

Sexual and Romantic Relationships Among
People Experiencing Homelessness
by

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Dissertation Study Contributors

This dissertation consists of three studies. Studies 1 and 2 are scoping reviews, while Study 3 is a secondary data analysis of the Health and Housing in Transition study. I conceptualized, designed, conducted the data analyses for Studies 1 and 2, as well as the secondary analysis for Study 3. Dr. John Sylvestre supervised all the studies. Additional contributions were made by other individuals, either as second reviewers or by providing methodological guidance.

Study 1, co-authored by Ms. Kimberly Turner, Mr. Patrick R. Labelle, and Dr. John Sylvestre, involved Ms. Turner as the second reviewer. Mr. Labelle, a librarian, assisted with developing the search strategy and provided input on writing the methods section.

Study 2, co-authored by Dr. John Sylvestre and Dr. Serena Corsini-Munt, had Dr. Corsini-Munt as the second reviewer and consulted about data interpretation. Mr. Labelle provided search strategy guidance. For Study 3, the Health and Housing in Transition study was led by Dr. Stephen Wang, with Dr. Tim Aubry coordinating the project in Ottawa and Dr. Anita Palepu in Vancouver. Dr. Aubry also provided methodological guidance, while Dr. Martin Lalumière and Dr. Veronika Huta consulted on statistical methods.

General Abstract

In Canada, individuals experiencing homelessness face ongoing marginalization, with many of their essential needs frequently ignored. This issue is exacerbated by structural challenges within homelessness services, including the design of single-sex shelters and a lack of private spaces, which impedes the initiation and sustainment of sexual or romantic partnerships. Academic studies have predominantly concentrated on addressing mental health, addiction, housing, and financial needs while providing minimal attention to the sexual and romantic relationship needs of the homeless population. Moreover, while much of the existing research categorizes sexual behaviour primarily as a risk factor for poor sexual health outcomes among people experiencing homelessness, there's a dearth of studies examining how romantic partnerships could offer support and contribute to stability. For this dissertation, I conducted three studies to explore the effects of sexual and romantic relationships on the lives and overall well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness and to assess how these relationships might influence their housing stability.

Study 1 was a scoping review that aimed to (a) characterize the nature of research that has examined sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless and (b) identify and synthesize the findings of studies that examined romantic and sexual relationships among people experiencing homelessness. We found that the majority of existing studies predominantly focused on the potential risks linked with sexual activity, including victimization and the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Among the studies that substantially investigated consensual sexual or romantic relationships, we identified prevalent themes, including love, romance, and emotional support; the transactional nature of partner relationships; obstacles to forming partner relationships; and aspects of casual sex and pleasure.

Study 2 was a scoping review that examined the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex. Survival sex is the exchange of sex for material goods required for survival (i.e., shelter, food, drugs) and, in Western contexts, almost exclusively occurs among people experiencing homelessness. We identified three themes associated with the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex: power, coercion, and sexual agency. Additionally, we recognized five factors that contribute to increased vulnerability to engage in survival sex, which we termed 'push factors': hunger, patriarchy, poverty, substance use, and insecure housing. Each of these factors contributes to a coercive environment that diminishes individuals' capacity to freely consent to sex, thereby limiting their ability to exercise sexual agency.

Study 3 used romantic satisfaction to differentiate between higher-quality and more problematic relationships when examining their impact on housing stability. Using four years of data from the longitudinal Health and Housing in Transition (HHiT) study, participants were grouped by homelessness patterns (chronic, episodic, transitional, and vulnerably housed) and classified by partnership status and romantic satisfaction. Two clusters emerged: 'low romantic satisfaction, low partner status frequency' and 'high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency.' We examined how the relationship pattern clusters were associated with days homeless over the four-year period and homelessness patterns and did not find a statistically significant result. We developed three path analysis models to explore the relationship between partner status (independent variable) and housing stability (dependent variable), with romantic satisfaction as a mediator. In each model, all variables were measured at one time point, with the dependent variables being measured in the subsequent year. While we hypothesized a significant indirect path in all three panels, full mediation was only observed in Panel 3 (Y3-Y4). Our results indicate a potential positive link between satisfactory partner relationships and increased

housing stability. Future research can build on the three studies presented in this dissertation to examine the potential impact of partner relationships on housing stability or their role in helping individuals cope with homelessness.

Structure and Objectives of this Dissertation

This dissertation examined the dynamics of partner relationships and their impact on housing stability among people experiencing homelessness. In this dissertation, I use partner relationships to refer to a consensual relationship that may be romantic, sexual, or both. In cases where I intend to refer to *sexual* or *romantic* relationships, I will specifically use those terms.

In the *General Introduction* of this dissertation, I examined the scope of homelessness in Canada and elsewhere. I also reviewed the concept of residential instability, focusing on factors that contribute to that instability. Next, I examined the impact of general social support on housing stability, focusing on the potential influence of both overall social support and support specifically from partner relationships. Given that social support from partners may be a key mechanism through which partner relationships affect housing stability, this analysis aimed to clarify its role. When exploring the possible influence of partner relationships on homelessness, I examined the importance of the bonding-bridging distinction in social capital theory. Throughout the *General Introduction*, I examined terminology used in existing literature to describe residential instability, homelessness, and partner relationships. This was necessary for developing a targeted set of keywords, underpinning the methodology of the studies that used scoping review methods.

I present this dissertation as three studies. The first two are published articles, and the third is an unpublished manuscript. *Study 1* was a scoping study that systematically reviewed the literature on sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). *Study 2* was a scoping study that examined the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex and to identify which factors push people into greater levels of deprivation and vulnerability to engage in survival sex (Czechowski, Sylvestre, et al.,

2022). *Study 3* was a secondary data analysis of data from the Health and Housing in Transition Study (HHiT) that examined the relationship between more satisfactory partner relationships and homelessness.

In the *General Discussion*, I synthesized and integrated the findings from all individual studies. I provided a comprehensive overview of the collective research findings. I discussed my research's theoretical and practical implications, particularly by further developing the theory of Sexual Citizenship as it relates to homelessness. I concluded with a reflection on limitations and future research directions.

General Introduction

Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex social issue marked by persistent interpersonal, environmental, institutional, and structural challenges. According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 35,000 Canadians are homeless any given night, 27.3% of whom are women, 18.7% of whom are youth, and the majority (52%) are between the age of 25-49. Most shelter stays are relatively brief in Canada, on average ten days, and the national shelter occupancy rate has steadily increased over the past two decades (Gaetz et al., 2016; Government of Canada, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the particular vulnerabilities faced by people experiencing homelessness. This includes notable outbreaks in homeless shelters across Canada (O'Shea et al., 2020). The pandemic has seen a disproportionate impact on people experiencing homelessness in terms of overdoses, especially when compared to those with stable housing (Bodkin et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022).

Research has consistently shown that homelessness is not a singular experience, with distinct types having been identified based on the duration and frequency of homeless episodes (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). Most research examining homelessness typologies indicates that the majority of people experiencing homelessness go through a single, typically brief episode of homelessness. This group, representing 80 to 94% of the homeless population, is identified as transitionally homeless and represents the majority of people affected by homelessness. By comparison, about 2-10% are considered episodically homeless, where individuals experience several brief stints of homelessness punctuated by periods of being housed, whereas 3-11% are classified as chronically homeless, experiencing fewer but much longer periods without stable

housing (Aubry et al., 2013; Culhane et al., 2007; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Ly & Latimer, 2015; Tsai et al., 2014; Wise, 2011).

Although episodic and chronic homelessness affect smaller groups, these individuals account for a substantial portion of shelter usage and often require a broader range and more intensive services compared to those experiencing transitional homelessness (Aubry et al., 2013). Those in episodic and chronic homelessness clusters frequently experience higher rates of physical and mental health issues, including substance use histories (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). Episodically homeless individuals in particular, tend to need more support services as they cycle in and out of homelessness over several years (Ly & Latimer, 2015). They frequently transition between various settings, including shelters, hospitals, jails, and treatment centers, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of their service needs.

The Canadian definition of homelessness is reflective of these typologies, if not somewhat broader. According to the Canadian definition (Gaetz et al., 2012),

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing. (p. 1)

The Canadian definition of homelessness explicitly includes individuals "without stable housing," emphasizing the risk of homelessness. This category includes those who have not yet experienced homelessness but are in precarious housing situations, lacking the security and

permanence that define housing stability. This places them at an increased risk of facing homelessness in the future. The Canadian definition also acknowledges four categories that include: (1) *unsheltered* or *absolutely homeless*, living in places not intended for human habitation; (2) *emergency sheltered* which refers to people using overnight shelters intended for people without a home or impacted by partner or family violence; (3) *provisionally accommodated* which refers to people who lack security of housing tenure; and (4) those who are at *risk of homelessness* and whose housing is precarious and may not meet safety standards. The latter two align with the concept of residential instability. This concept describes scenarios where individuals frequently change residences and constantly face the threat of losing their housing.

The Canadian definition of homelessness recognizes the profound instability and uncertainty faced by those who are unstably housed. The term *residential instability* has been defined in various ways in the literature. Key aspects of this concept include the frequent and often involuntary transitions people make across a range of settings deemed 'unstable,' such as jails, emergency shelters, or rooming houses. This characterization underlines the often transient and insecure nature of living conditions experienced by those experiencing residential instability (Cotton & Schwartz-Barcott, 2016; Frederick et al., 2014). In the study of residential instability, scholars have used various terms to highlight the high levels of mobility. These include 'residential mobility' (Clark et al., 2006), 'hypermobility' (Vogel et al., 2017) and 'high residential mobility' (Herbers et al., 2012). Cox et al. (2017) noted the inconsistency in terminology across different studies, observing that terms like 'housing (in)security,' 'housing (in)stability,' 'housing (in)sufficiency,' 'housing satisfaction,' and 'risk of homelessness' are used interchangeably. Despite variations in terminology and the ways it is operationalized, residential stability remains a primary goal of housing programs and a crucial concept in community psychology, especially

concerning homelessness and housing issues (Cox et al., 2017; Frederick et al., 2014; Sylvestre et al., 2009).

Evidence increasingly suggests that supportive housing is effective in not only helping individuals secure housing but also in ensuring they maintain it (Sylvestre et al., 2017). One notable approach is Housing First, which offers housing along with support that does not require individuals to stop substance use or undergo mental health treatment as a condition for receiving assistance (Tsemberis et al., 2004). While Housing First has proven effective in helping individuals exit homelessness and maintain housing, evidence regarding its impact on non-housing outcomes like poverty reduction, alleviating loneliness, social exclusion, and health improvement is limited (Kertesz et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2011; Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016). However, there is evidence that Housing First can enhance its participants' quality of life and community integration (Aubry et al., 2015). These findings have prompted researchers to investigate various factors that could alleviate the hardships associated with homelessness, assist people in exiting homelessness, and help them remain stably housed. Social support is a critical factor in this context, particularly since a lack of housing is often synonymous with the absence of a private and safe space for developing and maintaining partner relationships (Busch-Geertsema, 2010).

Partner Relationships, Sexual Behaviour, and Homelessness

Although this dissertation examines consensual sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness, it is crucial to acknowledge the disproportionate rates at which people experiencing homelessness are victimized and sexually marginalized. Moreover, understanding how sexual behaviour among people experiencing homelessness has been approached in existing research is essential to contextualize this dissertation's work. Most

literature in this area tends to frame sexual behaviour as a risk factor, particularly concerning health.

Study of Sexual Behaviour Among People Experiencing Homelessness: Risk and Victimization

When examining sexual behaviour among people experiencing homelessness, researchers often operationalize sexual behaviour as a health risk for the transmission of HIV (e.g., Gioseffi et al., 2022; Maria et al., 2018; Reddon et al., 2023). Similarly, when examining sexual risk specifically, sexual behaviour is often viewed as a contributing factor to HIV risk (Athey, 1991; Busza et al., 2011; Gangamma et al., 2008; Hudson et al., 2011). In a systematic review of STI prevalence among homeless adults in the United States, Williams and Bryant (2018) reported STI prevalence rates ranging from 7.3% to 39.9% across seven articles included in their review. They also identified correlations between substance use, intimate partner violence, and the severity of homelessness with higher STI risk. Consequently, sexual activity among people experiencing homelessness is frequently characterized in research as a risk factor for HIV and other STIs.

In studies that focus on sexual behaviour as a risk factor for STIs, researchers often investigate sexual victimization as a variable associated with sexual health risk (Melandner & Tyler, 2010; Misganaw & Worku, 2013; Noell et al., 2001). People experiencing homelessness, particularly women, are known to experience high rates of sexual assault (Baron, 2003; Heerde & Hemphill, 2016). The unique circumstances of homelessness, often characterized by exposure to unsafe street or shelter environments, increase their vulnerability to sexual assault. Thus, when examining sexual victimization, researchers examine correlates of sexual assault (e.g., Hudson et al., 2010). This helps in understanding the specific nature and extent of the risks for victimization

that people experiencing homelessness encounter. Clarifying these risks is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems to protect this vulnerable population. The environments in which people experiencing homelessness are made to reside significantly increase their risk of victimization. A prevailing characteristic of the homelessness context is the prevalence of extreme deprivation, such as lack of shelter and hunger (e.g., no shelter, hunger). These conditions can heighten the vulnerability of homeless individuals to various forms of exploitation, including survival sex.

Survival sex, particularly in the context of homelessness, is commonly defined as the exchange of sexual activities for necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, or drugs, often under conditions of significant deprivation (Greene et al., 1999; Heerde & Hemphill, 2017a; Purser et al., 2017). Survival sex can be conceptualized as somewhere on a continuum between sexual victimization and consensual sexual activity. When conducting the literature review for this dissertation, I could not identify any studies that explicitly evaluated elements of survival sex that include some level of consent to sex (literal agreement to or compliance with sex) and coercion (an environment of deprivation). A study of these elements is important to understanding the pressures people experiencing homelessness may encounter to participate in sexual or romantic relationships. Understanding these unique dynamics can provide valuable insights into the distinct characteristics of partner relationships within the context of homelessness, revealing how survival strategies might influence the nature and quality of these relationships. Given that relationships are often formed more out of a necessity for survival (i.e., provision and sharing of essentials like food, shelter, and safety) rather than for developing deep personal or emotional connections (Bower et al., 2018, 2023; Watson, 2016), further study of the

nature of survival sex may help us understand the limitations of partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness.

Survival sex is frequently conceptualized within the umbrella of sexual risk behaviours. A review by Heerde et al. (2015) found that people experiencing homelessness, and especially women, are at a disproportionately high risk of experiencing sexual victimization and engaging in sexual risk behaviours (defined by Heerde and colleagues as survival sex, sex work, engagement in pornography). This conceptualization highlights the complex and vulnerable situations faced by people experiencing homelessness, where survival sex and other related activities are not just choices but often strategies employed under extreme circumstances. Although sex work is also transactional sex, it is different from survival sex since it is considered a professional transaction (Walls & Bell, 2011). If consent is conceptualized on a continuum from sexual assault/victimization on one extreme and enthusiastic consent for sex on the other, survival sex would likely be closer to sexual assault/victimization than sex work. While survival sex could be considered borderline consensual or at least compliant (given the *agreement* to sex under deprivation), sex work is done on one's own accord and thus can conceptually be considered consensual. However, in the context of homelessness, many may engage in sex work under conditions of deprivation (Krüsi et al., 2012; Lazarus et al., 2011). Consent considerations are essential when framing the context in which people experiencing homelessness engage in consensual sexual and romantic relationships. The prevalence of non-consensual or marginally consensual sexual activities among this population can significantly influence their perceptions and experiences of consensual relationships. The pervasive, unsafe environments often faced by those experiencing homelessness can complicate the dynamics of consent, affecting how individuals navigate and perceive consensual sexual or romantic interactions. Recognizing these

challenges is vital to comprehending the full spectrum of sexual and romantic experiences within the context of homelessness.

Overall, the risks researchers frequently link to sexual behaviour among people experiencing homelessness tend to co-occur and are commonly examined together. People experiencing homelessness have been reported to engage in transactional sex at high rates, including sex work and survival sex, putting them at a greater risk of contracting STIs (Chettiar et al., 2010). Thus, in choosing to examine sexual behaviour among people experiencing homelessness as a risky behaviour, a picture of risk-based sex is painted in academic literature that reports on sex among people experiencing homelessness.

Supportive Partner Relationships in the Context of Homelessness

A small but growing body of literature has specifically examined the impact of partner relationships on homelessness. Some studies have provided evidence that partner relationships may increase the chances of exiting homelessness (Nilsson et al., 2019). However, these studies are methodologically limited in that they examined only the relationship between homelessness and partnership status without examining the relationship's quality or the support it provided (e.g., examined partner relationships as one of many individual-level predictors; Nilsson et al., 2019). A handful of qualitative studies have examined partner relationships as the central aim of the study (e.g., Blais et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012) or incidentally when interviewing people experiencing homelessness about sexual risk behaviours (e.g., Ryan et al., 2009) or victimization (e.g., Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014), consistently reporting and partner relationships can be an essential source of support through the harrowing experience of homelessness. Further, there is evidence suggesting that relationship breakdown often precedes episodes of homelessness. This suggests that having stable partner relationships might positively influence the process of exiting

homelessness (Rea, 2022). The stability and support offered by such relationships could potentially play a key role in preventing or mitigating the experience of homelessness. The following sections will review the literature that specifically examined the impact of partner relationships on homelessness.

The Impact of Partner Relationships on Homelessness

In a meta-analysis of individual-level predictors of entries into and exits out of homelessness, Nilsson et al. (2019) concluded that being "partnered" (e.g., married, in a partner relationship) was associated with (pooled OR= 1.7; 95% CI [1.3-2.1]) exiting homelessness. The review offers preliminary evidence indicating that being in a partner relationship could increase the likelihood of individuals transitioning out of homelessness. Four of the five studies used in the Nilsson et al. (2019) article used data on marital or partner status to infer if someone is in a partner relationship (Cheng et al., 2013; Cohen et al., 1997; Donley et al., 2017; Greenberg et al., 2006). Specifically, the studies included questions about current stable relationship status (Cheng et al., 2013), marital history (Cohen et al., 1997), married/cohabiting status (Donley et al., 2017), or marital status (Greenberg et al., 2006).

