Literature Review

Gerontology 500

Older Women's Homelessness and Housing

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Introduction

The baby boom generation has experienced various social, political, and economic cycles that have increased their probability for homelessness. This literature review provides an analysis of the literature and research about the experiences of older women who are homeless and seeking housing. Throughout the ten articles reviewed for this paper, older women's homelessness and their vulnerability, health issues, lack of resources, and lack of sustainable housing were significant factors for older women returning to homelessness. Many of these articles have recognized that there is an increase in older women homelessness and their life, health, and financial experiences often challenge their access to housing and their resources and support within their communities (Darab et al,2018;Grenier et al, 2016; Gonyea & Melekis,2017; McDonald et al,2009).

Research Question

The primary research question that guides this review is twofold: What is the older woman's homelessness experience, and how does it relate to defining the meaning of home and the access to housing? The question is important because it could provide social agencies and services with an understanding of the specific needs and challenges of older women who are homeless and are seeking supportive housing within their communities. My thoughts on the outcome of the question are that it will not be fully answered due to the limited number of empirical articles; however, it is an overview to the understanding of the experiences of older women who deal with homelessness, and their access to housing. The following three themes from these articles are

explored in the literature review: (a) Homelessness Among Older Women; (b) Meaning of Home; and (c) Housing Options.

Theme 1: Homelessness Among Older Women

The experiences of homeless women combined with sociological factors such as poverty, addiction, and lack of health services and housing options are contributing to their vulnerability and their continued pathways to homelessness (Hecht & Coyle, 2001; Shier et al.,2011). Isolation from family and friends contributed to the isolation and stigma of homelessness and eliminated the opportunity for employment due to the lack of experience or employment.(Grenier et al, 2016). Focusing and providing specific resources, programs, and housing are more effective in addressing homelessness among older women(Gonyea & Melekis, 2017; Peterson, 2015; Waldbrook, 2013).

The social environment and the interaction of individuals, along with the sociological factors (culture, beliefs, values , political, and economic) influence and contribute to homeless women's vulnerability and the risk of becoming homeless again. Consistent with this, additional articles found that older women had challenges that included domestic violence situations, financial abuse, and challenges with eviction; they were continually dealing with higher levels of stress due to homelessness and their dealings with the legal system. (Darab et al,2018;Grenier et al, 2016; Gonyea & Melekis,2017; McDonald et al,2009). For older women who are homeless, having access to services that address vulnerabilities with practical resources such as, affordable housing with support and, physical and mental health services, may facilitate the decrease of older women's homelessness by encouraging and instilling resilience (Grenier et al, 2016; Shier et al,2011;Travia &Webb, 2015). Supportive facilities, community services, and formal and informal social support networks are crucial for improving health of formerly homeless older women by

being safe and secure (Grenier et al, 2016; Gonyea & Melekis,2017; McDonald et al',2009; Waldbrook, 2013).

Theme 2: Meaning of Home

"Home is where the heart is ... or is it?"

Across a few of the research articles, it became apparent that multiple societal factors, such as poverty, poor physical and mental health, isolation, and abuse influence women's feelings and often adds to their awareness of what home is or is not ; and is relevant to their perception of home(Grenier et al, 2016; Leith,2006; Waldbrook, 2013). Additionally, the perception and the meaning of home is an ongoing life process contingent upon older women evaluating current life situations and residential environments and their ability to develop an attachment to either the facility or housing (Leith,2006).

Across five research articles on older women's homelessness quality of life ;chronic physical and mental health conditions, and isolation often limited social relationships which then influenced their perception of home and environment and their access to permanent supportive housing(Grenier et al, 2016; Leith,2006; McDonald et al',2009;Waldbrook, 2013;Winetrobe et al., 2017). Older individuals' health and emotional wellbeing are often influenced not only by the perception and the quality of home but also by the social connection with others within the community. Interviews conducted by Leith (2006) noted that the home environment influences the physical and emotional well-being of older adult women, and it continues to be related to societal differences between men and women.

Theme 3: Housing Options

As populations age, many of us will begin contemplating if we will have adequate income to sustain our health, financial needs, and housing options. Older adult women face various challenges, such as, health, substance abuse, poverty, and the choice to age in place. Many of the articles addressed the disparity of income among older women who experience poverty and are unable to access housing. (McDonald et al, 2009; Peterson, 2015; Travia, 2015). Research conducted by Gonyea & Melekis (2017) explains that societal factors, such as poverty and health conditions, limit older women' housing options and access to resources and services.

Through interviews conducted by McLeod & Walsh (2014), the shelter experiences of older women who were 50 years of age and older, who have become homeless for the first time and reside in shelters examine how the women became homeless, navigate their experience, and perceive the shelter space and delivery of services. The researchers examined aspects of shelter living that affected older women's experiences and use of services. The study revealed three areas for consideration for improvement for shelter program design, which included shelter site, shelter situation, and service delivery (Gonyea & Melekis, 2017). Additional research performed by Petersen, (2015) examined programs and housing models that are likely to be more effective in addressing the older women's homelessness. The findings revealed that a range of housing and support options is necessary in attaining an adequate relationship between the needs, preferences, and living arrangements of older women who are homeless. The findings also showed that the public housing sector is failing these low-income individuals.

Supportive housing facilities, community services, housing subsidies, and formal and informal social support networks are crucial for improving the health of formerly homeless older women by being safe, secure, and affordable (Grenier et al, 2016; McDonald et al', 2009;

Peterson, 2015;Waldbrook, 2013). In contrast, Darab et al.(2018) found the housing preferences of single older women to include security, permanency, and affordability; these provide women a feeling of independence and a sense of belonging within the social environment.

Conclusion

What do you learn about the topic?

After completing this literature review, I learned not only is there an increase in older women and homelessness but also their access to resources and services specific to address their physical, emotional, financial, and housing preferences. Additionally, since I am an older woman, I reflected on what I might consider and act upon if I was homeless and needed access to resources and services. What I reflected on as an older woman was the importance of communication with not just the access to information but also the understanding of the process. A sense of belonging would also be necessary to continue creating relationships within the social and housing environments that would encourage older adult women to form advocacy groups within their housing communities

What did you learn about the process?

What I learned about the process is that continuing to gather and review additional research often provides not only additional resources to consider but also, an intensive review process that may broaden your analysis of the current and prior research. The literature review process is fluid and should be the most important chapter in your thesis or project. It sets a road map to follow by discovering diverse topics and themes within the research.

Did the references you found answer the question?

The literature unfortunately did not answer the questions entirely due to the limitation of empirical articles that have focused on the older women's homelessness experiences and the multiple emotional, physical, and financial challenges while seeking supportive housing.

If not, what would you do differently?

I would continue to explore the literature and media, which would focus on the systemic social problem of older women and homelessness. Additionally, I would seek out organizations such as non-profits to learn about the current conditions of the older women homeless population and learn more on the current needs and resources that are currently available to the older women who are seeking assistance.

What would be your next steps if you were to continue this research?

If I decided to continue this research, I would broaden my access to additional forms of empirical literature in order to identify the gaps in existing research that might provide new opportunities to study the older women's homelessness experiences and their challenges of obtaining resources, services, and housing within their communities.

References

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