Late life homelessness: Recognizing and addressing unmet need

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Abstract

Homelessness among older people is on the rise in Canada and international contexts. This webinar outlines key issues and needs with regards to late life homelessness, and highlights gaps in policy and practice. It shares lessons and insights from research with older people with lived experience, and provides suggested directions for change.

Outline

The Late Life Homelessness Project

What is Late Life Homelessness?

Key Issues, Gaps, and Insights

Suggestions for Change

Homelessness in Late Life: Growing Old on the Streets, In Shelters and in Long-term Care

https://criticalgerontology.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/iStock_000002609488Small.jpg

Multi-method Ethnographic Study

? Study Questions:

What happens at the intersections of aging and homelessness?

What gaps exist? What changes need to be made?

Critical Ethnography

Site Observations
Stakeholder Interviews
Interviews - Older People
Policy Analysis
Administrative Data

Identify key gaps and issues

Understand voices of older people with lived experience

Expose problems and gaps within policy and practice

Identify points for change

What is Late Life Homelessness?

Late life homelessness?

"….Late life homelessness is an experience of unequal aging"
(Grenier, 2021, p, 21)

Why is Addressing Late Life Homelessness Important for Policy?

- Rising numbers of older people in shelters and on the streets (since ~2010)

- Affordable and safe housing is difficult to access- Shelters are becoming long-term

- Structural causes often missing from the analysis

  - Racism, colonization, de-institutionalization, intimate partner violence, etc

- Late life homelessness reflects disadvantage and has health effects

- Emergence of groups 'new to homelessness' (eviction, housing costs, etc)

- Older people have unmet needs (incomes, housing, health and care)

- Older people are excluded, stigmatized, unrecognized and overlooked

Grenier, A. (In Press, 2021). *Homelessness as 'Unequal Aging': A critical life course perspective*. MQUP, Montreal, Quebec.

Key Issues, Gaps, and Insights

Challenging Policy Assumptions:

Four examples of taken for granted assumptions:

- Homelessness among older people is a small scale issue
    (ie. 'not a big enough problem')
- Housing First intended to provide housing (e.g., designed for 'all' needs)
- The group is too difficult to reach and the problem 'too complex'
- Homelessness in late life is a choice

Understanding the Extent of Late Life Homelessness: Proportional Share of Older People in Three Canadian Cities

Consider 3 point in time counts:

Montreal (2015)	Toronto (2013)	Vancouver (2016)
41% (largest group)	29% in 2013 20 % in 2009	18% of pop *young population
Aged 50+	Aged 51+	Aged 55+

Grenier, A., Barken, R., Sussman, T., Rothwell, D., Bourgeois-Guérin, V. (2016). Homelessness among older people: Assessing strategies and frameworks across Canada. *Canadian Review of Social Policy/ Revue Canadienne de Politique Sociale, 74*, SPRING 2016, 1-39. file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/39889-50157-2-PB%20(1).pdf
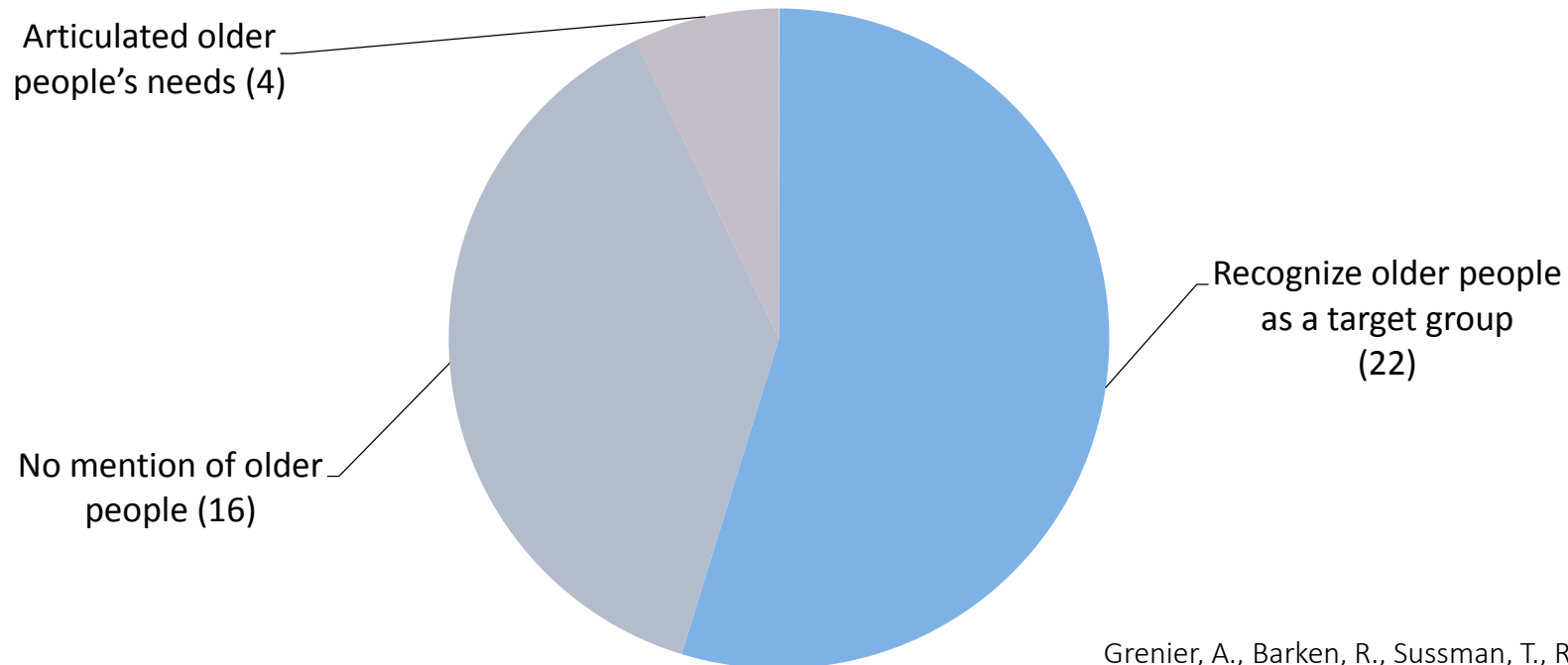
Behind the Numbers: Life at the Intersections of Aging and Homelessness…….