The four studies did not primarily examine the impact of marital or partner status on homelessness (e.g., the study by Donley et al. did not report on the *p*-value that Nilsson et al. used to reach their conclusion) but instead collected the information as a demographic characteristic and measured their association with exiting homelessness. Moreover, drawing conclusions from marital status is limited because people may be in committed, supportive, long-term relationships and not married. Further, marital or partner status is insufficient to understand the relationship's nature. Research specific to the impact of relationship characteristics on homelessness would be necessary to better understand the relationship between partner

relationships and homelessness. Factors such as relationship satisfaction or support from one's partner may play an important role in the possible benefits of partner relationships in the context of homelessness.

The fifth study in the Nilsson et al. review specifically focused on sexual partner relationships. In this study, authors conducted a longitudinal analysis, with three assessments six months apart, to explore the relationship between characteristics of sexual networks and improvements in housing situations. This was conducted among a cohort of drug users participating in an HIV prevention program, offering a more targeted examination of sexual partner relationships in the context of housing stability (Davey-Rothwell et al., 2011). In this study, the measurement of sexual networks encompassed several factors, including the size of the network (indicated by the number of sexual partners), the presence of a primary or main sex partner (such as a spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend), and whether the sex partner provided emotional support, among other variables. Analyzing data from 237 participants, the study found that having a primary or main partner was linked to a transition from homeless to housed at the final follow-up (Davey-Rothwell et al., 2011). Notably, this study was the only one among the five reviewed by Nilsson et al. that specifically focused on the impact of partner relationships as its central research aim, making it a unique contribution to the literature on this topic.

Overall, these studies provide preliminary evidence that sexual or romantic partner relationships may facilitate exits from homelessness. However, most of this research only incidentally addresses the link between housing status and partnership without examining the quality or specific characteristics of these relationships or considering the type of homelessness involved (e.g., episodic, chronic; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). These studies often rely on marital status as an indicator of partnership, which excludes non-marital relationships and limits

understanding of the full range of partner experiences. Further, despite the overrepresentation of LGBTQ individuals among the homeless population (Ecker, 2016; Ecker et al., 2019; Gutman et al., 2022), few, if any, studies that have specifically examined the impact of partner relationships on homelessness among the LGBTQ population.

It is not unexpected that partner relationships may play a meaningful role in helping individuals exit homelessness. Healthy sexual relationships have been found to enhance closeness and increase relationship satisfaction (Muisse et al., 2016), potentially adding stability and resilience for those experiencing homelessness. The benefits of romantic and sexual relationships are not limited to monogamous partnerships. Individuals in consensually non-monogamous relationships, such as swinging, open relationships, or polyamory, report levels of psychological well-being and relationship quality comparable to those in monogamous relationships (Rubel & Bogaert, 2015). However, despite the unique social support benefits associated with romantic relationships and sexual intimacy, people experiencing homelessness have largely been overlooked in studies examining the benefits of consensual sexual or romantic relationships (Ecker et al., 2018).

In sum, supportive partner relationships can act as a potential mechanism for enhancing housing stability among people experiencing homelessness, offering emotional and material support that may help individuals navigate the complex and often precarious conditions of homelessness. These relationships can provide critical social support, which may alleviate some of the hardships associated with homelessness and, in some cases, facilitate exits from it. This underscores the broader role that social relationships play in shaping the well-being and resilience of individuals facing housing instability. However, understanding these dynamics also requires examining the types of social capital available to people experiencing homelessness and

how social networks influence access to resources and services. The following section will delve into social capital, focusing on how different forms of social connections—whether bonding or bridging—affect individuals' opportunities, support systems, and overall well-being in the context of homelessness.

Social Support

While almost all people experiencing homelessness are living in poverty, not all people who live in poverty are homeless. Various factors can lead those in poverty to become homeless, but strong social connections, especially with family, can significantly reduce this risk. For instance, a study using a nationally representative sample from the United States demonstrated that close familial ties lowered the likelihood of becoming homeless by 50% (Corinth & Rossi-de Vries, 2018). Such findings are consistent with the notion that family members are more likely than friends or other support sources (e.g., religious community) to be willing and able to provide tangible aid (e.g., temporary housing) and support (e.g., guidance) after housing loss to mitigate the effects of housing loss and reduce the chances that one finds themselves homeless (Bates & Toro, 1999). However, some research findings suggest that some social ties may increase stress and loneliness. Particularly in the context of homelessness, people might form relationships more out of necessity for resources and safety than for emotional connection. This dynamic could limit one's ability to rely on relationships to reduce feelings of loneliness, potentially weakening the typically protective role of social relationships in the context of homelessness (Bower et al., 2023).

Social support is a multi-dimensional concept that can be measured in three ways, including 1) social integration considering the size of one's social network; 2) the extent of support received from social network ties; and 3) perceptions of the availability of support from

one's social network ties (Cornman et al., 2003; Hwang et al., 2009). In research on social support within the context of homelessness, romantic relationships are often grouped with other forms of close relationships without a distinct focus on their unique contributions (Hwang et al., 2009; Johnstone et al., 2016). It is thus not clear to what extent the impact of social support on homelessness is attributable to support derived from partner relationships. This lack of differentiation highlights a need for further study into how partner relationships distinctly influence the experiences and outcomes of those experiencing homelessness.

Social Capital

Social capital is understood as the benefits obtained from social relationships that improve access to resources and support. (Irwin et al., 2008; Lin, 2001). It is seen as a form of capital, akin to economic or human capital, that people can use in different circumstances. It emphasizes that networks and connections hold value, offering both emotional support and tangible resources. In the context of housing stability, social support may be a key mechanism through which partner relationships exert some level of positive influence. This perspective underscores the role of social interactions and the resources they provide in shaping individuals' opportunities and well-being.

Social capital is not evenly distributed across the general population, and people experiencing homelessness often have limited access to social capital, in comparison to housed individuals. Bonding capital typically refers to relationships among close family and friends with similar social positions, such as close friends who share common socioeconomic status, neighbourhood environments, or cultural identity. In contrast, bridging capital links people of different social groups (Irwin et al., 2008; Woolcock, 2001). The bonding and bridging capital of people experiencing homelessness often differ significantly from those not experiencing

homelessness. Family relationships, for example, are commonly a source of bonding capital for housed individuals, but this dynamic shifts for those experiencing homelessness, especially if they are estranged from their families. In these cases—particularly among homeless youth rejected by family—connections with peers may act as bridging social capital, extending their networks beyond immediate circles (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2016; Barman-Adhikari & Rice, 2014). For people experiencing homelessness, bonding capital is often established through connections with other homeless peers, which can provide strong social bonds and mutual support. However, this bonding capital may also reinforce social exclusion by limiting connections with non-homeless groups, ultimately hindering broader social integration (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2016). This dynamic highlights how bonding capital among homeless populations can foster community and support but may also hinder broader social integration.

People experiencing homelessness not only have different types of social capital but also tend to have far less of it, which exacerbates challenges in achieving stability and support. A study examining the support networks of women experiencing homelessness and the impact of these networks on substance use found that a significant portion of the participants lacked any substantial source of support. Specifically, over half of the women reported having no meaningful support (i.e., not a single person), highlighting the severe social isolation they experienced (Nyamathi et al., 2000). This finding underscores the acute challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness in terms of building and maintaining supportive social connections. Nyamathi and colleagues (2000) also found that women who received social support from non-substance users (i.e., bridging capital), as opposed to those with no support or support primarily from other substance users (i.e., bonding capital or absence of social capital), demonstrated increased use of health services and improved psychosocial profiles. These profiles

included better self-esteem, more active or problem-focused coping strategies, higher life satisfaction, and fewer psychological symptoms. The study concluded that an increase in support did not necessarily lead to better outcomes if the support came predominantly from other substance users, highlighting the importance of the source of support in influencing health and well-being outcomes. The relationships between substance users and non-users may be a form of bridging capital that facilitates or *bridges* their access to health services and improvement in psychosocial profiles (Nyamathi et al., 2000). It is clear that among people experiencing homelessness, more support does not necessarily translate into better outcomes if this support comes primarily from people of similar social positions (i.e., bonding capital).

Similarly, Fitzpatrick et al. (2007) examined suicidal ideation among people experiencing homelessness and found distinct roles for different types of social capital. They noted that bridging capital, defined in their study as connections with people who are not homeless, provided access to resources beyond the participants' immediate social circles and positively impacted their mental health. In contrast, bonding capital did not show a significant effect on suicidal ideation. Their conclusion emphasizes that social capital connecting disadvantaged individuals to socially dissimilar groups offers benefits not found within bonding capital. These findings highlight the importance of differentiating between types of social capital, particularly in the context of homelessness.

Some forms of bonding capital may contribute to negative outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, referred to as the *dark side* of social capital (van Deth & Zmerli, 2010). The idea was initially developed in political theory, democratic development, and authoritarianism. In this context, strong social ties within a group can foster an 'us versus them' mentality, akin to the psychological concept of in-group and out-group dynamics. This

perspective can lead group members to exclude those outside their group, thereby impeding the development of bridging capital, which is essential for connecting diverse social groups (Putzel, 1997). This theory of the *dark side* of social capital was later expanded and recognized as present across civil society. If a social network becomes too homogenous, its members may benefit from significant social and psychological support at the expense of developing broader identities that would allow them to leave their group if they so choose (van Deth & Zmerli, 2010). Thus, the concept of the *dark side* of bonding capital (Putzel, 1997) implies that in certain situations, it might be more challenging for individuals to escape homelessness. In the context of homelessness, individuals often need to establish relationships with others in similar situations for safety, protection, social support, and access to resources like food and shelter. Therefore, friendships among those experiencing homelessness might frequently be based more on survival needs than on emotional or personal connections (Bower et al., 2018, 2023). It may also be that homelessness reduces opportunities to form relationships with others who are not homeless. People form bonds with people facing similar challenges and not with those who may connect them to resources and opportunities from which they may benefit. This effectiveness is attributed to the broader spectrum of services and support networks accessible through these external connections, which are generally unavailable within the homeless community (e.g., Nyamathi et al., 2000).

The classification of romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness as bonding capital is not straightforward. An essential factor is the nature of the social networks each partner is part of, particularly whether their partner is also experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the impact of a romantic partner, even one within the same social network, on the likelihood of exiting homelessness remains uncertain. Unlike other close relationships, a

romantic partner often shares a uniquely intimate bond and might pool social, material, and financial resources with their partner, potentially influencing their shared housing stability. When assessing the role of social capital in homelessness, one can view a romantic relationship as a singular unit, blending the social and bridging capital each partner contributes. Partners in a romantic relationship can share and mutually benefit from each other's social capital resources, both bonding and bridging, especially when transitioning into new housing. In understanding support within the context of homelessness through a social capital perspective, a key aspect to consider is the extent to which an individual's social network may provide a pathway out of homelessness and how a partner's support may help navigate the challenges and hardships inherent in the experience of homelessness.

Current Dissertation

The overall aim of this three-study dissertation is to comprehensively examine the role of sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness. I investigate the dynamics, implications, and outcomes of these relationships, particularly focusing on how they influence housing stability, social support, and individual well-being. Further, the studies collectively aim to explore under-investigated aspects of homelessness, such as the impact of consensual partner relationships, the nuances of survival sex, and the prevalence of and satisfaction within romantic relationships across different homelessness typologies. This dissertation, composed of three sequentially designed studies with each shaping the scope and objectives of the following study.

Study 1 systematically reviewed the literature on sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness. The initial phase of the study involved a comprehensive review and identification of relevant sources and categorizing literature on sexual

and romantic behaviour among the homeless into four primary topics: victimization, sexual health risk, survival sex, and consensual relationships. The review and categorization revealed a notable lack of research on consensual partner relationships within this demographic. Although existing studies suggest that such relationships might offer support and potentially aid in exiting homelessness, the evidence is preliminary and not robust. Given the scarcity of research literature on the topic, this first study was helpful in shaping the direction of subsequent studies, helping to define their objectives and methodologies effectively.

Study 2 was a scoping study that examined the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex to identify which factors push people into greater levels of deprivation and vulnerability to engage in survival sex. One of the categories that emerged from Study 1 was survival sex. Investigating consent and coercion in survival sex is crucial for grasping the pressures or incentives people experiencing homelessness may experience to participate in sexual or romantic relationships. This inquiry can shed light on the particularities of partnerships in homelessness, showing how survival needs might shape these relationships. Given that relationships often stem from survival necessities rather than emotional bonds, exploring the dynamics of survival sex is vital to understanding the potential constraints of partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness. Given that relationships are often formed more out of a necessity for survival rather than for developing deep personal or emotional connections (Bower et al., 2018, 2023; Watson, 2016), further study of the dynamics of survival sex is key to understanding the potential constraints on the protective aspects that partner relationships may offer in the context of homelessness.

Study 3 used data from the longitudinal Health and Housing in Transition (HHiT) study to examine the relationship between partner relationships and housing stability among homeless

and vulnerably housed individuals across three Canadian cities. Participants were categorized by homelessness typology (chronic, episodic, transitional; Culhane et al., 2007) and based on their frequency of partnership and levels of romantic satisfaction over the four years of the study. Multinomial logistic and linear regression analyses assessed the associations between romantic satisfaction, partner status, and housing stability. To further explore these relationships, path analyses tested the indirect effect of partner status on housing stability via romantic satisfaction to examine a possible mediating effect. Three path analysis models examined the pathways from the independent variable (partner status) at one year to the dependent variable (housing stability) through the mediator (satisfaction with romantic relationships) while controlling for covariates. All variables were measured at one time point, with the dependent variable measured in the following year.

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Study 1: Sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness: A scoping review

Abstract

Homelessness is widely recognized as a pervasive issue. Despite increasing research on factors affecting the health and well-being of people who are homeless, one that remains relatively understudied is the role of romantic and sexual relationships. Given that this population has the same needs for intimacy and closeness as anyone else, it is important to understand how these relationships occur, what barriers exist in developing and maintaining them, and what is their impact. This scoping review aimed to (1) characterize the nature of research that has examined sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless, and (2) identify and synthesize the findings of studies that examined romantic and sexual relationships among people who are homeless. Of 539 studies that examined sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless, 88.87% examined sexual health risk, 11.13% examined sexual victimization, 5.57% examined survival sex, and 2.41% examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships. Of the studies that examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships substantially ($n=13$) all used qualitative methods and identified common themes such as love, romance and emotional support; partner relationships as transactional; barriers to partner relationships; and casual sex and pleasure. Despite the possible benefits of sexual and romantic relationships in the context of homelessness, researchers instead have primarily focused on possible risks associated with sex. We introduce how sexual citizenship can be applied to understand how current practices and policies limit people's civic participation when homeless.

Sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness: A scoping review

Homelessness is a pervasive global problem (Embleton et al., 2016; Philippot et al., 2007; Toro, 2007). Although definitions of homelessness may vary, they generally include people who experience primary homelessness (living without shelter) or secondary homelessness (homeless shelters, absence of a usual residence; United Nations, 2008). People experiencing homelessness often reside in emergency shelters where conditions tend to be poor and may include bed bug infestations (Hwang et al., 2005), and where they may experience poor mental health (Aubry et al., 2016). People who are homeless and who reside in emergency shelters tend to have lower levels of subjective quality of life compared to the general population or to those who are formerly homeless but are housed (Hubley et al., 2014). Increasingly, definitions of homelessness have expanded to include people in poor quality and unstable housing. This is consistent with the American definition of homelessness as describing someone who “lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (Henry, 2018, p. 2) and the Canadian definition that lists a range of living situations including being unstably housed (Gaetz et al., 2012). Indeed, the health and well-being of people who are unstably housed is similar to that of people experiencing primary or secondary homelessness, suggesting that unstable housing may not be conducive to better health and well-being when compared to homelessness (Argintaru et al., 2013).

In a context of poor quality of life and challenging living conditions associated with homelessness, some have emphasized the unique importance of social support (Johnstone et al., 2016). Social support and strong social ties, particularly among close relatives and friends, have been shown to mitigate the risk of becoming homeless (Corinth & Rossi-de Vries, 2018). Family

members are more likely than friends or other support sources (e.g., religious communities) to be willing and able to provide tangible aid (e.g., temporary housing) and support (e.g., guidance) as a means of mitigating the effects of housing loss and reducing the odds that one becomes homeless (Bates & Toro, 1999).

Romantic relationships are an important source of emotional support and sexual intercourse is an important part of intimate relationships. A healthy sexual relationship has been found to enhance closeness in relationships and increase relationship satisfaction (Muise et al., 2016). Benefits associated with romantic and sexual relationships are not limited to monogamous relationships. Those who engage in consensually non-monogamous relationships including swinging, open relationships, and polyamory tend to report similar levels of psychological well-being and relationship quality as those who practise monogamy (Rubel & Bogaert, 2015). When examining sexual behaviour in the homeless population, researchers have often focused on the possible negative outcomes of sexual activity, such as the transmission of HIV (e.g., Maria et al., 2018). Indeed, people who are homeless are at a greater risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (S. P. Williams & Bryant, 2018). Research has also suggested that people who are homeless tend to experience high rates of sexual assault and victimization (Baron, 2003; Heerde & Hemphill, 2016). The homeless population has also been reported to engage in transactional sex at high rates, including sex work and survival sex, putting them at a greater risk of contracting STIs (Chettiar et al., 2010).

