

RE-STORYING THE SELF: A CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF WOMEN REBUILDING IDENTITIES AFTER HOMELESSNESS

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INTRODUCTION

OECD (2024) estimates that over 2.2 million people experience homelessness in a given year. Homeless people face multiple adversities, ranging from mental health disorders to a lack of basic needs (Rakus and Singleton-Jackson, 2024). However, despite being more vulnerable to the threats posed by homelessness, women are underrepresented and under-researched while being less prone to apply for or make use of formal support services (Lenta et al., 2025; Rakus and Singleton-Jackson, 2024).

Women tend to avoid 'literal homelessness' using informal support networks, such as 'sofa-surfing', to delay entering the formal system, however, studies show that it ends up being more harmful in the long term (McGrath et al. 2023). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the main causes of homelessness in women, and it persists within both the informal and formal support networks (McGrath et al., 2023; Rakus and Singleton-Jackson, 2024). Studies centered around Housing First have shown how intervention successfully managed to help with housing stability, however, these same studies also show that it lacks any meaningful impact regarding community integration and mental health (Bassi et al., 2020).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the poems and interviews where the women manage to overcome the power imbalance that they have experienced there is a more positive tone and outlook towards the future. In those where the power imbalance is never fixed and thus their sense of agency of their own lives is low, the predominant tone is negative. It was identified how the storytelling of these women could fit either restitution or chaos narratives (Frank, 2013), suggesting how homelessness can have lasting effects even if stable housing is achieved. In this sense, one of the lasting effects might be the unwillingness or the struggle to integrate into their community, as many of the interviewees expressed. Not only does this result in isolated individuals but it is also a sign of instability, higher risk of relapsing into substance abuse and homelessness as a whole.

We can also see how the fear can persist even when they are far removed from the perpetrator, and these lasting scars will affect how they relate with other people. The women interviewed often expressed being overwhelmed by the situation and in most cases it's a shout for help. This should be looked into in greater detail as homeless women are on one of the lowest scales of power and, seemingly, the best way to reintegration and mental health betterment is by addressing the power imbalance that their situation entails.

CONCLUSION

Research on the similarities between the narrative types proposed by Frank (2013) and the interviews might shed light on how similarly homelessness can create long-lasting effects the same way a chronic illness can.

Evidence suggests that traumatic events leading up to and during homelessness can cause severe cases of anxiety and depression that would limit the social integration of women, which in turn results in a poor support network and less stable housing conditions.

Despite its success both in North America and in the first pilots in the UK, it is evident that Housing First needs a more tailored approach when dealing with homeless women as their needs and vulnerabilities are different from those of men. In this sense, it is recommended to continue the financing of Housing First, while developing a national level operation in the UK that considers implementing a more flexible budget and multi-organizational approach.

