughout.

If you have experience supporting homeless children in your school, I would like to invite the teachers in your school to participate in an interview. I would greatly appreciate if you could pass on the attached information letter and consent form to any teacher who you know has taught children experiencing homelessness. I am happy to speak to you more about my research in person or over the phone, my mobile number is [REDACTED]

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix B



Research Study

Information sheet

Exploring homelessness in the classroom: Supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

Dear Participant,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a PME student in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I am completing a research study as part of my Professional Master of Education Programme in Primary Teaching under the supervision of [REDACTED]

This study is designed to explore the barriers to education facing homeless children in Ireland and to identify what kind of support can be offered to these children by educators. If you have experience supporting a homeless child in your class or school, I would like to invite you to participate in a short 30-45mins interview.

All data will be collected anonymously which means that neither you, your school nor any of the participants will be identified in the study. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party, with the exception of my dissertation supervisor. A pseudonym will be assigned to all to maintain anonymity throughout.

I am hoping that this study will positively contribute to our understanding of the educational experience of homeless children and families at a time when there is unprecedented growth in numbers. According to recent statistics, there are now over 10,000 people experiencing homelessness in Ireland, with 4,000 of these being children. This crisis has resulted in childhood education settings, such as primary schools, facilitating children who are experiencing the phenomenon and teachers/principals are often in a position where they are witnesses to the impact which homelessness and living in temporary accommodation can have on a student's ability to engage and participate fully in education and school life in general.

If at any time you have any queries/issues with regard to this study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor:

PME2 Student: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: [REDACTED]

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix C

Consent Form

I have read and understood the Information letter, and understand what the study is about. I also understand that:

- My participation involves an interview of approx. 30 minutes
- My involvement in this research is voluntary
- I may withdraw without giving a reason at any time, and without consequence
- ID codes will be applied to the research data so that I, my school or organisation cannot be identified by anybody other than the researcher
- My interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher
- I will not receive any financial incentive for taking part in the study
- Should any information resulting from the research be used for presentations or reports, all identifying information will be changed to maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- I understand that under freedom of information Act I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix D

Research Study: [REDACTED]

Exploring homelessness in the classroom: Supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

What made you want to work in the education sector/be a teacher/principal etc.?

Sub-questions/Objectives	Interview questions
What are the most prevalent barriers to education facing children experiencing homelessness?	- As a teacher, can you tell me about any experience you have of working with children who are/were experiencing homelessness. - How did you find out that the child was homeless? - Do you think the child/children's learning was affected by their home situation? - Was there anything different about that child's mental health/motivation to learn/attitude towards school in comparison to his/her peers?
What supports are available for these children in the classroom and school?	- Did you find yourself doing anything differently for that child in the classroom? Was there any supports/differentiation put in place? - Is there any other supports offered to the child/their parents to help alleviate the challenges they are facing in regards to education?
How does the teacher adjust his/her practice to accommodate children experiencing homelessness?	- Did you receive any additional training that contributed to your knowledge of how to support the child? - What supports do you think should or could be provided to you as a teacher/the school in general?

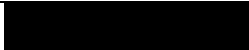
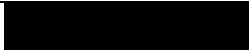
Is there anything further you would like to add that we have not yet covered in our discussion?

Appendix E

Research Study

Interview Schedule

Exploring homelessness in the classroom: Supports to improve equity in education, from a teacher's perspective.