Despite the important and unique benefits of social support associated with romantic relationships and sexual intimacy, people who are homeless appear to have been largely excluded from the literature that examines the benefits of consensual sexual or romantic relationships (Ecker et al., 2018). This is despite evidence that that being “partnered” (e.g.,

married, in a partner relationship) was associated with exiting homelessness, providing some initial evidence that romantic and sexual relationships may be conducive to exiting homelessness (Nilsson et al., 2019). One framework that may help in understanding the exclusion of people who are homeless from this literature is sexual citizenship. Sexual citizenship is a framework that has been used to examine ways in which sexual minorities' citizenship and societal participation is limited or constrained. Sexual minorities were considered sex offenders until *homosexual* acts were decriminalized, thereby ending the institutional policing of their sexual practices (McGhee, 2004). This was also extended to social and political theory by Turner (2008) as reproductive citizenship, where people who are in non-heterosexual relationships were traditionally viewed as not contributing to society by raising children while their parental rights were limited by various social and legal conditions. Thus, a primary argument in sexual citizenship literature is that dominant forms of heterosexuality underpin societal understanding of citizenship, excluding people who are sexual minorities under the assumption that they do not fulfill obligations to society associated with childbearing (Richardson, 2017).

Increasingly, the concept of citizenship has been introduced in discussions of people who are homeless or who have experienced serious mental illness (Rowe et al., 2001; Sylvestre, 2017; Walsh & Klease, 2004). These discussions highlight how people have been denied full participation in society. This marginalization includes the denial of the right to sexual expression. Wade (2002) has argued that the fundamental right to sexual expression is denied to people with significant disabilities due to assumptions that sexual expression is something they either do not need or are unable to practice. We argue that people experiencing homelessness are similarly denied the right to sexual expression because of societal responses to those without housing based on how people who are homeless are controlled or managed. Integral to a human

rights-based model of sexual citizenship is the internationally recognized right to privacy (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, 1966). The right to privacy is closely linked to having control over one's public-facing actions and is a right systemically denied to people experiencing homelessness given that privacy and property go hand in hand and that people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately affected by privacy breaches (Lynch & Cole, 2003; Sparks, 2010). Indeed, romantic and sexual relationships are constrained and regulated by the spaces that people experiencing homelessness occupy. Homeless shelters, for example, may have policies that separate couples and that actively discourage or prohibit sexual contact (R. A. Brown et al., 2013). They offer little or no space for privacy, and when not in shelters, people who are homeless largely occupy public spaces.

The sexual citizenship of people who are homeless can also be suppressed through the absence of positive social representations of sexuality in this population. Research may largely focus on risks associated with sex, obscuring that positive relationships exist and that people who are homeless have the same needs, and desires as those who are housed. When studying social support in the context of homelessness, researchers often group close relationships that include sexual and romantic relationships together when measuring social support without examining the unique value of sexual and romantic relationships (e.g., Hwang et al., 2009; Johnstone et al., 2016). These concerns may be mirrored at the practice level where little or no support or resources are offered for initiating or maintaining positive relationships, and instead, messages of risk dominate. The result is that an essential aspect of life, the right to sexual expression, is discouraged if not outright denied, to people who are already vulnerable in so many other ways.

A first aim of the current scoping review was to examine the literature that focused on sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless and to understand how the

topic has been studied. A second and more central aim of this review was to identify and report on research that examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless. Scoping studies are particularly useful when considering a broad topic that has not previously been extensively researched (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). We took an open-ended approach that started broadly and eventually narrowed our criteria as our familiarity with the literature increased. We were guided by the following two research questions:

1. How has the existing empirical literature studied sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless?
2. What are the extent, nature and range of findings for the studies that have examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless?

Methods

This review was adapted from the methodology presented by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). Our reporting for this scoping study was guided by the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018).

Identification of Relevant Studies

Information Sources

This scoping review focuses on romantic and sexual relationships among people who are homeless. A social sciences research librarian with experience in planning systematic and scoping reviews (PL), contributed to this review by drafting, developing and implementing a search strategy to find pertinent published articles in APA PsycInfo (Ovid), Medline (Ovid), CINAHL (Ebsco), Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest) and Web of Science. The search strategy itself was designed, in part, by examining reviews related to

sexual intimacy and sexual risk behaviours (Naranbhai et al., 2011; Tucker et al., 2016) as well as to homelessness (Munthe-Kaas et al., 2018; Naranbhai et al., 2011), and through discussions with members of the research team. The search strategy aimed to capture studies that refer to consensual sexual or romantic behaviours. This included “survival sex” that may under some circumstances be considered consensual but did not include terms that definitionally refer to non-consensual sex (e.g., “rape”). The final search strategy includes relevant database-specific subject headings and keywords for both homelessness (e.g., “homeless*”; “living on the street*”) and sexual intimacy (e.g., “romance”; “sexual intercourse”) of the review and was executed on October 31, 2019. No limits or restrictions were used in any of the database searches (the complete search strategy is available in the Supplementary File 1). We imported citations into Covidence, an online tool used to manage various aspects of systematic and scoping reviews. Duplicate references were identified and removed once imported into Covidence.

Eligibility Criteria

We included empirical peer-reviewed articles published in English. We excluded dissertations, editorials, and review articles. No date restrictions were applied to the searches.

Study Selection

Figure 1 displays a flow chart detailing steps taken for this review, including number of citations screened, articles moved to full-text, studies assessed for content and finally, studies included in the synthesis of results.

Initial Title and Abstract Screening

All title and abstract screening was conducted independently by two investigators (KC, KT) using Covidence. We pilot tested 300 references to ensure common understanding of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and that screening was consistent. We met regularly to resolve

discrepancies and to reach a consensus on each individual reference. This process also included revising some of the inclusion criteria and involving other members of the research team in the discussion when necessary. Once the pilot was completed, the titles and abstracts of a total of 2715 unique references identified through the database searches were screened.

Eligibility. Articles were eligible for inclusion in our review if (1) the population of interest was individuals who are homeless and (2) the article was explicitly about sexual or romantic relationships. If the main focus of the article or a dedicated section of the article was not about sexual behaviour (e.g., a single sexual behaviour outcome reported in the context of a study examining something other than sexual behaviour), it was excluded. If an article was about a sexual minority group but did not examine sexual behaviours, it was excluded. If an article was about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but did not examine the sexual behaviours associated with acquisition of the infections, it was excluded. Our definitions of homelessness were consistent with both the Canadian (Gaetz et al., 2012) and American (Henry, 2018) definitions, that include residential instability (and related terms such as housing insecurity).

Second Title and Abstract Screening

A total of 654 references were included following the initial round of title and abstract screening. Prior to beginning the full-text screening stage of the review, we took the additional step of further examining the titles and abstracts. Of the 654 references, 115 were initially excluded for the following reasons: duplicate articles ($n=50$); language other than English ($n=11$); irrelevant (i.e., does not meet inclusion criteria; $n=16$); wrong publication type (e.g., a conference abstract; $n=11$); source was a review article ($n=13$); or full-text unavailable ($n=14$). After excluding these 115 references, 539 references were further examined. The majority of these were about sexual risk only (e.g., sexual behaviour as a risk factor for HIV). Closely

assessing the titles and abstracts of these references allowed us to identify 360 references whose sole focus was on *sexual health risk*, which we decided to screen out.

Full-Text Screening and Coding

Three reviewers (KC, KT, PL) took part in the process of full-text screening of the remaining 179 articles. At this point, our aim was to identify what proportion of these articles examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships, to then extract data from those and to synthesize their results. Articles were coded using four (at times overlapping) codes to understand the broad nature of the available literature: sexual health risk; sexual victimization; survival sex; and consensual sexual or romantic relationships. We considered a fifth, sex work, but found that articles that examined the topic generally fit within the other categories. We chose these codes, based on reviewer notes and discussions, as representing the different kinds of sexual behaviour reported on in the relevant literature.

The 179 articles were divided evenly between each of the three reviewers so that each article was coded twice. All reviewers piloted 15 articles and reviewed disagreements and refined code definitions to ensure they were understood in a consistent manner. Next, reviewers coded the articles for four categories of interest, allowing for multiple codes to be applied to the same article. Once the independent coding was complete, two reviewers (KC, KT) resolved conflicts to decide on the final coding for each of the references where conflicting codes were applied. We coded 119 references as relating to *sexual health risk*, 60 as *sexual victimization*, 105 as *survival sex* and 51 as *consensual sexual or romantic relationships*.

Our initial *survival sex* and *consensual sexual or romantic relationships* definitions were more broadly defined than the other categories; they included any reference to participants engaging in survival sex or consensual sexual or romantic relationships. We therefore narrowed

the definitions to be more consistent with *sexual health risk* and *sexual victimization*. They were narrowed to ensure included studies substantially or primarily focused on survival sex (see Table 1 for a display of the criteria and definitions for each code). Two reviewers (KC, KT) reviewed the full texts of the articles initially coded for *survival sex* and *consensual sexual or romantic relationships* to ensure that the narrower definitions were still applicable and, thus, ensuring a more consistent and reliable measure of the overall proportion of literature devoted to each of the four categories. This review for the narrower definitions resulted in a reduction of 105 articles coded for *survival sex* to 30. In the following section we provide more detail about this process as it applied to *consensual sexual or romantic relationships*, the code for which we aimed to ultimately synthesize results.

Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relationships: Article Selection and Charting

Given the exploratory nature of our search, we initially coded articles very broadly regardless of the centrality of consensual relationships within a given article. Two reviewers (KC, KT) independently reviewed the 51 studies (see the full list of 51 references in the Supplementary file 2) that were coded as having examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships to further determine which of these substantially examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships. Studies considered to have substantially examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships must have either (1) primarily examined consensual relationships as the purpose of the article, or (2) have devoted a sizeable section of the article to consensual relationships if the purpose of the article was to examine something else (e.g., survival sex). Reviewers resolved any disagreements through discussion by reviewing the full text of the article together. As a result of this process, 13 articles were included in this review (see Table 2).

Results

Of 539 studies that examined sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless, 88.87% ($n=479$) examined sexual health risk, 11.13% ($n=60$) examined sexual victimization, 5.57% ($n=30$) examined survival sex, and 2.41% ($n=13$) examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships. In the following sections we summarize some characteristics of the four codes (see Table 2 for full code definitions) and the remainder of the results will focus on our synthesis of results of studies that examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships.

Sexual Health Risk

The vast majority of studies ($n= 479$ or 88.87%) focused on sexual risk behaviours (e.g., unprotected sex). Pregnancy was considered as an aspect of sexual health, meaning that articles examining risk behaviours associated with unplanned pregnancy were included in this category. The vast majority of these articles focused exclusively on sexual behaviour as a risk factor for possible poor sexual health outcomes. Although these articles examined a wide range of sexual health outcomes, the most common was HIV. Factors that were frequently examined as predictors of poorer sexual health outcomes were exchanging sex or sex work, sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and sexual orientation. Articles in the three other categories often included an examination of sexual risk.

Survival Sex

Survival sex was defined as the exchange of sex to obtain materials to meet basic needs. We initially applied this code liberally to any article that examined survival sex or if their participants disclosed, they had engaged in the practice ($n=105$ or 19.48%). After the initial coding, we narrowed criteria to identify articles that had a significant focus on survival sex to be more consistent with criteria used for other categories ($n=30$ or 5.57%). Articles excluded at this stage often included survival sex as one of multiple behaviours or experiences associated with a

construct such as sexual risk behaviour (e.g., Halcon & Lifson, 2004), sexual exploitation (e.g., Fogel et al., 2017), or HIV risk behaviour (e.g., Booth & Zhang, 1997). Some excluded studies included a more peripheral focus on survival sex if their research participants brought survival sex themselves but did not initially ask about survival sex (e.g., Johnson et al., 2010).

Exchanging sex for money was not considered survival sex, except in the context of extreme deprivation. The majority of these articles were focused on women exchanging for either basic goods such as food, shelter, or drugs. Trading sex for goods was commonly included as a variable associated with negative sexual health outcomes.

Sexual Victimization

Articles were coded for sexual victimization if the article had a significant focus on sexual victimization (e.g., sexual assault or sexual exploitation) that occurred while the victim was homeless ($n=60$ or 11.13%). This finding is almost certainly an underestimate of the total amount of literature that examines sexual victimization among people who are homeless, given that our search terms did not aim to identify victimization, but sexual behaviour broadly. This finding suggests a search for sexual or romantic relationships will identify a proportion of literature that primarily examines sexual victimization. Some studies reported on a relationship between experiencing childhood victimization and the likelihood of experiencing current sexual victimization on the street (Tyler & Schmitz, 2018). Further, childhood victimization and current street victimization are associated with trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Kim et al., 2018). Overall, the majority of articles about sexual victimization focused on sexual violence against or the sexual exploitation of women and youth. Sexual victimization was often brought up in the context of studies that employed qualitative interviews as part of their design; studies frequently asserted that sexual victimization is associated with homelessness.

Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relationships

Articles in this category were characterized by descriptions of sexual intimacy, desire, pleasure, love and romantic relationships. Some articles also focused on barriers to engagement in consensual relationships, including structural barriers within shelter systems. Merely asking whether someone was in a romantic relationship was not considered sufficient focus. In total, 51 (9.46%) articles were coded for consensual sexual or romantic relationships. The majority of these ($n=38$) included mentions of consensual sexual or romantic relationships without a substantially focusing on them. Only 13 (2.41%) articles provided an in-depth examination of this concept. Among the 38 articles that did not have a substantial focus, consensual sexual and romantic relationships were frequently brought up by participants within the context of a qualitative interview, rather than being part of the authors' research questions. Therefore, the following sections will focus on the articles coded as examining consensual sexual and romantic relationships, and the other codes will be used to contextualize them within the broader literature.

Synthesis of Main Results

Of the 539 articles that were coded for the four categories, 51 (9.46%) were coded for consensual sexual or romantic relationships and when we added the criterion that an article must have a substantial focus on consensual sexual or romantic relationships, 13 (2.41%) studies were identified as such.

These 13 publications all used qualitative methods (with one using mixed qualitative and quantitative) and were published between 2005 and 2018. All studies were conducted with participants 18 years or older with the exception of one study that described their population as youth without identifying their age range (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). In terms of gender/sex, six studies sampled women only, five samples included both men and women, and one sampled men

only. Five studies were conducted in the United States, three in Canada, two in Australia, one in England, and one in South Africa. Two studies did not specify where they were conducted, but given that all author affiliations were in Florida, we marked the studies as located in the United States (Wesely, 2018; Wesely & Wright, 2005).

Of the 13 studies that focus on consensual sexual or romantic relationships, two were also coded as including a focus on sexual health, two examined survival sex, and three as included a focus on sexual victimization. This suggests an overlap between articles focusing on consensual relationships and other aspects of non-consensual or potentially non-consensual (i.e., survival sex) sex. The following section examines the results of these 13 studies that were retained for this scoping review. Study characteristics are charted in Table 2.

In this section we use *partner relationships* to refer to consensual romantic or sexual relationships. We acknowledge, however, that authors whose work we synthesize in the following sections may have used other terms such as couple relationships, intimate relationships, normative intimate relationships or romantic relationships. Even when using different terminology, it is not always clear if authors are referring to the same kind of union (e.g., difference between couple relationship and romantic relationship may not be clear). We also note that the distinction between a committed, romantic partner relationship and uncommitted sexual or casual relationship is also not clear. This ambiguity, however, may not be unique to relationships among people who are homeless.

Gendered Results

Among the studies we reviewed, gender was an important theme in terms of study design, sampling, and result reporting. Only six studies sampled both men and women (Attenborough, 1998; Blais et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014; Rayburn & Corzine, 2010;

Stevenson & Neale, 2012), another six sampled only women (Loates & Walsh, 2010; Ryan et al., 2009; Watson, 2011, 2016; Wesely, 2018; Wesely & Wright, 2005), and one study sampled men only (R. A. Brown et al., 2013).

Of the studies that examined the experience of both men and women in their samples, some noted gender differences in the experience of sexual or romantic relationships while homeless. In their study of the experience of people living in emergency shelters, Stevenson and Neale (2012) noted that men more frequently indicated that sex played an important role in their relationships and men also spoke of casual sex relationships more often than women. As this sample consisted of people who use opiates for long periods of time, this may have had an impact sexual desire.

Jones et al. (2012) reported that the men in their sample of homeless employed adults tended to not be in partner relationships. In contrast, two thirds of the women in their sample reported they were in relationships, despite the fact that many had become homeless after fleeing a previous (in some instances abusive) relationship. Several studies reported on the expectations that men would provide physical protection to women, who were thus in partnered relationships by necessity. This is covered in greater detail in a later section devoted to *Physical Protection and Safety*. In addition to reporting on men as protectors of women in partner relationships, one study of homeless youth living on streets identified men as both providers of necessities and perpetrators of violence against women (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). The authors also remarked that some women hid their sex work from their male partners, noting that the sex work conflicted with men's perceptions of their role as the male provider.

Although studies that sampled both men and women made gender comparisons within their sample, studies that examined the experience of women only tended to take a feminist

approach to their research. For example, Watson (2016) aimed to “conceptualize how gendered subjectivities are produced and practised through young women’s experiences of intimate relationships while homeless” (p. 263). Four studies examined the gendered experiences or subjectivities of their single-gender sample (e.g., Watson, 2011, 2016; Wesely, 2018; Wesely & Wright, 2005). One such gendered experience, identified in a study of women who had experienced homelessness, is that participants reported that they were frequently presumed to be willing to exchange sex for basic necessities simply because of their homeless status (Watson, 2011). Another study reported on their participants’ mixed feelings about gender separation policies in shelters (Loates & Walsh, 2010). Some women reported feeling unsafe and being harassed or stared at by men with whom they shared accommodations. For other women, however, separation meant being unable to sleep next to their male partner (Loates & Walsh, 2010). We expand further on separation as a barrier to partner relationships in the *Barriers to Partner Relationships* section of this paper.

Love, Romance, Emotional Support

Eleven studies reported on partner relationships as a source of love, romance, and support through the experience of homelessness. When reviewing the articles displayed in Table 2, we found these themes to be the most prevalent.

Support through homelessness. Eight studies reported on the emotional support from partner relationships, which was perceived as beneficial or essential. Some also identified relationships as a source of hope and motivation during unstable times and a tangible source of support when people had children to care for. Loates and Walsh (2010) identified partner relationships as a crucial source of support that provided women living in shelters with strength through the experience of homelessness. Similarly, the shelter residents interviewed by Rayburn

and Corzine (2010) identified relationships as a source of emotional support where people could talk to their partners about their troubles. In a study of women staying in homeless shelters who had experienced violence, some explained that being homeless with their husbands made them feel safe emotionally, giving them a sense of emotional security (Wesely & Wright, 2005).

