Background

Erasmus+ funded project looking at the adaptations of Housing First model in Europe

Four partner organizations: Sophia Housing (Ireland, project lead), Arrels Fundació (Spain), Housing First Berlin (Germany) and Y-Foundation (Finland)

Schedule: 2023-2025

Research Questions and Objectives

Questions

- 1. How Housing First has been adapted in Europe?

- 2. What are the staff training needs to implement Housing First successfully?

Objectives

- Better understanding of the training needs in different countries

- Better understanding of what is working and what is not

- Better match with the policies and service user's needs

- To support 2021 Lisbon Declaration to end homelessness by 2030

Data

Qualitative, semi-structured focus group (N=8) and individual interviews (N=50) in Finland, Germany, Ireland and Spain. In this presentation the focus is on the individual interviews conducted in Finland (n=15).

Target groups: actors and stakeholders working in the field of homelessness and Housing First in each partner country, including residents and peer workers

Interview themes: interviewees working history in HF and homelessness field, the everyday application of HF in interviewees country and organization, reflecting and adapting HF principles, and training needs

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Eight Core Principles (Pleace 2016)

- Housing is a human right

- Choice and Control for Service Users

- Separation of Housing and Treatment

- Recovery Orientation

- Harm Reduction

- Active Engagement Without Coercion

- Person-centred Planning

- Flexible Support for as Long as Is Required

Housing First Guide Europe

Nicholas Pleace

Why Adaptations?

Housing First Research

- Some elements of HF might not be applicable in every country (Wygnańska, 2020)

- There already is policy variation, but we don't have enough understanding of it (Pleace 2011)

- Ending homelessness and successfully implement HF does not require high fidelity, and programmatic variation does not necessarily mean the Housing First model lacks clarity (Chen 2019; Pleace & Bretherton 2013)

- Adherence to HF fidelity might overlook service user's needs (Parsell 2016) and adaptations for their part might respond well to the needs of some resident groups (Montgomery 2019; Harris ym. 2019)

Research on Policy Adaptations

- Policies must typically be implemented and modified over time (Warren et al. 2001)

- Realities of policy adjustment involve learning, debate, contention among a variety of stakeholders (ibid.)

Fidelity in Housing First

- Fidelity is concerned with the implementation and running of programs as intended (Aubry et al., 2018).

- Measuring Fidelity requires locating and evaluating "critical ingredients" (Carroll et al., 2007). In European Housing First, these are commonly viewed as the eight core principles, which can be found in the Housing First Europe Guide (Pleace, 2016).

- High fidelity Housing First programs achieve greater housing stability, and other improvements in quality of life (O'Campo et al., 2022).

- However, there are numerous systemic, organizational, and individual barriers to achieving Housing First Fidelity (Samosh et al., 2018). This can make high fidelity Housing First appear idealistic, or unachievable in many contexts.

- Where barriers appear insurmountable, are there opportunities to fit the context by adapting the program?

Analysis

Thematic coding with Atlas Ti software

Coding questions:

How Housing First principles were discussed and reflected in the interviews?

What challenges, if any, the interviewees experienced in applying the principles?

How the principles should be adapted for the HF policies to be successful?

Theoretical Framework

HF principles as rationalities that shape how homelessness and its solutions are represented and addressed (cf. Parsell 2020; Bacchi 2009)

What is highlighted and what is overlooked in HF's discourse on homelessness according to the interviewees? (cf. Katz el al. 2017)

What is suggested as an alternative?

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Results

- I Applications

- II Problematisations

- III Adaptations

Results I: Applications

- The eight principles were known well by the interviewees; in the Finnish data only one was not familiar with them, but knew the general aim.

- The principles also got support from the interviewees.

- Generally speaking, principles housing as a human right, flexible support and person-centered planning provided an unquestioned basis for measures supported by other principles.

- Harm reduction, recovery, and active engagement emerged as principles that required more training and resources

- The principles of separation of housing and treatment and choice and control of service users raised the most critical reflection

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Extract 1:
Housing and support

These are, of course, what we are trying to achieve. I myself think that it is... that *housing is a human right, and everything starts with housing*

housing provider A, Finland

Perhaps I would highlight the ones that I see us implementing or aiming for. Probably *individual-centred planning*. Then *flexible support for as long as there is a need for it*

social worker, Finland

Extract 2

Active Engagement

- Active engagement… especially these places where there are different kinds of *work activities*...I think that is a big and significant and hopefully growing future dimension.

  - HF expert, Finland

Harm Reduction

- The whole housing-first model is, of course, also about harm reduction. (...) Perhaps there could be brainstorming on what harm reduction means in the context of housing beyond what is strictly related to substance abuse.

  - Development worker, Finland

Recovery

- Well of course, yes, this is good. But well... You don't force someone to recover, but in a way, we must be awake, if the person... We must constantly feed the residents with these opportunities.

  - Housing provider B, Finland

Results II
Problematisations

- The problematisations (cf. Bacchi 2015) attached to HF were focused on the principles of separation of housing and treatment and choice and control of services users.

- Particularly the role of single-site housing in HF was discussed.