Participant	Date/Time	Location
A	02.03.2020/16:00	
B	02.03.2020/16:45	
C	26.03.2020/13:00	Over the phone
D	26.03.2020/18:00	Over the phone
E	30.03.2020/13:00	Over the phone

F	04.04.2020/15:00	Over the phone
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Appendix F

Theme Name.no.	Sub-theme	Sub-sub theme	Part. 1 JM	Part. 2 MM	Part. 3 FB	Part. 4 AL	Part. 5 MS	Part. 6 SH
1. Supports	School level	Link between home and school	L21-22 L83-84			L445-457	L610-611	L723-725 L785-788 L797-799
		Difference in DEIS schools	L20-21 L76-77 L82	L188-190		L399-401	L601-603	L708-709 L781-785 L789-792
		Basic needs	L89-98	L190-194	L314-319	L478-483	L612-615	L793-797 L801-810 L813-816 L821-827
		Mental health						L845-853 L908-911
	Class level	SEN support	L63-67 L80-81	L178-180 L188-190		L426-429	L603-606	L719-723 L737-744 L911-917
	Teacher level	Difference in age	L43-50		L275-276 L283-287		L684-690	
		Awareness	L63-64 L67-71 L111-114	L175-177 L205-208	L326-327	L498-500	L567-568 L574-580	L853-859 L893-896
		Academic	L71	L211-215	L309-314	L496-497		L799-801 L841-844 L896-901 L932-934
		Prioritising	L77-79					
		Routine/Structure		L208-209	L265-266			L901-908
		Mental health		L215-217 L217-220			L581-582	L839-841 L926-927
Barriers	Physical	Commuting	L29-31					L771-774
		Lethargy	L35	L161-165		L457-461	L589-590 L666-671	L759-762
		Basic needs			L269-270			L928-930 L930-932
	Emotional	Unsettled	L32-34 L131-132					
		Pride	L84-88 L89-98					L832-834
		Social skills				L426 L429-433		
	Mental health		L35-38					

		Motivation/Priorities	L50-53 L120-122	L168-169 L205			L591-593 L593-595	
		Mood		L156-160 L227-229		L533-536		
		Self-esteem		L165-168	L276-280 L294-299 L376-380		L675-679	L762-767 L767-771
		Sense of security				L413 L524-528	L558-562 L661-662 L663-665	L939-941
	Academic	Attendance	L119-120	L225-227	L356-357			L927-928
		Punctuality	L122-125					L749-750
		Resources		L180-183				L753-757 L757-759 L917-920
		Achievement			L264-266 L368-369		L619-621	
		Homework			L266-269			L752
3. Homelessness: A complex issue	Unemployment		L35-38					
	Domestic violence					L391-392		
	SEN					L414-420		L736-737 L911-917
	Drug abuse					L442-446		
	Single parent family						L559-562	
	Defining homelessness							L710-717
4. Training	Experienced training		L103-106	L200	L332-336		L631-638	L835-839 L873-876 L892-893 L939-941
		Learning as you go			L341-345			
	Staff support		L103-104 L130		L332-336	L401-404 L489-493	L649-652	L884-886
	Possible training			L234-241	L332-336	L513-515 L515-518	L652-656	L891-892 L917-920

Appendix G

Data Analysis: Mapping

Maroon: Complexity of homelessness

Red: Types of homelessness

Orange: Achievement

Light green: Lethargy

Dark green: Routine & mental health

Light blue: Self-esteem

Dark blue: motivation

Purple: Basic needs

Pink: Sense of security

Aqua: attendance

Lime green: Structure

Pink highlight: Commute

Green highlight: Recapping

Blue highlight: Awareness

Red highlight: Training

Maroon: emotional support

Navy highlight: continuum

Green highlight: DEIS Supports

Grey highlight: Differentiation

Purple highlight: Punctuality

It has been suggested that children who are experiencing homelessness have deficits in some of their deficiency needs (Focus Ireland, 2019). Physiological needs which are the very foundation of motivation according to Maslow (1954), include shelter. Families who are considered homeless, do not have the means to provide suitable accommodation (or shelter) for themselves, and therefore this need is not being fulfilled (Housing Act 1988). This can also impact upon an individual's sense of security and therefore another critical need is facing deficiency (Martin & Jumis, 2007). With deficiencies at these levels of need, it can be suggested that children's motivation to fulfill growth needs which are promoted in education (self-actualization, cognitive, self-transcendence) will be negatively impacted and the child will not prioritize these (Martin & Jumis, 2007). This idea has been affirmed by parents in an