Some studies identified the support provided by partner relationships as reducing isolation, including benefits afforded to by their partner relationships that included a reduction of isolation as well as help in coping through struggles related to mental health (Stevenson & Neale, 2012). In another study, a third of the street-involved young adults interviewed reported that partner relationships made them feel valued and confident, and contributed to easing feelings of isolation. Participants reported that the emotional support they received from their partners helped them get through the precarious conditions of street life (Blais et al., 2012)

Other studies reported on a stabilizing effect: in a study of homeless adults, participants indicated that the experience of homelessness strengthened their relationships with their partners and contributed to a sense of normalcy and stability (Jones et al., 2012). Similarly, in a study of young women who had experienced homelessness, partner relationships were said to offer a sense of stability (Watson, 2011). The relationships were described as having provided participants with additional social capital that made the impact of homelessness more bearable. However, one respondent provided a disconfirming perspective to this view, preferring to not have a partner while homeless. The participant reported that pursuing partner relationships during a period of homelessness can make survival on the street more arduous or *messy* (Watson, 2011).

Some studies identified partner relationships as providing participants with hope and motivation to create change in their lives (Blais et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2012), or as essential for

psychological health and following a good path in life, including exiting homelessness (R. A. Brown et al., 2013). Finally, when discussing support through homelessness, respondents from three studies identified practical support such as caring for their children as being crucial (Blais et al., 2012; Loates & Walsh, 2010; Stevenson & Neale, 2012).

Love. Six studies examined romantic love relationships in the context of homelessness. Studies found that love was a prominent or particularly important theme in their data. One study identified the general importance of a lover and romantic relationships as one of the most significant findings of their study, despite this not being an initial aim of the study, but instead one that was frequently brought up by participants without prompting (Rayburn & Corzine, 2010). Authors of a study examining the experience of street-involved young adults identified a romantic view of love as a dominating perspective of partner relationships identified by most of their sample (Blais et al., 2012). Those who had been on the street longer tended to describe a less idealized romantic view of love that had been transformed by life on the street. Those who spent less time on the street, however, described love as intangible and meant to last.

When discussing romantic love, respondents in some studies emphasized emotional intensity and commitment. The 28 women residing in homeless shelters interviewed by Ryan and colleagues (2009) described a total of 56 recent sexual events. In all events, respondents reported they knew their partners to some degree prior to engaging in sex (i.e., they did not have “one-night stands” with strangers). The women often characterized sexual events in terms of emotional intensity. Especially in the context of more serious relationships that involved deeper connections, the women in their study described commitment, love, and supportive relationships. Stevenson and Neale (2012), who examined the experience of adult drug users in emergency shelters, reported that shelter users described an intense commitment and desire to be together. To

spend time alone together with their partners, some resorted to foregoing their shelter beds to camp in tents outside (Stevenson & Neale, 2012).

In contrast to the other studies that identified love as an important component of partner relationships in the context of homelessness, the nature of love was described as more transactional by the homeless youth interviewed by Osthus and Sewpaul (2014). Authors reported that the meaning of love was contested among their participants. Many of their respondents described a relationship between love and provision of material resources as inseparable. This was also observed by Watson (2011) who reported that some relationships may have started in the context of a transactional relationship where the primary motivation was to seek financial support to facilitate survival on the street. In some instances, however, the young women who had experienced homelessness reported staying in a relationship they initially considered as a means to gain financial support because they were treated well. Thus, when discussing romantic/love narratives, some of Watson's (2011) respondents conceptualized material support as evidence of being cared for by their partner.

Partner Relationships as Transactional

Nine studies reported on transactional characteristics of partner relationships. The transactional nature of these relationships involved three factors: survival sex, transactions for physical protection and sex work.

Survival Sex. Eight studies identified survival sex either within the context of partner relationships or not, involving the exchange of sex for food, shelter, substances or other material resources. Such transactional relationships may have been in the context of a love relationship or a one-time exchange of sex for resources, but, at times, the lines between the two were blurred.

Blais and colleagues (2012) described a need to survive as explaining the establishment of partner relationships of half of their sample of street-involved young adults. Their participants described entering into a love relationship as a strategy for sharing a partner's resources out of necessity to survive. Attenborough (1999) reported that shelter residents frequently exchanged sex for drugs and drew an association between the exchange and high-risk sexual behaviour. Out of that same necessity to survive, Wesely (2018) reported that some of the formerly street-involved women they interviewed drew men in by feigning sexual availability and proceeded to rob those men when they were off guard.

Most descriptions of survival sex, however, did not involve theft and at times occurred within a partnered or more serious relationship. A study of young men and women living on the street described relationships between boyfriends and girlfriends as transactional (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). Although some discourses of love and care were present, it was clear that the provision of money, food, and other goods in exchange for sex were explicit in parallel with such discourses. Similarly, the majority of homeless men interviewed by Brown and colleagues (2013) described temporary or unstable relationships as opportunistic exchanges of sex from the women for substances or other resources from the men. The men attributed these circumstances to the harshness of the conditions on the street. This is consistent with young homeless women's descriptions in another study that stated that it was presumed they would be willing to exchange sex for necessities because of their homeless status (Watson, 2011). Moreover, there is some evidence these experiences are not rare. A study of homeless women examined the frequency in which partner relationships of a transactional nature occurred by examining descriptions of women's recent sexual episodes (Ryan et al., 2009). Authors found that a fifth of the episodes described involved the exchange of sex for money, substances, or material things. Of the

episodes described, approximately half were in the context of a serious relationship. This suggests that, consistent with observations in other studies (e.g., Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014), the implicit or explicit transactional nature within relationships may occur in the context of both serious romantic relationships as well as those that do not involve a more serious romantic component.

Indeed, the gendered nature of these transactions was frequently discussed in the literature where women were described as trading sex for material goods or possessions provided by men. In one study, however, some of the women experiencing poverty and homelessness who were interviewed described their relationships with men as consisting of mutual financial support (Loates & Walsh, 2010). This was an example of mutual financial support within the context of a partner relationship in contrast to more one-sided transactional relationships where men provided material goods to women in exchange for sex.

Physical Protection and Safety. When describing the transactional nature of partner relationships, respondents in six studies described engaging in partner relationships in exchange for physical protection or safety. In all six studies, this was described as a gendered phenomenon where women would pair with men to seek protection from them. Watson (2016) described these as bodily alliances where women, by necessity, relied on men's stronger bodies for safety. Another study described the dynamic as a protector and provider role that boyfriends held within their partner relationships (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). Some studies also cited threats of street life (Blais et al., 2012) or a threatening, insecure environment (Stevenson & Neale, 2012) that necessitated such partnerships to establish a sense of safety. In their study of homeless men, Brown and colleagues (2013) described temporary relationships where men provided protection to women in exchange for sex. Some of the men in their sample described partnering with

women whom they reported would “skip” from one male partner to the next depending on whom they perceived as most capable of providing protection. Their participants reported that in some instances, this involved one woman partnering with several men at once (Brown et al., 2013). While most studies did not specify the nature of the threats from which women would seek protection, Watson (2011) reported that some of the young women who experienced homelessness in their sample described a threat of male violence associated with street homelessness that partner relationships provided protection against.

Sex Work. A final kind of transactional relationship was sex work. Four studies reported on their participants’ experiences trading sex for money, often described as a means of survival (Loates & Walsh, 2010). In their study of the experience of formerly street-involved women, Wesely (2018) reported that some of their participants progressively transitioned from stripping to sex work as they became more entangled in street life. In a context where men expect to be providers, some female youth described instances where they concealed their sex work from their male partners (Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014). Thus, some described the stigmatizing nature of sex work, but it was frequently cited as a necessity for survival. Considering the nature of sex work, some women residing in temporary shelters differentiated between more formalized sex trade or less formal situations involving survival sex where sex was traded (more implicitly) for a place to stay or for food (Ryan et al., 2009). In many cases, the distinctions between sex work and survival sex were unclear.

Barriers to Partner Relationships

Six studies identified barriers to partner relationships. Many of the barriers were described as unique to people who are homeless or street-involved, and included concerns related to living in a shelter, the stigma associated with being homeless and substance use. Other barriers

such as infidelity or relationship difficulties were described as exacerbated by the experience of homelessness. In addition to the six that reported on barriers, one study reported mixed findings related to *couple rooms* in a shelter. Attenborough (1998) reported on a shelter that included couple rooms where people could seek privacy for intimacy. Same-sex partnered residents who said that use of the rooms would be too public of a statement on their sexuality and thus did not use them. Couple rooms were inaccessible to gay couples due to social barriers but accessible to and used by those who were coupled with other-sex partners.

Five studies identified shelter rules, policies, and environments as a barrier to engaging in and maintaining partner relationships (Attenborough, 1998; Blais et al., 2012; R. A. Brown et al., 2013; Loates & Walsh, 2010; Rayburn & Corzine, 2010; Stevenson & Neale, 2012). Challenges included not being able to sleep beside one's partner, no-visitor policies, and single-sex shelters. Further, respondents in one study reported issues related to a gender imbalance where men outnumbered women, making it difficult for other-sex attracted men to find partners (Stevenson & Neale, 2012).

Three studies identified the stigma or low social status associated with homelessness as a barrier to partner relationships. A third of the men interviewed by Brown and colleagues (2013) described how their homelessness degraded their self-esteem and their self-confidence. Some reported they believed that there was additional stigma on homeless men who were partnered, or had families, in contrast to single homeless men. Similarly, approximately a third of Blais and colleagues' (2012) sample (12 men, two women), believed that their status as street-involved substance-using youth was unattractive and stigmatizing. Authors reported that their participants attempted to hide evidence of their substance use and street involvement from potential partners through various means including lying about their circumstances and using financial means to

distract from or compensate for their street involvement. Finally, Watson (2011) reported that their sample of young homeless women described the experience of feeling shame related to their homeless status and viewed their homelessness as stigmatizing. Indeed, the author provided an example of one participant who hid the fact that she had become homeless for several months from her partner because the participant viewed their homelessness status as stigmatizing.

Three studies identified substance use as a barrier. One study's sample of drug users residing in emergency shelters identified reduced libido as an effect of long-term opiate use and increased risk of blood-borne virus transmission as a barrier to sexual relationships (Stevenson & Neale, 2012). A second study (Attenborough 1998) identified libido loss while under the influence of opiates as a barrier to sexual contact. Another study that examined the experience of street-involved young adults cited substance use as the most influential factor on romantic relationships (Blais et al., 2012). While a minority of their participants acknowledged that substance use created opportunities for them to meet partners, most reported that drug trafficking and use (whether their own or that of their partner), hindered their ability to invest in a romantic relationship or had led to conflicts.

Casual Sex, Pleasure, Attraction

Five studies examined partner relationships described as short-term, casual or uncommitted that were associated with pleasure, desire, and attraction. When discussing such relationships, half of a sample of street-involved young adults identified sex, physical attraction and pleasure as important reasons for engaging in casual sexual relationships, some of whom reported that they had sex because of sexual attraction and not love (Blais et al., 2012). Attenborough (1998) reported that all but one of the people they interviewed said they had sex while living in the shelter and a few had sex while living on the streets, these encounters

frequently occurred with people they had just met. Rayburn and Corzine (2010), reported that desire was an important motivator for engaging in casual sexual relationships among adults in homeless shelters, with some emphasizing that a focus on hygiene and exercising to stay fit was important to remain sexually attractive.

One study that examined monogamy among homeless men reported that the majority of their sample said that they engage in brief relationships or one-time encounters (R. A. Brown et al., 2013). Some of the men were reported to have described one-time encounters in idealized terms, longing to see them again or comparing their partners to themselves unfavourably (i.e., that they did not deserve to be with the one-time partner). In the study by Ryan et al. (2009), women residing in temporary shelters discussed casual relationships in the context of referring to a new partner or a relationship that lasted for a brief period of time. These relationships served a number of purposes, including romantic or emotional attachment, sexual activity without emotional attachment, or reasons that were described as purely economic.

Discussion

We conducted a scoping study that examined the broad characteristics of the existing literature on sexual or romantic relationships. We then focused on identifying and synthesizing findings from studies that specifically examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless. In the following paragraphs we highlight the major findings of the review as they relate to consensual partner relationships and discuss them in terms of the insights they aggregately produced. We also propose sexual citizenship as a human rights-based framework to contextualize findings related to the exclusion from or limitation of the participation of people who are homeless in sexual and romantic relationships.

Guided by our first research question, we classified articles into four categories: consensual sexual or romantic relationships, sexual victimization, sexual health and survival sex. Our aim was to examine the relative frequency with which researchers have chosen to examine consensual partner relationships among people who are homeless. Of the 539 articles we identified as having examined sexual intimacy in the context of homelessness, only 51 (9.46%) examined to some extent consensual sexual or romantic relationships. After a closer review and excluding articles that did not substantially focus on consensual sexual or romantic relationships, we identified 13 out of the total 539 (2.41%) that focused on consensual sexual or romantic relationships. Our review suggests that consensual sexual and romantic relationships have been largely ignored in the literature despite their importance and value as consistently reported by the 13 studies whose we synthesized. By failing to examine consensual relationships, research has obscured this fundamental aspect of humanity among the homeless population. The inattention can be viewed as further marginalizing people who are homeless and reinforcing perceptions that they either have no sexual needs or are incapable of healthy romantic or sexual relationships. The disproportionate focus in academic literature on risk and victimization, relative to consensual sexual or romantic relationships, all but ensures that people who seek literature on sex in the context of homelessness will find literature that exclusively portrays sex as a risk factor for STIs or an act that is generally not consented to. This further reinforces the idea that sex in the context of homelessness is inherently risky. In the following paragraphs we highlight the major findings of the review as they relate to the minority of overall literature that examined consensual partner relationships and we discuss them in terms of the insights they aggregately produced. We conclude with a discussion of future research directions.

Consensual Sexual and Romantic Relationships Among People Who Are Homeless

Guided by our second research question, we sought to examine the characteristics of the literature that substantially examined consensual sexual and romantic relationships in terms of the extent, nature and range of studies' findings. Studies reported on some positive aspects of partner relationships such as the provision of emotional support through the arduous experience of homelessness, love relationships and pleasure derived from sex. Most studies also identified challenges including barriers to sex and complexities associated with consent in the context of homelessness.

Studies that examined the experience of people who engage in romantic relationships while homeless consistently found that such relationships are an important source of support through the experience of homelessness. This is consistent with findings from a review of individual-level predictors of entries into and exits out of homelessness. Based on five studies they reviewed, authors found that having a partner (i.e., marital status, presence of committed relationship) predicted higher chances of exiting homelessness (Nilsson et al., 2019). These studies provide initial evidence that sexual or romantic partners may be conducive to exiting homelessness despite the limited focus of the studies included in the review on presence or absence of partner relationships, without delving further into the nature of the relationships themselves. Findings from this review illustrate the range of support people were provided by their partners including emotional support, feelings of safety, reduction of isolation, and an overall increase in stability. While the Nilsson et al. (2019) review suggests that presence of partner relationships predict higher chances of exiting homelessness, this review illustrates the possible nature of the support provided by partners that may be a protective factor against homelessness. Despite these possible benefits of consensual sexual or romantic relationships in

the context of homelessness, the environments associated with homelessness at times complicated notions of consent.

The line between consensual and non-consensual relationships is not always clear, particularly in a context of extreme deprivation. Several studies reported that their participants engaged in survival sex, the exchange of material goods often needed for survival under conditions of extreme deprivation (Greene et al., 1999; Heerde & Hemphill, 2017a; Purser et al., 2017). It is questionable whether in a context of extreme deprivation one's agreement to engage in sex can be considered consent. Studies in this review identified survival sex as occurring across a variety of partner contexts, from love relationships to one-time encounters. This finding raises issues consistent with conceptual challenges with defining consent such as instances where people consent to sex but do not want it (Muehlenhard et al., 2016a). Moreover, in otherwise unsafe shelter or street environments, some studies we reviewed reported that women may enter partner relationships out of necessity to ensure their safety, further complicating the notion of consent to engage in a partner relationship.

Studies we included in our review rarely examined the partner relationship experiences of LGBTQ people. LGBTQ status was generally relegated to sections of the articles that reported on demographic characteristics. LGBTQ people are over-represented in the homeless population. LGBTQ youth may represent from 8 to 37% of homeless youth in Canada and the United States, while LGBTQ adults may comprise from 9 to 30% of the overall homeless population (Ecker, 2016; Ecker et al., 2019). People who identify as transgender or non-binary may be especially marginalized and often attribute their homeless status to rejection associated with their gender identity (Kattari & Begun, 2017a). Insofar as a key conclusion of this review is that sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless are understudied, we can conclude with a

high degree of confidence that relationships among people who identify with the LGBTQ community are especially understudied. This is consistent with findings that suggest the LGBTQ population is over-represented in the homeless population yet understudied (Ecker et al., 2019). It may be especially difficult for people who belong to the LGBTQ community to engage in consensual sexual or romantic relationships. In addition to barriers we identified in this review, they may experience additional barriers associated with discrimination they experience due to their identities.

Overall, some of the more notable barriers that studies identified to engaging in consensual or romantic relationships were systemic in nature, including shelter rules or policies and stigma associated with being homeless. While shelter policies that segregate based on gender are increasingly under scrutiny because of their impact on trans and gender diverse communities (e.g., Mottet & Ohle, 2006; Yu, 2010), such shelter policies have far less frequently been examined in terms of their impact on partner relationships. Shelter policies that limit private spaces, segregate based on gender or forbid partners to remain overnight (e.g., no-visitor policies) may adversely impact people's capacity to develop and maintain consensual sexual or romantic relationships. According to our review, it is clear that people will find ways to engage in partner relationships. If they are prevented from doing so in shelters, they may be forced to find less safe environments to do so.