- The problems manifested in particular as a discrepancy between HF's principles and everyday reality and its demands, for which HF was seen as offering too normative and one-dimensional solutions

- In the most critical notions, HF was seen to serve not so much the objective of eradicating homelessness as the development of the model

Extract 3
Separation of Housing and Treatment: The Case of Single Site Housing in Finland

Q; Could these (single sites) be applied in other countries?

A: I know there are far fewer in other countries. The starting point to is live in scattered housing and not in apartments within the same building. *Maybe they think it's too institutionalized or something* like that. *It doesn't correspond to the idea* of having your own home.

Q: Do you see that these could be applied?

A: *Yeah, without a doubt. I don't share the idea that its too institutionalized.* It may have institutional vibes, elements, but it can be built so that people have their own homes, their own tenancies, they feel it as their own home, and then it can be made possible in a way that there is staff there all the time to support it.

- Development worker, Finland

Extract 4
The Case of Single-Site Housing

"What is the alternative if you are not capable of living by yourself? Is the option to be in a hostel or emergency accommodation? *We find that this does work*. For some people, the community becomes a place they love. Some of us want to live in communities. They are even seen as the future."

- Housing provider C, Finland

Extract 5:
Choice and Control for Service Users

- How about choice…do you try to listen resident´s wishes?

- Yes, as far as possible, of course, *but then when there are so few apartments* (...) so of course if there is for instance certain area, which is on the no-no-list, so of course we will then try to it take into account. But, then when the number of apartments is small, so it can be a little challenging to take into account

  - manager, NGO, Finland

- Choice is not always so easy and many of these women are such that *they don't know how to make choices*. With some of them, it's an emotional regulation skill...*their skills are just not*...

  - Peer worker, NGO, Finland

Extract 6
HF as too normative and one-dimensional

- These are so common (principles) that I would not interfere with them, but *when these fidelity assessments are made, and we look at the decimal precision how some dimension has been achieved*... I would be interested to know whether it has really been clarified that what are *the key things* that enable housing, *what are really the things, the factors that have ensured the continuation of housing.*

<div align="center">HF expert, Finland</div>

Results III
Adaptations

- Interviewees also offered suggestions for the development of HF

- The focus of these suggestions was, first, on concrete measures, which could make HF better prepared to face the everyday challenges of housing people with homeless background and different support needs.

- Successful adaptations implemented in Finland included according to the interviewees more diverse housing options, homelessness prevention, forms of community work, development of low threshold work activities and the active role of public stakeholders as funders and coordinators of activities

- The second level of proposals concerned more the ideological level of HF, which should take a more open and pragmatic approach to different ways of implementing the principles.

Extract 7
Finnish Adaptations: low threshold work activities and community building

- A: I love the *peer-to-peer work* we do, when they're out there painting and doing the renovations. I mean, the kind that it is *real work*, not just tinkering (...) We have, for example, in the capital region, like our *own repair group*. Our peer worker goes to pick up guys from those scattered apartments, if they want to do something. Then in the (single-site) they might make food together *community*. So, all sorts of things.

- Q: And do you get paid for that?

- A: You get two euros an hour. And you do what you can.

Extract 8
Not Housing First but Ending Homelessness

- Maybe we emphasise the importance of housing in the sense that *we actually... there are different options available*. We think that housing is not just one single dwelling, but it is always related to some other context (..) The Finnish model has, from its origins, been *largely homelessness and problem-solving. Not in the way of the Pathways model,* that it has taken a particular target group and then started to build a project around that and that idea

  - Development worker, Finland

- In a way, we should always take these principles and think, *which are the most important ones for each region and each country,* to determine what direction we should take, with what strategy, with what timetable, and who we need to do it. And how to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the service and the work in general (…) if we think about these principles, is that they are linked to the need.

  - Public official, Helsinki, Finland

Conclusions I

- Interviews featured Finnish interviewees' reflections on the principles of Housing First

- From a theoretical point of view, this speech can be approached as a reflection on the contents and limitations of HF discourse.

- The principles were generally supported in the interviews and were also sought to be applied to.

- Critical comments were directed at the normative nature of HF, which was seen to lead to excessively strict requirements on how the HF principles should be applied and to overlook problems in the "realities" of housing.

Conclusions II

- The Finnish model was described as an adaptation, where new ways of working and thinking had been successfully introduced into HF. It was also proposed that these should be experimented with in other countries.

- At the same time, it was stressed that activities should always be needs-based and take into account different contexts.

- Such an interpretation of HF is similar with "active adaptation" described by Lancione et al. (2017), where adaptation is systemic and context sensitive, but adheres to the core ethos of HF.

- The normative nature of the HF model was seen as a problem, especially when it prevented the application of measures that could be successful in ending homelessness

Conclusions III

- Preliminary findings from data in other countries have highlighted similar type of findings and critique.

- What was lacking in the interviews was a neoliberal critique of Housing First which sees HF as too individual-orientated and focused on cost-efficiency to address homelessness as a social problem (e.g. Grainger 2021; Katz et al. 2017)

- On the contrary, the interviewees discussed HF in the framework of human rights, which could be achieved by investing in durable and diverse housing solutions.

- HF also offered a platform for the criticization of governmental disinvestment in housing and social policy

- A step towards a more political adaptation of HF?

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