[If I asked you, what does it mean to grow older on the streets?] …Not much, there are no real options, 1. Work. 2. The social exclusion. It's really an overload of social segregation. Because family life, you forget that. Your parents, well they watch down on you from above…… It's very negative, very negative, because you have to repeat yourself all of the time, that you need an elevator everyday, for everyday activities, and to be a person you could say, social activities, it's exclusion. (Older man, shelter)

Review of Homeless Strategies across Canada
A glimpse at the time of Housing First Roll-out (2016)

We reviewed 42 Canadian strategies on homelessness:

Articulated older people's needs (4)

Recognize older people as a target group (22)

No mention of older people (16)

Grenier, A., Barken, R., Sussman, T., Rothwell, D., Bourgeois-Guérin, V. (2016). Homelessness among older people: Assessing strategies and frameworks across Canada. *Canadian Review of Social Policy/ Revue Canadienne de Politique Sociale, 74*, SPRING 2016, 1-39. file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/39889-50157-2-PB%20(1).pdf

Lack of Recognition Makes it Difficult to Respond: Housing and Care

There are *no partnerships between the homeless world and old age care* . . . I think they are scared of the issue of having to work with homelessness in old age care. . . . There is [one organization] that works with this old age care, but it's full, jam packed. There **is** *a waiting list and the list to get on the waiting list*.

(Community stakeholder with experience in shelter/housing)

Older People and Providers were eager to participate….

Recruitment/participation was smooth

Older people wanted to participate
Some had never spoken about their lives

Stakeholders wanted to share their insight, knowledge and experience

Homelessness was NOT a choice

Homelessness was not a 'choice': The desire for a 'regular life'

"In the next couple years, *I hope to find myself an apartment* for the few good years I have left, *before the big pains of "aging" come*. I really want *a normal life*, get up in the morning, go to work, think about vacation. Hang out with other people . . . I don't have a girlfriend, but would like to start a life with someone else"

- Older man, shelter

Partner Involvement: The Key to Participation and Policy/Practice Relevant Results

Literacy levels- Stigma (e.g., consent form)

Approach/Connections (Trusted contacts)

Protection of Identity
(e.g., signing forms- undocumented workers; Indigenous populations)

Comfortable and Safe place (also safety protocols)

Data Collection- Students with shelter experience

Discussion/contextualization of results

KMb and Sharing Results

Our project was developed with partners and built in KMb

It extended our reach and have impact (e.g., Quebec- older people)

Multiple forms of KMb:
- staff training
- academic articles
- meetings think tanks & community

The needle has shifted (slightly) in terms of recognition, but need for inclusion is ongoing...