Homelessness and Sexual Citizenship

Barriers to sexual and romantic relationships, highlighted by this review (e.g., shelter policies, lack of private space) subvert choice and agency, which are key elements of citizenship (Sylvestre, 2017). Previous researchers have found that civil, political and social citizenship rights of people who are homeless are infringed upon or denied (Walsh & Klease, 2004).

Moreover, failure to ensure that people have access to adequate housing and support keeps people in insecure and potentially dangerous situations, placing them at risk for coercion, assault, and injury, along with continued discrimination and marginalization.

Rather than define citizenship within a static framework of rights and obligations, one may conceptualize citizenship as a set of processes (Turner, 2008). One such process is the participation in healthy consensual sexual or romantic relationships. At minimum, respect for sexual citizenship rights would mean removal of barriers to developing and maintaining sexual or romantic relationships. Ideally, policy and decision makers would take the additional step of implementing policies that allow people who are experiencing homelessness the space and privacy to develop and maintain sexual or romantic relationships while homeless. In sum, inadequate social policies have contributed to a status quo where people who are homeless are made to live in unsafe and unhealthy environments where their basic citizenship participation is restricted. Researchers and policy makers have spent resources to study risk associated with sexual behaviour and not the possible benefit it may have in this context, in essence contributing to the view that sex among people who are homeless is exclusively a risk factor. Our findings suggest that readers of the scientific literature interested in sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless are far more likely to encounter studies examining risk and victimization than consensual sexual or romantic relationships. This can perpetuate the perception that sex is inherently risky for people experiencing homelessness and obscure how consensual partner relationships, as evidenced by the 13 articles we included in our review, can be of value to many people who are experiencing homelessness.

Future Research Directions

Although understudied, consensual romantic and sexual relationships appear to be increasingly studied. With the exception of one study published in 1998, all of the final thirteen studies included in our review (see Table 2) have been published since 2005. Based on our findings, we have produced suggestions to guide future research. Future research should examine partner relationships more centrally and examine what components of relationships may contribute to stability in an otherwise unstable context of homelessness. Indeed, studies we reviewed identified satisfaction with one's relationship, level and nature of support, and love as important factors. Participants in studies we reviewed spoke colourfully of love, romance and bonding through hardship. Theories of love, attraction and partner selection have been well developed (e.g., Sperry, 2018), and researchers should examine how the experience of love relationships may impact homelessness.

Overall, given the sparse amount of research examining this topic, it is not clear if sexual or romantic love relationships are rare among people who are homeless (and thus sparsely studied) or if there is limited research on them because of prevailing assumptions and stereotypes. If they are rare, it is possible that the conditions that people who are homeless find themselves in make pursuing healthy relationships very difficult. Studies we examined suggest such relationships may not be rare despite barriers to developing and maintaining partner relationships and the overall difficulties associated with homelessness. However, research using larger and more generalizable samples should be conducted to specifically examine the extent and nature of sexual and romantic love relationships among people who are homeless. Such research may also examine how prevalence and relationship quality may differ across different housing or shelter circumstances (e.g., living in a shelter; unsheltered; unstably housed) and the

different impact a good quality partner relationship may have between housing or shelter circumstances.

Studies reviewed to inform the second research question provide initial evidence that the current approaches to sheltering people who are homeless may lead to practices that prevent healthy relationships. A shift to successful housing practices like Housing First (Aubry et al., 2015; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016) may reduce the amount of time people spend homeless. Housing would provide people with environments to pursue healthy and consensual sexual and romantic relationships.

Scoping Study Limitations

We identified a few limitations of this scoping review, which may impact the generalizability of results. First, the search strategy developed for this review, although comprehensive and detailed, may have failed to identify other relevant results that used different keywords or that were indexed with other subject headings. Also, we did not conduct complementary searches such as handsearching, citation searching or contacting specific authors or experts, which may have led us to find additional pertinent studies. In addition, we note that the small samples and qualitative designs of the included studies that we reviewed and synthesized were not intended for generalizability. Although our review identified common themes across studies, larger sample studies that use inferential statistics will be necessary to produce generalizable and reliable findings. Relatedly, even among the final 13 studies used for the results synthesis, few examined romantic or sexual relationships as a primary focus of the study. Most did so incidentally while primarily examining another phenomenon such as survival sex. Another limit related to the fact that included studies were conducted in Western countries.

It is unclear to what extent their findings may be transferable or comparable to non-Western contexts.

Conclusion

This scoping review suggests that romantic or sexual relationships among people who are homeless are understudied. When they were studied, they were often done so incidentally in studies where the primary focus was on sexual health risk, sexual victimization or survival sex. We introduced the framework of sexual citizenship as it applies to sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless as a model that prioritizes removal of barriers to homeless people's full participation as sexual citizens. Of the studies that did substantially examine consensual sexual or romantic relationships, many found that they have benefits associated with emotional support and closeness associated with partner relationships. Studies also identified barriers including shelter environments that are not conducive to beginning and maintaining sexual or romantic relationships. This review suggests that there are benefits associated with romantic and sexual relationships among people who are homeless. Although this ought to be clear given that robust literature exists about the benefits of romantic and sexual relationships among the general population, there is a stark lack of research about their possible benefits in the unique circumstances of homelessness. Given that homelessness is a remarkably distressing experience, we strongly encourage future research to gather additional data that may support and encourage the development and maintenance of consensual, healthy, and supportive, sexual and romantic relationships among people who are homeless.

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Tables

Table 1

Codes applied to studies at full-text screening

Codes/Categories	Definition
Sexual Health/Risk	Studies that examined sexual behaviour as it related to sexual health behaviours including condom use, STI prevention. We include pregnancy and other related sexual health topics.
Sexual Victimization	In section that describes purpose of the article or hypotheses, sexual victimization must be referred to (e.g., sexual assault, sexual violence). May also just reference "victimization" if it's obvious it's of a sexual nature.
Survival Sex	In the section that describes purpose of the article or hypotheses, survival sex must be referred to (or sex exchange/trade/transactional sex if for material goods) as examined in the study.
Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relationships	Studies that primarily examined consensual sexual or romantic relationships as the purpose of the article or have devoted a sizable section of the article to consensual relationships if the purpose of the article was to examine something else (e.g., survival sex).

Table 2*Summary of articles included in the scoping review*

Authors, year	Title	Location	Population	Consensual	Sexual Health/Risk	Survival Sex	Sexual Victimization
Blais et al., 2012	Love without a home: a portrait of romantic and couple relationships among street-involved young adults in Montreal	Montreal, Canada	Street involved young adults aged 18-32 (N=42)	X			
Brown et al., 2013	Monogamy on the street: A mixed methods study of homeless men	Los Angeles, USA	Homeless men (N=30 qualitative sample; N=305 quantitative sample)	X	X		
Jones et al., 2012	Intimate Relationships as Routes into and out of Homelessness: Insights from a Canadian City	Calgary, Canada	Homeless, employed adults (N=61)	X			
Loates & Walsh, 2010	Women negotiating sexual identity in the face of homelessness: From silence to satisfaction	Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver; Canada	Women currently or recently living in shelters (N=76)	X			
Osthus & Sewpaul, 2014	Gender, power and sexuality among youth on the streets of Durban: Socio-economic realities	Durban, South Africa	Homeless youth living on the streets (N=37)	X			X
Rayburn &	Your shelter or mine? Romantic relationships	Orlando, USA	Adults residing in shelters (N=19)	X			

Corzine, 2010	among the homeless					
Ryan et al., 2009	When, where, why and with whom homeless women engage in risky sexual behaviors: A framework for understanding complex and varied decision-making processes	Los Angeles, USA	Women residing in temporary shelters (N=28)	X	X	
Stevenso n & Neale, 2012	'We did more rough sleeping just to be together'- Homeless drug users' romantic relationships in hostel accommodation	South Central England ^a	Adult drug users currently or recently residing in emergency hostels (N=40)	X		
Watson, 2011	Understanding survival sex: Young women, homelessness and intimate relationships	Melbourne, Australia	Young women, aged 18-25, who had experienced homelessness (N=15)	X	X	X
Watson, 2016	Gender-based violence and young homeless women: Femininity, embodiment and vicarious physical capital	Melbourne, Australia	Young women, aged 18-25, who had experienced homelessness (N=15)	X		
Wesely, 2018	“Women Make That World Go ‘Round’: the Role of Women’s Sexual Capital in the Gendered Scaffolding of Street Life	Florida, USA ^b	Formerly street-involved women (N=25)	X	X	X
Wesely &	The Pertinence of Partners:	Florida, USA ^b	Women staying in homeless shelters	X		

Wright, 2005	Examining Intersections Between Women's Homelessness and Their Adult Relationships	who had experienced violence (N=20)
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Note. Population descriptions in the Table described as they are in the original articles

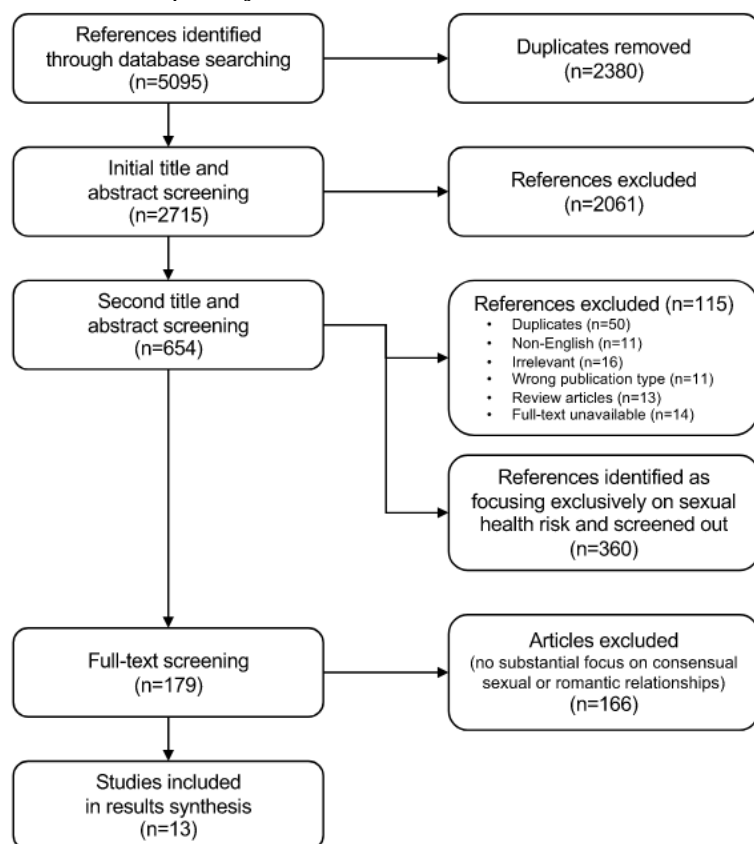
^aStudy took place in six unspecified cities and towns across South Central England;

^bThe study location is described as “a southeastern metropolitan area”, no additional detailed were provided and it was inferred that the study took place in Florida based on author affiliations

Figures

Figure 1

Flow Chart of Study Selection Process



Supplementary File 1

Search strategy (executed on October 31, 2019)

APA PsycInfo (Ovid)

1. exp homeless/
2. (evict* or homeless* or "living on the street*" or "residential stability" or "residential instability" or "unstable housing" or "stable housing" or "Improvised dwell*" or "Shelter dwell*" or "street liv*" or "Street life" or "street youth" or "street children" or "marginally housed" or "precarious housing" or "vulnerable housing" or "vulnerably housed" or runaway* or Houseless* or Unhoused or "without a roof" or Roofless or "rough sleeper" or "Street youth*" or "Sleeping rough" or "sleep rough" or "rough sleep" or "emergency accommodation*" or "temporary accommodation*" or "insecure accommodation*" or "pathways to housing" or "pathways to homelessness" or "homeless persons" or "residential mobility").ti,ab.
3. or/1-2
4. exp "Sexual Intercourse (Human)"/
5. sexual partners/ or human courtship/ or safe sex/ or sexual harassment/ or sexuality/
6. exp sexual satisfaction/
7. (sex* adj3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavio*)).ti,ab
8. (intima* or affection or love or romance or intercourse).ti,ab
9. (condom* or safe sex or "survival sex" or "sexual risk" or coit*).ti,ab.
10. or/4-9
11. 3 and 10

Medline (Ovid)

1. homeless persons/ or homeless youth/
2. (evict* or homeless* or "living on the street*" or "residential stability" or "residential instability" or "unstable housing" or "stable housing" or "Improvised dwell*" or "Shelter dwell*" or "street liv*" or "Street life" or "street youth" or "street children" or "marginally housed" or "precarious housing" or "vulnerable housing" or "vulnerably housed" or runaway* or Houseless* or Unhoused or "without a roof" or Roofless or "rough sleeper" or "Street youth*" or "Sleeping rough" or "sleep rough" or "rough sleep" or "emergency accommodation*" or "temporary accommodation*" or "insecure accommodation*" or "pathways to housing" or "pathways to homelessness" or "homeless persons" or "residential mobility").ti,ab

3. or/1-2
4. coitus/ or courtship/ or sexual harassment/ or sexuality/ or unsafe sex/
5. sexual partners/
6. exp sexual satisfaction/
7. (sex* adj3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavio*)).ti,ab
8. (intima* or affection or love or romance or intercourse).ti,ab
9. (condom* or safe sex or "survival sex" or "sexual risk" or "coit*").ti,ab.
10. or/4-9
11. 3 and 10

CINAHL (Ebsco)

1. (MH "Residential Mobility") OR (MH "Homelessness") OR (MH "Housing") OR (MH "Public Housing") OR (MH "Homeless Persons")
2. TI(evict* or homeless* or "living on the street*" or "residential stability" or "residential instability" or "unstable housing" or "stable housing" or "Improvised dwell*" or "Shelter dwell*" or "street liv*" or "Street life" or "street youth" or "street children" or "marginally housed" or "precarious housing" or "vulnerable housing" or "vulnerably housed" or runaway* or Houseless* or Unhoused or "without a roof" or Roofless or "rough sleeper" or "Street youth*" or "Sleeping rough" or "sleep rough" or "rough sleep" or "emergency accommodation*" or "temporary accommodation*" or "insecure accommodation*" or "pathways to housing" or "pathways to homelessness" or "homeless persons") or AB(evict* or homeless* or "living on the street*" or "residential stability" or "residential instability" or "unstable housing" or "stable housing" or "Improvised dwell*" or "Shelter dwell*" or "street liv*" or "Street life" or "street youth" or "street children" or "marginally housed" or "precarious housing" or "vulnerable housing" or "vulnerably housed" or runaway* or Houseless* or Unhoused or "without a roof" or Roofless or "rough sleeper" or "Street youth*" or "Sleeping rough" or "sleep rough" or "rough sleep" or "emergency accommodation*" or "temporary accommodation*" or "insecure accommodation*" or "pathways to housing" or "pathways to homelessness" or "homeless persons" or "residential mobility")
3. S1 OR S2
4. (MH "Coitus") OR (MH "Sexual Abuse") OR (MH "Sexual Satisfaction") OR (MH "Sexual Partners") OR (MH "Sexuality+")
5. TI((sex* N3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavio*)) OR AB((sex* N3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavio*)))

6. TI(intima* or affection or love or romance or intercourse or "sexual risk*" or condom* or "safe sex" or "survival sex" or coit*) OR AB(intima* or affection or love or romance or intercourse or "sexual risk*" or condom* or "safe sex" or "survival sex" or coit*)
7. S4 OR S5 OR S6
8. S3 AND S7
Used database's option to limit results to "scholarly (peer-reviewed journals)."

Sociological Abstracts and Social Services Abstracts (searched together on ProQuest)

1. (MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Homelessness") OR ti,ab(evict* OR homeless* OR "living on the street*" OR "residential stability" OR "residential instability" OR "unstable housing" OR "stable housing" OR "Improvised dwell*" OR "Shelter dwell*" OR "street liv*" OR "Street life" OR "street youth" OR "street children" OR "marginally housed" OR "precarious housing" OR "vulnerable housing" OR "vulnerably housed" OR runaway* OR Houseless* OR Unhoused OR "without a roof" OR Roofless OR "rough sleeper" OR "Street youth*" OR "Sleeping rough" OR "sleep rough" OR "rough sleep" OR "emergency accommodation" OR "temporary accommodation" OR "insecure accommodation" OR "pathways to housing" OR "pathways to homelessness" OR "homeless persons")) AND ((MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Condoms") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Love") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Sexual Intercourse") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Sexual Reproduction") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT.EXPLODE("Sexuality")) OR TI,AB(sex* N/3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavior*))) AND PEER(yes)

Web of Science

1. TS=((evict* or homeless* or "living on the street*" or "residential stability" or "residential instability" or "unstable housing" or "stable housing" or "Improvised dwell*" or "Shelter dwell*" or "street liv*" or "Street life" or "street youth" or "street children" or "marginally housed" or "precarious housing" or "vulnerable housing" or "vulnerably housed" or runaway* or Houseless* or Unhoused or "without a roof" or Roofless or "rough sleeper" or "Street youth*" or "Sleeping rough" or "sleep rough" or "rough sleep" or "emergency accommodation*" or "temporary accommodation*" or "insecure accommodation*" or "pathways to housing" or "pathways to homelessness" or "homeless persons" or "residential mobility")) AND TS=((("sexual intercourse" or "sexual partner*" or "sexual satisf*" or "intima*" or "affection" or "love" or "romance" or "intercourse" or "sexual risk taking" or "condom*" or "safe sex" or "survival sex" or "sexual risk" or "coit*") or (sex* NEAR/3 (intima* or satisf* or partner* or relation* or interact* or activ* or intercourse or behavior*)))

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Study 2: Survival sex: Sexual agency and consent in a state of deprivation? A scoping review

Abstract

Survival sex is the exchange of sex for material goods required for survival (i.e., shelter, food, drugs). Because this exchange occurs under conditions of deprivation, there is a power imbalance that limits the ability to freely consent to sex or to exercise sexual agency. This review aimed to examine the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex and to identify which factors push people into greater levels of deprivation and vulnerability to engage in survival sex. We searched six databases and included 21 articles that discussed the sexual consent or sexual agency implications of survival sex and synthesized the study findings via qualitative analysis. We identified three themes as they relate to the consent or sexual agency implications of survival sex: *Power*, *Coercion*, and *Sexual Agency* and four themes we called push factors into greater vulnerability to survival sex: *Hunger*, *Patriarchy*, *Poverty*, *Substance Use*, and *Insecure Housing*. Each factor has the effect of limiting people's capacity to consent to sex by creating a coercive environment that limits their power to exercise sexual agency. We found that women are at particular risk to be coerced into survival sex by other people or circumstances of deprivation. Our findings suggest that survival sex is often nonconsensual sex. In contrast to traditional approaches that consider survival sex a risk factor for sexual health, we discuss policy and advocacy efforts and apply a human rights perspective that considers how survival sex is a violation of personhood and autonomy.