OBJECTIVES

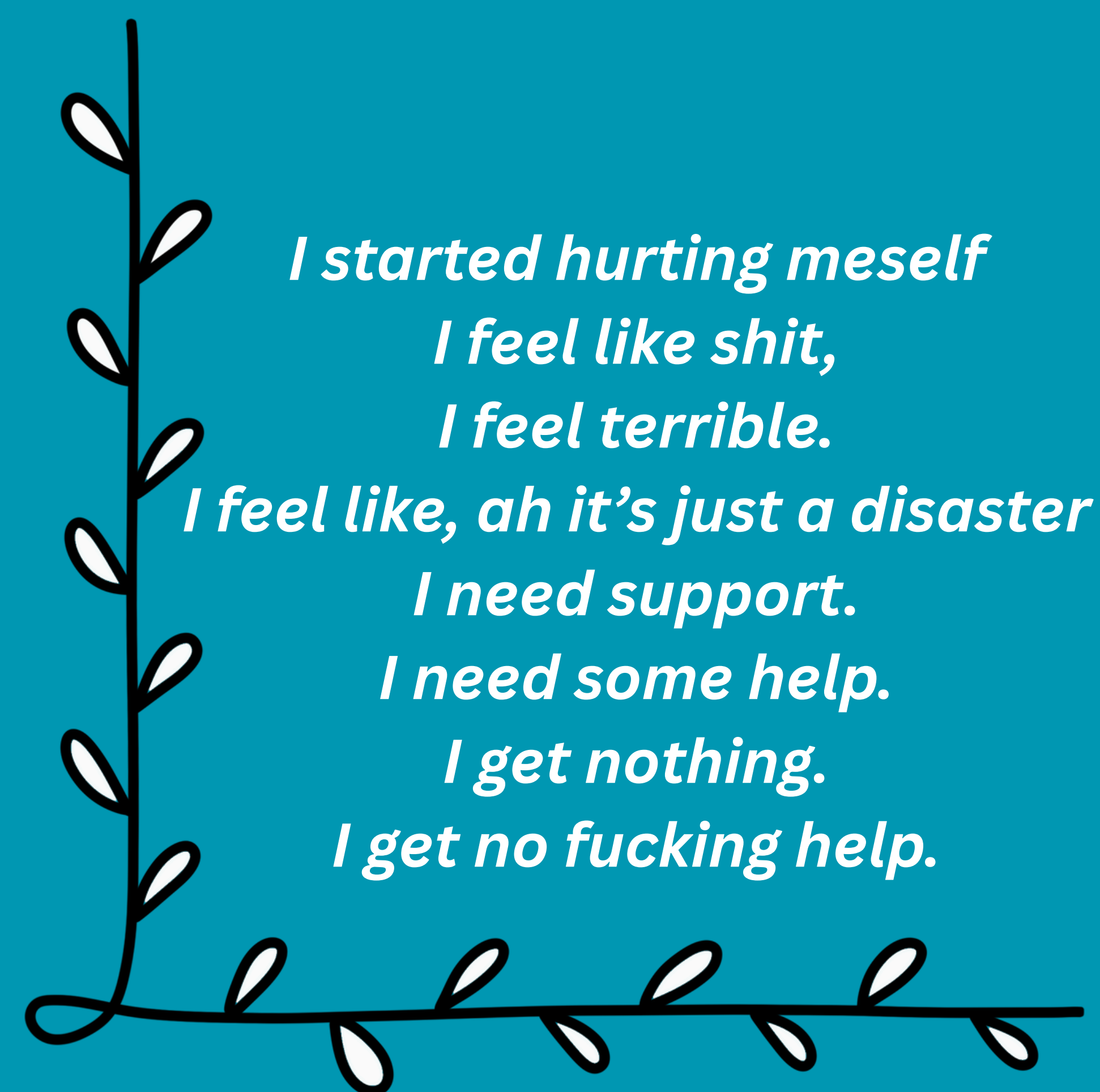
- How does homelessness impact women's identity formation?
- How does said identities influence long term housing stability and social reintegration?

METHODOLOGY

A dataset from interviews with 20 women will be analysed using the method of I-poems. I-poems are a part of the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015), a qualitative method of analysis uses participants' subjective voices, thereby strengthening their stories (Dodding and Partington, 2024). Gilligan (2015) outlines three types of listening within the method.

1. The Listening of the Plot, which seeks to identify the narrative of the story.
2. The Listening of the I, where the researcher aims to understand the sense of self and agency; from this listening, the I-poems are created. Each "I-statement" is separated according to its order of appearance, after which the researcher selects which statements will form the poem.
3. The third is the Listening for Contrapuntal Voices, which aims to highlight contradictions and provide an additional layer of analysis.

The Listening Guide has been commonly used when researching marginalised groups, implying its exceptional worth when dealing with participants whose voices are normally unheard.



*I started hurting meself
I feel like shit,
I feel terrible.
I feel like, ah it's just a disaster
I need support.
I need some help.
I get nothing.
I get no fucking help.*

REFERENCES

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For full reference list refer to: <https://laidlawscholars.network/documents/research-report-re-storying-the-self-a-creative-exploration-of-women-rebuilding-identities-after-homelessness>