For example, Quebec's (2014) strategy on addressing homelessness:

"Older people who are homeless have *extremely poor health* (physical, psychological, cognitive); experience *premature aging*; and have a *mortality rate* that is three to four times greater than the general population. As such, this group is particularly *vulnerable, both financially and socially* (victimization, abuse, isolation)"

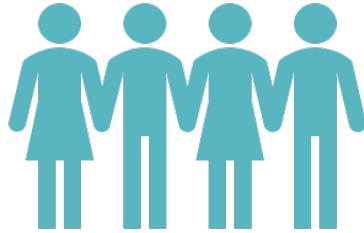[translation by authors]

(Government of Quebec, 2014, 14-15)

Suggestions for Change

Policy Agenda for Change: Addressing Unmet Need

Include	Older people in strategies and frameworks
Alter	Program eligibility for persons not yet 65 (ie., 50+)
Develop	Housing for older people
Ensure	Access to income, health, housing, care
Recognize and respond	To inequality, disadvantage, risk and insecurity
Address	'At-risk' trajectories of over-represented groups
Discuss	Housing and care NOT housing OR care
Provide	Access to aging 'well' in safe and desirable places

Grenier, A. (In Press, 2021). *Late life homelessness: Experiences of disadvantage and unequal aging*. Montreal, McGill Queens

Older People Need :
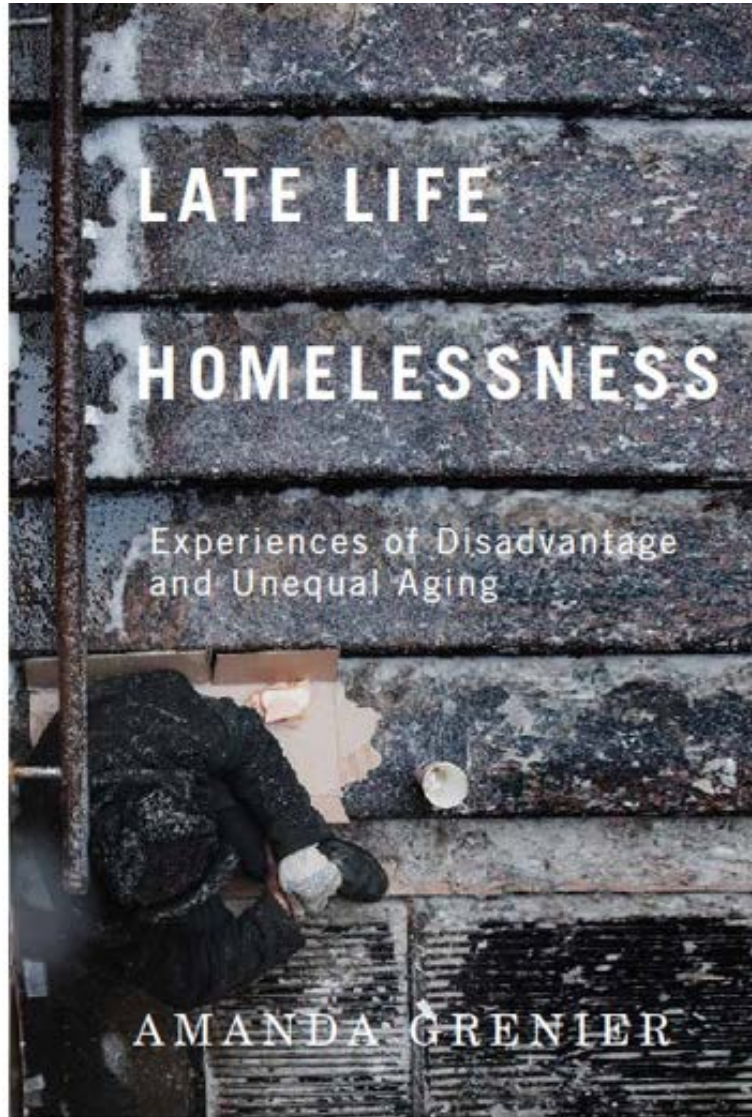
Recognition and Inclusion

Stable Income and Access to Care (sometimes <65)

Affordable and Safe Long-term Housing (with Care/Support)

Protection from Eviction and Displacement

Grenier, A. (In Press, 2021). *Late life homelessness: Experiences of disadvantage and unequal aging*. Montreal, McGill Queens

Late Life Homelessness:

Grenier (Fall, 2021).

Late Life Homelessness: Experiences of Disadvantage and Unequal Aging

Montreal: McGill Queens University Press

Questions?

Thank you

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