Survival Sex: Sexual Agency and Consent in a State of Deprivation? A Scoping Review

Survival sex is commonly defined as the exchange of sex for material goods required for survival (i.e., shelter, food, drugs), and therefore is often studied among populations experiencing material deprivation (i.e., housing instability, food insecurity, substance withdrawal (Heerde et al., 2015b; Walls & Bell, 2011; Watson, 2011). The circumstances under which this exchange occurs create an extreme power imbalance that may limit the person's ability to freely consent to sex or to exercise their sexual agency. This review examines the consent and sexual agency implications of survival sex.

Terminology

Transactional sex is often used to refer to a broad range of practices that vary in motivation and meaning, including survival sex (McMillan et al., 2018). Transactional sex is effectively an umbrella term akin to “sex trade” or “exchange sex” where it may not always be clear what exactly is being exchanged for sex and the circumstances under which the trade is made. Sex work, prostitution, and transactional sex commonly refer to commercial sex, in contrast to survival sex, which is often used to signal a lack of choice characterized by agency limitations, disempowerment, and a precarious economic position (McMillan et al., 2018). For example, sex work is often described as involving an explicit professional exchange of sex for money, while survival sex is considered a consequence of poverty and economic dependence (Walls & Bell, 2011).

Unique to survival sex is that a condition of deprivation is a necessary circumstance underlying the exchange. A broader review of terminology and the relative appropriateness of labels for different kinds of transactional sex are outside of the scope of this article and have been well-reviewed elsewhere (McMillan et al., 2018; Mulvihill, 2019).

Situational and Cultural Contexts

In higher income countries with stronger social safety nets that seek to meet people's basic needs for food, shelter, and sanitation, survival sex is frequently examined among people experiencing homelessness, (e.g., Czechowski et al., 2021; Ivanich et al., 2017; Srivastava et al., 2019). By definition, people experiencing homelessness have inadequate access to housing and tend to live in poverty characterized by poor access to food, higher risk for substance abuse, and sheltering in unsafe environments (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Gaetz et al., 2012; Henry, 2018). This places people experiencing homelessness in a unique circumstance that increases their vulnerability to be propositioned for or engage in survival sex. Indeed, in some samples of individuals experiencing homelessness, 16-28% report having engaged in survival sex at some point (Haley et al., 2004; Purser et al., 2017; Srivastava et al., 2019). When studying survival sex in the context of homelessness, researchers tend to examine survival sex as a risk factor for sexual assault or as a sexual risk factor. A conceptualization of survival sex as a risk factor is reflected in the language researchers use when referring to the practice. Examples include referring to survival sex as a problematic sexual behaviour (Attenborough & Watson, 1997), a sexual risk behaviour (Maria et al., 2015), HIV risk behaviour (Gangamma et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2000) or a deviant behaviour (Whitbeck et al., 2001).

In lower income nations and geographic regions experiencing high levels of poverty such as Sub-Saharan Africa, survival sex is often referred to as transactional sex (e.g., Animasahun et al., 2019; Lorway et al., 2011; Pettifor et al., 2019). It is discussed as more normative and is widely cited as an important contributor to the HIV epidemic (Jewkes et al., 2012; Ranganathan et al., 2016). Transactional sex is considered more common and is frequently defined as including exchange for money or material goods. One study across four countries in Sub-Saharan

Africa found 35.9-80.5% of unmarried girls (12-19 years old) who had sex in the last 12 months received gifts or money in exchange (Biddlecom, 2007). Among those cases of transactional sex, only those that included an exchange for a basic necessity of which the unmarried girl was deprived of would meet traditional definitions of survival sex. In certain regions, levels of deprivation may be further compounded by armed conflict and forced migration. Forro (2013) reports that in war-torn places, people (often women) engage in survival sex to meet basic survival needs and in doing so, may put themselves at risk of violence or even death at the hands of soldiers.

In their review of transactional sex in Sub-Saharan Africa, Stoebenau et al. (2017) report on the systematic disempowerment of women, cultural norms surrounding exchanging gifts as expressions of love, and the role of men as providers to women as compounding the risk of women needing to trade sex for basic necessities. They identify these factors as likely contributing to the disproportionately high rates of HIV among women. Overall, poverty, conflict and systemic disempowerment of certain groups of people (particularly women) are examples of structural contexts that make people more susceptible to survival sex. Although the attention in research paid to survival sex as a risk for negative outcomes such as HIV infection is important, there appears to be little consideration for how unmet basic needs can undermine sexual agency and capacity to consent to sex. We take a human rights-based perspective by examining the sexual agency and consent implications of survival sex to consider risks and harm associated with violations of one's autonomy and personhood.

Consent and Sexual Agency in the Context of Survival Sex

Survival sex is less structured than consensual sex work, in that there is no fixed price for sex. (McMillan et al., 2018). A lack of fixed price in the context of deprivation and limited options,

places individuals in a less powerful position in any negotiation for sex, and severely constrains the capacity for sexual agency, including consent. Terms may be dictated by the person with more power. There can be limited capacity for negotiation on the part of a person deprived of basic needs, compromising their capacity to freely consent to survival sex.

Personal agency, a basic psychological need, refers to a sense that one is causing or generating an action, a belief that one is the subject of their own actions (Alper, 2020). Sexual agency has typically been defined as the presence or perception of people's ability to choose sexual partners with whom they have wanted (as opposed to unwanted) sexual encounters, ability to initiate those encounters, and ability to resist submitting to requests for sex made by others (Fahs & McClelland, 2016; Fetterolf & Sanchez, 2015). Sexual agency is importantly related to sexual consent. Although there is some variability in how consent is defined, it often refers to a willingness and agreement to have sex, that may include behaviour that creates a presumption that willingness is given (Muehlenhard et al., 2016b). Some conceptualizations of consent emphasize that it ought to be *freely given* while acknowledging the complexities associated with instances where feelings of sexual desire are lower or absent but one may be willing to engage in it and even find it pleasurable (Beres, 2007). People may be willing to engage in survival sex, or choose to do so, but it is not clear the extent to which that choice is an exercise of sexual agency, or consensual given the context of deprivation.

Aims

The purpose of this scoping review was to examine literature that addressed the consent or sexual agency implications of survival sex. Compared to a systematic review, a scoping review method is less rigid and is recommended when authors are examining a topic that is

understudied and when it is unknown how much literature has addressed the specific topic (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Our review was guided by the following research questions:

(RQ1) Based on the extant literature in which survival sex is empirically studied or academically reviewed, what factors have scholars identified as pushing people into greater levels of deprivation or vulnerability to engage in survival sex?

(RQ2) Based on the extant literature in which survival sex is empirically studied or academically reviewed, what are the sexual agency and consent implications that scholars have identified?

Our first research question was guided by Pearce's model of Social Model of Consent.

Pearce (2013) argues their model "would address the social and environmental features that impact on young people's ability to consent and help practitioners to assess the different ways that a young person's capacity to consent can be abused, exploited and manipulated." (p. 53).

The model identifies push factors such as poverty and deprivation that push young people into greater exploitation. For our purposes, we aimed to examine what factors that contribute to deprivation push people into greater vulnerability to survival sex via reduced capacity to exercise their sexual agency and thus possibly compromising their ability to fully consent to sex.

Our second research question was guided by the Continuum of Volition (Weissman et al., 2006). The theory was initially developed by Save the Children to understand the factors that support and sustain cross-generational relationships as ranging along the continuum including "emotional security, material comfort and financial security, life maintenance, survival security, and coercion/physical insecurity" (p. 86, Weissman et al., 2006). The Continuum of Volition suggests that people who are involved in sexual relationships with those who are more powerful should not merely be viewed as passive, vulnerable victims, but as people who choose to engage

in sexual relationships for a range of motivations including for survival security. Survival security may itself represent a form of agency. According to the Continuum of Volition, people may engage in sexual activity that ranges from voluntary to coerced, with economically driven/economically rational sex in the middle. Survival sex may also fall in that middle, though closer to the coerced side of the continuum (Weissman et al., 2006). We view survival sex and different variations of survival sex, depending on materials being exchanged and related circumstances, as falling across the Continuum of Volition, some closer to voluntary, others closer to coerced.

Methods

This scoping review methodology was guided by an approach developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and followed some recommendations from Levac et al. (2010). Our reporting for this review was guided by the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) and PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021).

Information Sources, Eligibility Criteria, Identification of Sources

To design our search strategy, we consulted with a social sciences research librarian, examined reviews that included searches for survival sex (e.g., Heerde, Scholes-Balog, et al., 2015; Heerde & Hemphill, 2017), conducted a cursory review of the literature, and conducted discussions with members of the research team. Our search strategy aimed to capture articles that examined survival sex. We used keywords that may either be synonymous with or used to refer to survival sex (i.e., transactional sex, exchange sex, trade sex, sugar daddy; complete search strategy is available in the Supplemental File 1). We searched APA PsycInfo (Ovid), MEDLINE (Ovid), GenderWatch (ProQuest), Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), Social Services Abstracts (ProQuest), and Web of Science. We executed the search May 4th, 2021, and imported all

citations into Covidence, an online tool used for the management of systematic reviews. Covidence identified and removed nearly all duplicate references, we removed additional duplicates during the screening process. Articles were eligible if they were written in English and peer-reviewed journal articles or books. We did not use date restrictions.

Article Selection

Title and Abstract Screening

After importing references into Covidence, we pilot tested 100 sources and met to review and discuss disagreements to refine our inclusion criteria. Two reviewers (KC, SCM) independently completed title and abstract screening using Covidence. We resolved conflicts through discussion.

Eligibility at Title and Abstract Screening

At the title and abstract screening stage, articles were eligible if they examined survival sex in the context of deprivation. Survival sex was defined as the exchange of sex for any material goods required for survival, not including money and including drugs. We included drugs given that survival sex definitions frequently include drugs and because drug cravings or withdrawal can produce a powerful feeling of deprivation, comparable to other feelings of deprivation importantly associated with survival sex (e.g., hunger). We did not include the exchange for money. Although it is possible that one may exchange sex for money to obtain materials they desperately need for survival, we chose to only include the direct exchange of sex for materials, consistent with typical definitions of survival sex, that do not include money.

We used two criteria for inclusion, one for each research question. First (RQ1), we included articles if we determined deprivation was present when sex was exchanged for basic needs. We judged deprivation to be present if sex was exchanged for the material that would

satiate a basic need (e.g., studying cocaine-dependent participants that traded sex for cocaine, or studying the associations between hunger and survival sex when exchanging sex for food).

Second (RQ2), if the abstract or title contained some indication that authors discussed the consent or sexual agency implications of survival sex (e.g., if sexual agency was a theme identified in a study that examined people's experience with survival sex or a conceptual article about sexual agency in transactional sex contexts). This criterion was not limited to explicit references of "consent" or "sexual agency" but also included other references that may have similar meaning such as "choice" or "agreement". There were no screening criteria related to methods or population characteristics (e.g., gender).

Full-Text Screening

We included articles if they contained some discussion of sexual consent or the sexual agency implications of survival sex. Examples included motivations for engaging in survival sex, constraints on choice to have survival sex, or discussion of how deprivation may impact people's ability to exercise sexual agency. Two reviewers (KC, SCM) independently reviewed full text articles. Of the 174 articles reviewed at the full text stage, 140 were excluded for the following reasons: duplicates (n=9); not written in English (n=2); found to be irrelevant (n=4); about sex exchange but not for materials required for survival (n=25), no discussion of consent or sexual agency or related concepts as indicated above (n=100). We resolved any disagreements on reasons for inclusion or exclusion through discussion and by reviewing the full text article together.

Data Charting and Analysis

We charted articles primarily to describe and summarize key characteristics of articles and not for analysis. Articles in this review contained disparate references we deemed relevant

ranging from pages of material to a few relevant paragraphs throughout an article, thus charting information such as methodologies and outcomes measures would not be useful for analysis.

We followed Levac et al.'s (2010) recommendation to use qualitative analysis software and “qualitative content analysis approaches to make sense of the wealth of extracted data” (p. 6, 2010) and to structure results thematically following a theoretical framework (see framework adapted from Pearce, [2013] described in the following section). Prior to beginning analysis and during the screening stage, we linked notes to individual articles in Covidence describing their relevance to inform the initial stages of the analysis. We followed an inductive-deductive qualitative analysis approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). We imported all 21 final articles into NVivo Qualitative Analysis Software and deductively coded for “consent/agency relevant content” and “borderline relevant content” to denote potentially relevant content. Next, we exported both codes into text documents and inductively (Thomas, 2006) developed a final code list based on team discussions and a review of the data. Finally, we applied the final code list to all 21 articles. The final codes are closely related to the themes we report on in the following section. We drew on Pearce's (2013) Social Model of Consent to organize and interpret findings related to push factors in RQ1 and we used the Continuum of Volition, (Weissman et al., 2006) to assist in our organization and interpretation of findings as they related to RQ2. We used an audit trail (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993) to document code development and methodological steps.

Results

Article Characteristics

As displayed in Figure 1, in our review we identified 4665 sources through our database search, 2509 of which were removed by Covidence as duplicates. Of the remaining 2156, we

screened out 1982 during our title and abstract screen and reviewed full texts of 174 articles and finally included 21 for results synthesis. Article characteristics are charted in Table 1. Of the 21 included articles, just over half used qualitative methods ($n=11$), some used mixed methods ($n=4$), and two used quantitative methods. Four articles did not report on empirical data and we categorized them as review articles given their reliance on existing literature. Of the 17 articles that reported on empirical data, seven sampled exclusively women or girls, two males only, and eight included gender-mixed samples. In terms of sample origin among the 17 empirical studies, nine are from East Africa, four from the United States, two from the Caribbean region, one from South Africa, one from Australia, and one from South America. Regarding the first-author affiliations of the four non-empirical or review articles, two were affiliated with American institutions, one Australian, and one from the United Kingdom.

Synthesis of Results

To structure and interpret RQ1 findings, we adapted Pearce's (2013) Social Model of Consent for childhood sexual exploitation. The model identifies both social and environmental factors that push people into greater exploitation. We sought to identify and examine such factors that push people into greater vulnerability to survival sex. To structure and interpret the sexual agency and consent implications identified in included articles (RQ2), we used the Continuum of Volition (Weissman et al., 2006). The Continuum of Volition suggests that there exists a spectrum from volition to coercion and where one falls on that continuum may be dictated by a number of factors, including the power they hold in a relationship. For the purpose of our analysis, the power is influenced by the level of deprivation one experiences when exchanging sex for the materials of which they are deprived.

The further they are pushed toward a condition of deprivation, they further they are coerced into survival sex and deprived of the capacity and power to exercise their sexual agency and ultimately consent to sex. Thus, we examined how factors identified in RQ1 push people along a continuum represented in Figure 2 where greater deprivation ultimately leads to less capacity to exercise sexual agency, less power to refuse survival sex, and greater levels of individual-level and structural coercion into survival sex. The presentation of findings is organized by themes we identified in our qualitative analysis. First, we present RQ1 findings in the first sections:

Patriarchy, Poverty, Hunger, Substance Use, Insecure Housing, followed by the those primarily relevant to RQ2: *Power, Coercion, and Sexual Agency*. We note however, that all sections are relevant to both research questions given their interrelated nature.

Patriarchy

Frequently, cultural forces were identified as pushing women and girls into survival sex. Despite the diverse cultures from which participants in the studies we reviewed were sampled, we found striking similarities in the ways that cultural forces were cited as pushing women into survival sex. Specifically, both authors and quoted participants consistently noted that women were pushed into survival sex in a context of dominant culturally embedded views that men have a right to sexually exploit women and familial expectations or pressures that push women into survival sex to provide for themselves or their families. When identifying dominant culturally embedded views, authors very often referred to the economic marginalization women and girls, in particular, experience that further entrench their marginalized position.

Gender Roles. Culturally reinforced gender roles where men are expected to be providers of material and financial support to women, who in turn are expected to be financially dependent on men, were often cited as pushing women into exchanging sex for material support

(Austrian et al., 2019; Kyegombe, Meiksin, Namakula, et al., 2020; Stoebenau et al., 2017). In their examination of the circumstances surrounding American homeless youths' engagement in survival sex, Tyler and Johnson (2006) reported that women and girls experience less power at both interpersonal and societal levels. They noted that women and girls are viewed as sex objects in American society and thus are more often coerced into sex and use their sex object status as a resource for survival. In their review of the nature of women's participation in transactional sex in Sub-Saharan Africa, Stoebenau et al. (2017) reported that love and money are inextricably linked, where men provide material support to women, often in exchange for sex, as a dominant construction of masculinity. This was reported as creating a context where men are more likely to *provide* for women in exchange for sex. In a study of how exchange sex is enacted and perceived in Mozambique, findings suggested men may rationalize their provision of resources as an obligation of a *good provider* reinforced by local notions of masculinity (Bandali, 2011). These notions of masculinity were cited as a factor that normalizes sex exchange, which may include survival sex exchanges. In a Madagascar-based study, this rationalization was extended to a gendered segregation of labour where men's physical bodies may be more valued for labour (Freedman et al., 2021), resulting in a context where women have fewer opportunities to gain financial security. Fewer such opportunities mean women are more likely to experience deprivation that may reduce their capacity to refuse sex in exchange for basic necessities. As one of the women interviewed for a study in Tanzania explained, "girl children are not valued as other children in the community. Ah, the parents will ask the girl to look for her own essential needs" (Hagues, 2019, p. 825). In another example, Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al. (2020) reported that income generating opportunities typical for adolescent girls and young women in central Uganda such as hairdressing or domestic work are insufficient to meet their financial and

basic needs, thus pushing them into survival sex given increased deprivation of basic necessities. Further, gender role expectations extend past the labour market; Williams et al. (2018) reported that some among their sample of adolescents from a Congolese refugee camp in Rwanda, girls were often pushed into survival sex by a confluence of factors related to gender roles. Those factors included a lack of economic opportunities for them relative to boys, social expectations that assign girls more responsibilities (e.g., fetch water, look after siblings), and girls requiring more basic materials than boys (e.g., sanitary pads, hair products).

Family Pressure. Based on their research on the social and economic determinants of transactional sex in Madagascar, Freedman et al. (2021) reported on a “broader socio-cultural phenomenon of the involvement of family in organising and regulating sexual and marital relationships for their children, and particularly for daughters in Madagascar” (p. 6). Authors noted that traditional practices involved in arranged marriages (e.g., exchange of daughter bride for money or cattle) have evolved over time, though parents continue to expect financial gain or compensation for bringing up their daughter. This illustrates a cultural push factor into survival sex at the level of a family, where “much of the economy of [transactional sex] was centred around the family, rather than around individual choices” (Freedman et al., 2021, p. 6). In a Tanzania-based study of girls’ participation in transactional sex in and around schools, family was identified as a push factor out of familial deprivation of resources, leading parents to encourage their daughters to find a man willing to provide their daughter with basic needs so the family would no longer need to purchase them (Hagues, 2019). Cultural push factors at the family level were not only identified among young girls but another example involves recently widowed women in Uganda. Given a culturally dictated lack of security over familial assets for women, Miller et al. (2011) reported that among their sample from Uganda, recently widowed

women were often approached for sex in exchange for food or other basic materials as not only a way to exploit their deprivation of those resources, but to take over property they inherited from their husband. This illustrates a more coercive intent on the part of the men seeking to engage in survival sex when adopting a traditional patriarchal provider role. In such descriptions, *provider* may be increasingly synonymous with *coercer*.

Individual-Level Coercion. Some adolescent girls and young women in Uganda described their involvement in transactional sex as involving sexual or physical violence shaped by both cultural-level expectations, economic circumstances, and individual-level verbal pressure or forced consent/false agreement (Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al., 2020). Thus individual-level coercion may facilitate conditions that push or permit men to exploit women via survival sex where the “culturally embedded view is that men have the right to sexually exploit women and girls. It is considered normal male behavior” (Hagues, 2019, p. 821). Such a dynamic may be understood as a mutually reinforcing pattern of individual-level push factors (e.g., sexual assault, forced agreement) that are importantly shaped by cultural-level push factors (e.g., traditional gender roles) in a general context of economic deprivation.

Poverty

The terminology of *survival* sex and the deprivation of basic needs inherent to the exchange, emphasizes a precarious economic position for those who engage in it, in an absence of another means of meeting basic necessities (McMillan et al., 2018). All women who trade sex for survival in a study of HIV-related concerns in the United States were reported to engage in survival sex out of difficult economic circumstances, and perceived entry into survival sex as a response to economic crisis (Mallory & Stern, 2000). Similarly, based on interviews with young people about social and economic determinants of transactional sex in Madagascar, authors

identified the primacy of economic determinants of transactional sex (Freedman et al., 2021). When describing the coercive role that receiving resources from men played in Ugandan young and adolescent women's decision to have sex, Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al. (2020) indicated that those who were most susceptible to such coercion came from poor, economically vulnerable households. Finally, a study of Tanzanian girls' participation in transactional sex in and around schools was centered around a key theme they called *Girls participate in Transactional Sex Due to Poverty* (Hagues, 2019). These examples illustrate the centrality of poverty as a push factor that necessitates people who do not have the financial capacity to obtain resources to meet their basic needs, therefore increasing vulnerability to survival sex.

Deficiency of Basic Hygiene Products. In contexts of extreme poverty where people did not have access to basic hygiene, items such as soap, or a lack of basic hygienic products was presented as a push factor into survival sex. This was often inextricably linked to poverty, as described by Muna, a woman who participated in a Tanzania-based study, quoted by Hagues (2019),

I am thinking that poverty is one of the most causative issues that causes those girls running from here to here just looking for something for their own survival ... Yeah. So, you can find a family they, they don't have food, they don't have soap, they don't have any essential requirements ... So poverty is one of the main causes for them to run to engage in sex matters so that they can get supported by the men (p. 825)

Muna illustrated the deprivation of basic necessities which a family may experience ultimately left their daughter with a "choice" where the only way to obtain basic hygienic materials such as soap is through survival sex. Other studies included in this review cited examples of trading sex

for sugar and soap (Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al., 2020), soap (Austrian et al., 2019) and sanitary pads and clothing (T. P. Williams et al., 2018).

Hunger

Although trading sex for food was frequently referenced in included articles, some articles included in our review specifically examined the context and implications of the exchange of sex for food when deprived of food (i.e., hungry). Hunger was unsurprisingly described as a powerful motivator that left people in an intensely desperate state to alleviate that hunger. In an examination of social and economic vulnerabilities of refugee camps in Rwanda, a parent explained how young children such as their daughters are pushed into states of vulnerability by hunger:

When you are hungry you don't really have a choice at all. All you think about is what to put in your stomach. It doesn't matter how you are going to find food or at what cost. So men and boys take advantage of this [vulnerability] to have sex with young girls in the camp. They have sex in exchange for giving a girl a cup of milk, cakes, bread, body lotion, and so on. (Williams et al., 2018, p. 162).

This quote illustrates the intense individual-level pressure brought upon people who are food insecure, pressure that creates vulnerability to “choosing” to trade sex for food to survive. In their examination of the impact of food insecurity on sexual-risk behavior in Uganda, Miller et al. (2011) reported food insecurity as pushing people into greater vulnerability to survival sex at individual, familial, and structural levels. At an individual level, participants in their study described their own hunger as an important driver of their decision to obtain food through survival sex. At a familial level, some women from their sample indicated they were compelled to agree to exchanging sex for food in order to feed their children, speaking to a level of

deprivation felt by their whole family, particularly when they were the sole providers. Finally at a structural level, women indicated they were more deprived of food during dry seasons, making it more difficult to turn down offers of exchange of food for sex (Miller et al., 2011). While operationalizations of survival sex typically include the exchange of food for sex, the circumstances surrounding the nature of the deprivation of food can be multifaceted, as illustrated by the three aforementioned levels. This was clearly illustrated by findings from a study that found women who experienced a household death or injury from a hurricane in Haiti were significantly more likely to engage in transactional sex, a relationship moderated by food insecurity and poverty (Luetke et al., 2020). Overall, vulnerabilities can be amplified by an environmental or contextual factor such as a hurricane, dry season, a food-insecure family one must provide for, or conditions of poverty that may strengthen the push into survival sex. Poverty may be an exceptionally strong push factor given that a lack of economic capital may deprive one of multiple basic necessities, not only food.

Substance Use

Substance use is a unique push factor for survival sex. Drugs are not strictly required for survival. Although drug withdrawal in some cases may lead to death, this is not the kind of survival implied by other materials traded for in survival sex contexts. However, the desperation caused by deprivation of drugs (withdrawal, cravings) was often described as an incredibly powerful push factor into survival sex. Moreover, drugs have a disinhibiting effect when under the influence that in some cases was reported as facilitating engaging in survival sex or even a necessary precondition to do so.

Tyler and Johnson (2006) reported that addiction to drugs led some homeless women from their American sample to trade sex for drugs. They noted that intoxication helped the

women cope with negative feels associated with trading sex and facilitated the experience of trading sex, thus creating a cyclical relationship between substance use and sex trade (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). This kind of cyclical or mutually reinforcing pattern was noted across several studies. Mallory and Stern (2000) referred to this as a *cyclical phenomenon* where the women, who were also sampled from the United States, needed to be under the influence to engage in survival sex. Based on interviews with Kenyan women who inject drugs, injecting drugs prior to survival sex reportedly enabled participants to bear the shame of their circumstances (Mburu et al., 2019). One of the participants in their study indicated that they would at times ask people to provide them with drugs prior to their sex exchange so they may start using prior to sex, as sex would otherwise be undesirable. The practice of injecting prior to sex was colloquially termed “being steam” and was reported as essential by nearly all 45 participants in the study. When drugs were purchased in advance of the encounter, some women reported that it further exacerbated sexual health risks by weakening their ability to negotiate safer sex practices (Mburu et al., 2019). Some participants from a sample of female crack users from Brazil indicated they used crack before trading sex to give them courage to do so with partners they otherwise would not have chosen. This led them to smoke more crack than they otherwise would have (Nappo et al., 2011).

In their essay about language use in qualitative research that drew from examples of research with formerly incarcerated women, Hardesty and Gunn (2019) described a common narrative that a woman’s decision to commodify her sexuality is tantamount to relinquishing sexual agency. They further note that drugs such as heroin and crack are thought to hijack women’s agency, meaning that when under the influence, the women are viewed as people to whom *stuff happens* (Hardesty & Gunn, 2019). Thus, when engaging in survival sex, people are

viewed as less agentic if labelled as someone who trades sex in the first place and are further viewed as compromising their agency when under the influence of drugs.

Insecure Housing

A lack of housing can push people to trade sex to meet their basic need for accommodation and the basic need for safety associated with being sheltered and may deprive people of other basic needs as well. In a study of men who have sex with men in the United States, authors found that those who were experiencing homelessness had five times the odds of trading sex for methamphetamine compared those who had other living arrangements (Semple et al., 2010).

With no access to a place to spend the night, people may trade sex to share someone's housing, including the resources that may be available to them when housed such as a shower or food. A study of homeless youth across the Midwestern United States illustrated some of the differing circumstances under which this may occur (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). At times, the exchange may be implicit, as illustrated by the experience of a young, unhoused woman who slept with an older man she indicated she otherwise would never have slept with. She did so consistently to have a place to sleep, shower, and eat. Another participant in the same study indicated she would go to bars to meet men and entice them to take her home with them. That same participant described another circumstance where a housed acquaintance of hers offered her to sleep at his house only if she slept in his bed with him (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Taken together, these examples illustrate the different levels at which people's sexual agency may be compromised, where they may be pressured by another person to agree to trade sex in exchange for shelter or pressured by their unhoused circumstances to seek shelter at any cost.

In a study from Kenya, some women reported that their transactional sexual partners would regularly rape them, but they felt compelled to continue to stay with them to gain access to shelter. One woman compared the sex (or more accurately, rape), to a type of rent, something she had to accept (Mburu et al., 2019). When staying at a possible abuser's home, one may feel trapped or compelled to remain there if the alternative is an unsheltered environment that is possibly even more unsafe. Decisions about safety were also navigated by young women experiencing homelessness in Australia, where one woman contrasted going home with men to sleep at their house and risking being assaulted by those men, with the risks on the streets which also included being sexually assaulted (Watson, 2011). It is possible that the women in these examples exercised some level of agency in choosing abusive situations that are more predictable or familiar to them, though these expressions of agency are nonetheless quite limited.

Power

Survival sex occurs in a context of extreme power imbalance (Watson, 2011), where the power holder is in possession of resources the other person requires for survival. Authors of a study examining sexual exploitation in Uganda noted that people exploiting a child or young person may be able to do so based on power differentials derived from age, gender, physical strength, intellect, and/or command of resources (Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al., 2020). Male street youth interviewed across South Africa by Swart-Kruger & Richter (1997), described survival sex as “sex engaged in for purposes of enlisting or mollifying powerful others, and in exchange for protection, accomodation [*sic*], food, glue, or other goods and services” (p. 961). The authors further described intersecting factors such as age, setting (e.g., living on the street) as lessening the bargaining power people have to among other things, negotiate safer sex practices, ultimately putting them at a higher risk for contracting HIV/AIDS (Swart-Kruger &

Richter, 1997). Indeed, several articles noted the power imbalance inherent to survival sex exchanges limited the ability to negotiate safer sex practices (Austrian et al., 2019; Bandali, 2011; Miller et al., 2011; Nappo et al., 2011; Semple et al., 2010; Stoebenau et al., 2017).

Coercion

While both survival sex and sex work involve an exchange of sex for material gain, survival sex occurs in a context of structural constraints (Mulvihill, 2019). Mulvihill (2019) described such constraints as structural coercion that limit people's ability to freely choose whether to engage in survival sex. Examples of structural harms that characterize structural coercion include homelessness, drug or alcohol misuse, refugee status, and previous sexual assault, all of which contribute to people's vulnerability (Mulvihill, 2019). The *coercion* in survival sex may be of a structural nature in that people are considered *victims* of circumstances of extreme deprivation. People may not directly or physically be coerced into survival sex but believe they have no other choice. In one study, the male street youth sampled across South Africa "felt compelled into survival sex, it was not physically coercive" (Swart-Kruger & Richter, 1997, p. 961). However, coercion also exists at a more direct or individual level, as some in a sample of homeless youth recruited across the United States, "were coerced, manipulated, or forced to [have survival sex], indicating that the decision to trade sex is not always voluntary" (Tyler & Johnson, 2006 p. 215). Thus, coercion into survival sex may be more structural or individual, but either type of coercion limits one's ability to exercise their sexual agency.

Sexual Agency

Despite the assumption that situations of deprivation would necessarily limit sexual agency, in the context of survival sex some research has examined how people manage or

attempt to exercise their sexual agency despite the constricting and coercive impact of deprivation. In a study of young women who experienced homelessness in Australia, some women indicated they engaged in survival sex with men whom they expected would have otherwise raped them. The author described this as sexual relationships that are not safe but may be considered as “a risk management plan or the best prospect among the dearth available options” (Watson, 2011, p. 649). Participants in Watson’s (2011) sample illustrated that while their choices were limited by circumstances of material deprivation, they themselves assumed a stance that was agentic and active within the very narrow constraints of a *structural coercion*.

In their literature review on women’s participation in transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa, Stoebenau et al. (2017) developed a framework based on three paradigms of transactional sex. These paradigms illustrate the range of circumstances that may motivate people to engage in transactional sex. By situating survival sex within this range, we can better understand how push factors related to survival sex impact agency. Their first paradigm, *Sex for Basic Needs*, which includes survival sex, is characterized as positioning women as victims of transactional sexual relationships, suggesting women’s limited agency. This is contrasted with the second paradigm *Sex for Improved Social Status*, that positions women as sexually agentic beings who trade sex for better lifestyles and a middle-class status. The third, *Sex and Material Expressions of Love*, emphasizes cultural scripts where men are providers to women and gifts are an expression of love, covered in more detail in a following section about the ways in which culture may limit agency. Stoebenau’ et al.’s (2017) findings acknowledge the limits of sexual agency in the context of transactional sex regarding sexual decision-making, particularly in the first paradigm of *Sex for Basic Needs*.

In a study that sampled from adults from Mozambique, Bandali (2011) reported on an emerging agency where sex is a critical asset women relied on for a range of purposes. Purposes ranged from achieving upward social mobility to obtaining necessities to survive, thus wealth and/or access to resources were an essential factor in partner choice. Similarly, in a study of homeless youth in the United States, participants reported that despite feelings of shame associated with survival sex, their desire to be self-reliant meant they often did not ask for help to meet their basic needs and instead relied on themselves via survival sex (Maria et al., 2015). Finally, some among a sample of adolescent girls and young women sampled from Uganda viewed a decision to engage in survival sex relationships as evidence of agency: “agency in having entered the relationship, meant that it was not necessarily viewed as exploitative but instead a deliberate means of reaching their objectives” (Kyegombe, Meiksin, Namakula, et al., 2020, p. 10). This illustrates a perception of women as agentic drivers of their circumstances given some exercise of agency to enter a relationship in the first place, even if that agency is severely constrained by their circumstances. Thus, not asking for help to meet basic needs and relying on themselves is a form of agency itself.

Discussion

We conducted this scoping review to evaluate the consent or sexual agency implications of survival sex. Our first research question was guided by Pearce’s Model of Social Consent to identify and examine factors that push people into greater vulnerability to survival sex via a reduced capacity to exercise their sexual agency and thus possibly compromising their ability to fully consent to sex. Push factors into greater vulnerability to survival sex that include hunger, patriarchy, poverty, substance use, and insecure housing may each be divided further into more structural levels (e.g., a dry season rendering food scarcer; a family to feed) and more direct or

proximal levels (e.g., the hunger one feels in the moment). Our second research question was guided by the theory of the Continuum of Volition, which suggests sexual activity is driven by a range of motivations rendering it on a continuum from voluntary to coerced (Weissman et al., 2006). Our findings indicated that survival sex is clearly more coerced than voluntary, it cannot be considered a full exercise of sexual agency and does not fit typical definitions of consensual sex given the strong power differentials illustrated by findings from this review. The findings also illustrated the ways in which people may make strategic or calculated choices to have sex to survive, and within those choices are narrow exercises of sexual agency. As illustrated in Figure 2, the push factors collectively and in conjunction with one-another create a context of more coercion, less sexual agency, and less power to refuse survival sex.

Our findings emphasized women's vulnerability to survival sex, but evidence in our review was limited in that few included articles have examined the experience of sexual and gender minorities, whose marginalization may itself serve as a push factor into greater vulnerability to survival sex. Only one included article examined the experience of men who have sex with men (Nappo et al., 2011). Other research has documented the unique marginalization people who identify as trans or gender diverse experience that may increase their vulnerability to survival sex (Greenfield et al., 2021; Kattari & Begun, 2017b). Moreover, transactional or survival sex has been widely studied among men who have sex with men, often in the context of HIV risk (Magni et al., 2020; Nerlander et al., 2017). It is also important to consider that some may be pushed to have sex with people of a gender they may not be attracted to, another way sexual agency is limited by survival sex pressures (e.g., "gay for pay"; Javanbakht et al., 2019).

Implications for Research

In our search we included terms such as transactional sex and exchange sex because they are often used to refer to behaviours that are identical to survival sex, namely, that they occur under conditions of deprivation. However, many such transactions within these broader conceptualizations do not occur under conditions of deprivation. Researchers that reported on transactional sex in Sub-Saharan Africa typically referred to sex for basic necessities (probably survival sex) or non-survival sex for gifts that aim to raise one's social status (Stoebenau et al., 2017). Other examples of non-survival transactional sex include the phenomenon of sex-for-fish exchange, predominantly in East Africa (Fiorella et al., 2019) or Sugaring (i.e., sugar daddy/sugar baby exchanges) reported on in Western contexts (Upadhyay, 2021) and sugar daddies or blessers in African contexts (Hoss & Blokland, 2018). To capture unique circumstances associated with deprivation, researchers should ask about transactional sex as well as survival sex separately, rather than merging them under the umbrella term of transactional sex. To that end, researchers should explicitly include deprivation in their operationalization of survival sex, rather than simply defining it as the exchange of sex for basic necessities to minimize the chance of inadvertently including non-survival sex exchanges.

Finally, survival sex refers to a broad set of materials one may be deprived of. Researchers should ask participants if they exchanged sex for each material separately, and not together (see Knittel et al., 2019, for an example). It is common practice to ask people if they *ever* experienced survival sex defined as the exchange for food, shelter or drugs. This kind of question not only combines very different behaviours together, but also the experience of those who regularly have survival sex with those who may have done so only once.

Implications for Policy and Advocacy

Given that deprivation is a necessary precondition for survival sex to occur, alleviation of deprivation would eliminate people's need to engage in survival sex. While state and non-state organizations work to make progress to alleviate people's deprivation of basic needs (e.g., housing programs, safe supply drug programs) our findings suggested that policy and advocacy approaches may further their efforts if they consider the human rights implications of survival sex. Our findings illustrated the coercive effect deprivation of basic needs has on people's ability to exercise their sexual agency, rendering them unable to consent to sex in exchange for basic needs. Advocates and policy makers, who traditionally take perspectives of sexual risk reduction when addressing survival sex, may consider advocating on the basis of human rights as well. People who have survival sex often feel forced to have sex they are not willing to have but believe they must to survive, this is equivalent to nonconsensual sex. Some have suggested that nonconsensual sex should always be referred to as rape (American Psychological Association, 2021). Referring to and/or considering survival sex as rape, and at the very least, appreciating the undermined sexual agency and consent that is involved, may be a strong tool for advocates to emphasize the coercive circumstances that push people into survival sex and violate their personhood, autonomy, and sexual agency and to mobilize appropriate supports and resources for those that have had to engage in survival sex. One may argue that given the potential for undermined consent, labelling survival sex as rape could be used as a tool for advocacy. However, applying a categorical approach (i.e., something either is rape or is not) may ignore the nuance developed throughout this article and therefore may not be appropriate for research or clinical contexts. We take an approach, based on the Continuum of Volition (Weissman et al., 2006), that there exists a spectrum from voluntary sex to coerced sex, the latter part of the continuum may be akin to rape. The myriad of circumstances we display in Figure 2 collectively

contribute to a kind coercion that exists at both structural and individual levels. Structural coercion suggests that people are victims of their circumstances and environment, and not necessarily being raped by the person providing them with resources. It would therefore be inappropriate to conclude based on our analysis that people who have sex with victims of survival sex be criminalized. We suggest this as a tool appropriate for consideration for advocacy and activism to highlight the undermined sexual agency and consent and note that an unconditional association of rape with survival sex would miss many of the nuances we identified in our article. In sum, survival sex is not only problematic because it puts people at risk for HIV, but survival sex can undermine the individual's personhood based on the ways in which sexual agency and capacity to consent are so often constrained.

Limitations

A limitation to this review is that we were limited to the 21 articles that contained some discussion of the sexual agency or consent implications of survival sex. This means that the push factors we identified are likely not exhaustive. As noted earlier, sexual or gender minority status may be a push factor that was not identified in our included articles. Another possible limitation to our review process is that we did not include the exchange of money for sex, referred to as survival sex work by some (see Shannon et al., 2008). Our conceptualization of survival sex as excluding sex for money is consistent with common definitions of survival sex, but we acknowledge that literature about survival sex work may have provided some insights related to our research questions that may have enriched some of our findings.

Conclusion

In our scoping review, we identified hunger, patriarchy, poverty, substance use, and insecure housing as factors that push people into greater deprivation and render them more

vulnerable to survival sex via a path of decreasing sexual agency and power, and increased coercion. Our findings suggest that survival sex may often be considered inherently nonconsensual given individual and structural levels of coercion that increase people's vulnerability to survival sex. Despite these coercive circumstances, our findings illustrated the ways in which people may make strategic or calculated choices to have sex to survive, and within those choices are narrow exercises of sexual agency. We made recommendations for how future research may be designed to be more specific and accurate when examining survival sex. We also described how advocates and policymakers may strengthen their efforts to support people who engage in survival sex. Finally, we highlighted how survival sex should be considered as more than a risk factor for poor health and victimization, but should be understood as a form of autonomy- and personhood-limiting victimization.

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Tables

Table 1

Article Characteristics

Authors, year	Title	Sample	Design	Purpose
Austrian et al., 2019	“When He Asks for Sex, You Will Never Refuse”: Transactional Sex and Adolescent Pregnancy in Zambia	Adolescent girls (N = 1,853; n = 96 for qualitative analysis 10-19 years old [yrs]) across four provinces in Zambia	Mixed	Examined transactional sex as a driver of adolescent pregnancy. Examined how the exchange of sex for resources - primarily money but also food, transportation, housing and gifts - is enacted and perceived in relation to HIV-related risk, and how prevalent gender norms are reflected in this practice.
Bandali, 2011	Exchange of sex for resources: HIV risk and gender norms in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique	Adults in 16 focus groups (N = 160) and 29 individual interviews. Rural and matrilineal areas of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique	Qualitative	Explored the social and economic determinants of transactional sexual relationships in Madagascar, to explain the normalisation of this type of relationship amongst young women, and the increasing involvement of young men.
Freedman et al., 2021	Analysing the economies of transactional sex amongst young people: Case study of Madagascar Sex for soap? A contextual approach for understanding young girls' involvement in sex in Tanzania	Young people (15-24 years old) in 32 focus groups, 460 interviews, 38 in-depth interviews in Madagascar	Qualitative	An examination of if and how girls are taken advantage of, discriminated against, or solicited for sex in and around schools.
Hagues, 2019	Survival sex and trafficked women: The politics of re-presenting and speaking about others in anti-oppressive qualitative research	Women in semi-structured interviews (N = 30) in Tanzania	Qualitative	Authors explored the politics of voice and representation in anti-oppressive qualitative research.
Hardesty & Gunn, 2019	Community perspectives on the extent to which transactional sex is viewed as sexual exploitation in Central Uganda.	N/A	Review Article	Examined community perspectives on the extent to which transactional sex is considered exploitative.
Kyegombe et al., 2020		Adolescent girls and young women in 19 focus groups, 44 in-depth interviews in Uganda	Qualitative	

Kyegombe et al., 2020	Sexual health of adolescent girls and young women in Central Uganda: exploring perceived coercive aspects of transactional sex.	Adolescent girls and young women in 19 focus groups, 44 in-depth interviews in Uganda	Qualitative	Examined the extent to which adolescent girls and young women's participation in transactional sex is perceived to be coerced.
Luetke et al., 2020	Hurricane impact associated with transactional sex and moderated, but not mediated, by economic factors in Okay, Haiti	Adult women (N = 304) in Okay, Haiti	Quantitative	Evaluated the relationship between hurricane impact and transactional sex and if this relationship was moderated, or mediated, through economic factors
Mallory & Stern, 2000	Awakening as a Change Process among Women at Risk for HIV Who Engage in Survival Sex	Women (n = 11) from a small community in the Central Midwest of the United States	Mixed	Purpose was to better understand concerns, attitudes, and behaviors related to HIV of women who engage in sex for survival.
Maria et al., 2015	Exploring contextual factors of youth homelessness and sexual risk behaviors: A qualitative study.	Homeless youth (N = 64; 14-24 years old) in Houston Texas, United States	Mixed	Explored how homeless youth describe sexual risk behaviors, experiences of victimization, and decision making surrounding HIV risk behaviors.
Mburu, et al., 2019	HIV risk behaviours among women who inject drugs in coastal Kenya: Findings from secondary analysis of qualitative data.	Women in 3 focus groups, 24 interviews (N = 45) in the Mombasa and Kilifi, Kenya	Qualitative	Documented the nature of HIV risks encountered by women who inject drugs in the Mombasa and Kilifi, Kenya.
McMillan, et al., 2018	Usage of the Terms Prostitution, Sex Work, Transactional Sex, and Survival Sex: Their Utility in HIV Prevention Research	N/A	Review article	The article examined the terms prostitution, sex work, transactional sex, and survival sex, the logic of their deployment and utility to research
Miller, et al., 2011	Food Insecurity and Sexual Risk in an HIV Endemic Community in Uganda	Adults (N = 41) living with HIV/AIDS from Mbarara, Uganda	Qualitative	Examined the impact of food insecurity on sexual-risk behavior. Critically examined the use of the term 'prostitution' in English policy discourse
Mulvihill, 2019	Is it time to drop the term 'prostitution' from policy discourse?	N/A	Review Article	Investigated the practice of selling one's body to obtain crack and related consequences.
Nappo et al., 2011	Crack, AIDS, and Women in São Paulo, Brazil	Female crack users (N = 75; 14-45 years old) in Sao Paulo, Brazil	Qualitative	Examined background characteristics, substance use variables, contextual factors, and sexual risk behaviors associated with trading sex for methamphetamine.
Semple, et al., 2010	Social and behavioral characteristics of HIV-positive MSM who trade sex for methamphetamine	HIV-positive MSM (N = 155) who were enrolled in a sexual risk-reduction intervention in San Diego, United States.	Quantitative	

Stoebenau, et al., 2017	Revisiting the understanding of "transactional sex" in sub-Saharan Africa: A review and synthesis of the literature	N/A	Review Article	Conducted a historically-grounded, comprehensive literature review on the nature and motivations for women's participation in transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa.
Swart-Kruger & Richter 1997	AIDS-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviour among South African street youth: Reflections on power, sexuality and the autonomous self.	Male street youth (N = 141; 11-18 yrs) across 8 cities in South Africa	Mixed	Elicited the AIDS-related knowledge, attitudes and behavior of male street youth.
Tyler & Johnson, 2006	Trading Sex: Voluntary or Coerced? The Experiences of Homeless Youth.	Homeless youth (N = 40) in 4 midwestern states across the United States	Qualitative	Examined the circumstances surrounding homeless youths' "decision" to trade sex for food, money, shelter, or drugs.
Watson, 2011	Understanding survival sex: young women, homelessness and intimate relationships	Young women (N=15; 18-25 yrs) who had experienced homelessness aged 18-25 years living in Melbourne, Australia	Qualitative	Explored gendered experiences of homelessness through an examination of survival sex.
Williams et al., 2018	"It isn't that we're prostitutes": Child protection and sexual exploitation of adolescent girls within and beyond refugee camps in Rwanda.	Ten focus groups with 87 boys and 79 girls (12-17 yrs); 6 focus groups with 36 parents/caregivers in Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda	Qualitative	Aimed to identify existing social and economic vulnerabilities of female adolescents in refugee camps in Rwanda.

Note. Population descriptions and article purposes are described using language matching original articles.

Figures

Figure 1

Flow Chart of Study Selection Process

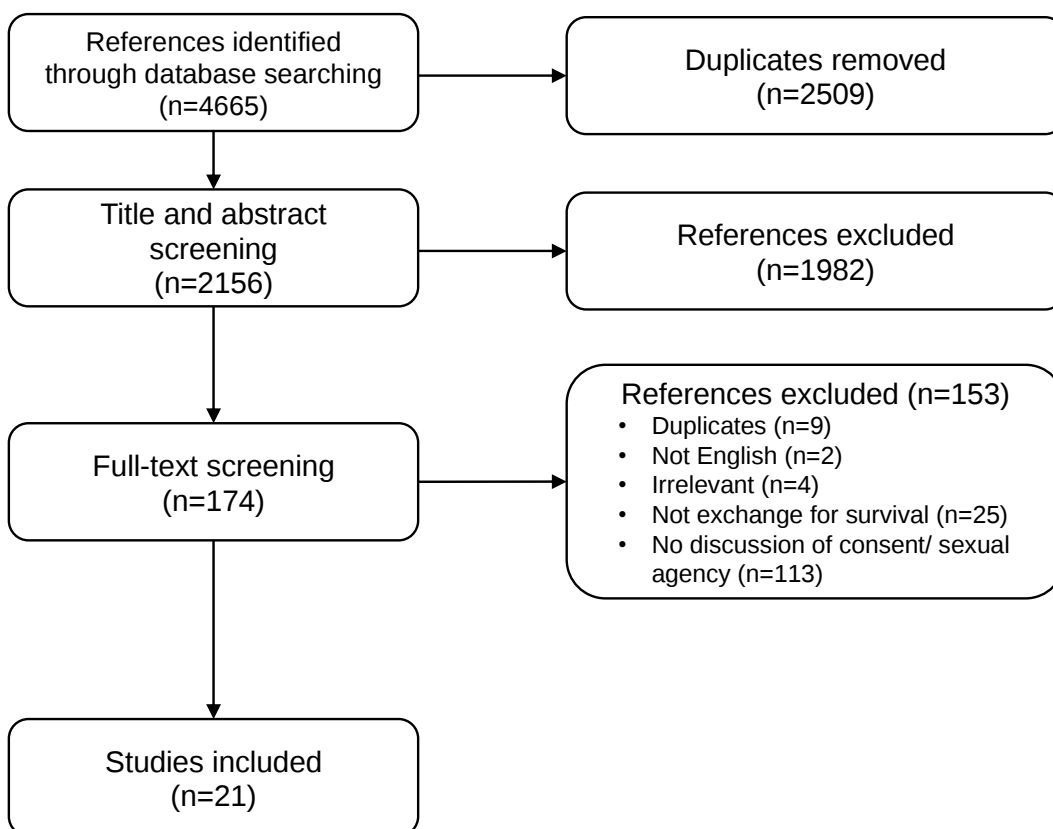
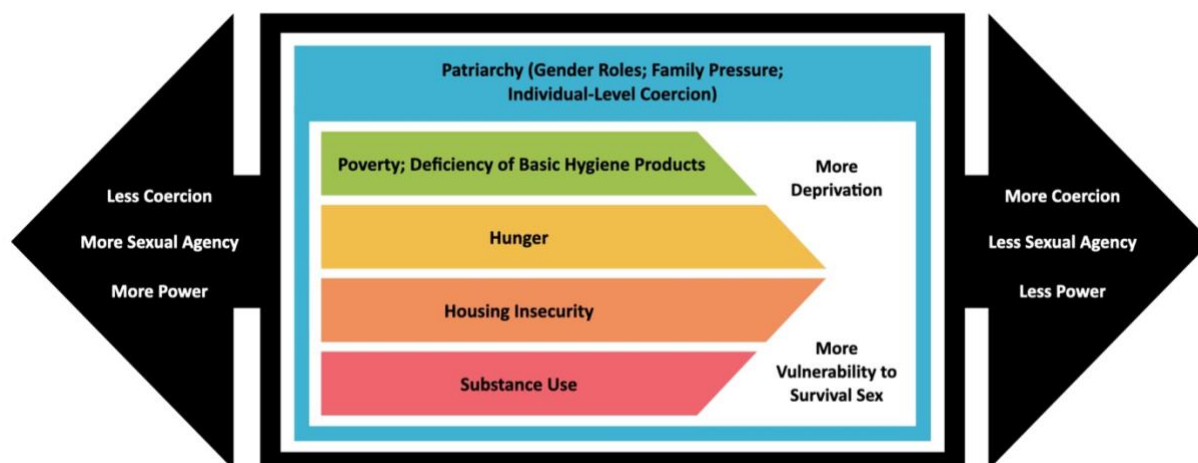


Figure 2

A Visual Representation of Findings



Study 3: The Impact of Partner Relationships on Homelessness Across Three Canadian Cities

Abstract

This study investigates the connection between partner relationships and housing stability in a sample of 1,192 homeless and vulnerably housed individuals across three Canadian cities across 5 years at four time points. Data from the longitudinal Health and Housing in Transition (HHiT) study were used to group participants by homelessness typology and romantic satisfaction. Multinomial logistic and linear regression analyses were used to examine the relationship between romantic satisfaction, partner status, and housing stability, with results indicating that while higher romantic satisfaction and frequent partner presence were directionally associated with greater housing stability and fewer days homeless, these effects were not statistically significant. Path analyses were conducted to explore the indirect effect of partner status on housing stability through romantic satisfaction. Results revealed that romantic satisfaction mediated the relationship between partner status and housing stability only in the final year of the study. These findings provide evidence that satisfactory romantic relationships may contribute to housing stability, but additional research is needed to explore these dynamics more thoroughly.

The Impact of Partner Relationships on Homelessness Across Three Canadian Cities

Researchers have long explored the complex dynamics that underlie homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2006; Chu et al., 2020; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Lee et al., 2010). Understanding these patterns enables the development of more targeted interventions that address the diverse and multifaceted needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. Among these needs, the need for connection via sexual and romantic intimacy has seldom been explored in a positive light in research on homelessness. Traditionally, studies have concentrated on the risks associated with sexual activity, such as sexually transmitted diseases or victimization, rather than the potential benefits of romantic and sexual relationships among people who are experiencing homelessness (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). This study aims to examine the impact of partner relationships on housing stability.

Partner Relationships and Homelessness

While a considerable amount of research has explored various patterns of homelessness, few studies have investigated sexual intimacy within the context of homelessness despite its recognized benefits to wellbeing (Ecker et al., 2018). Though not a focus of the research, some studies on housing stability and homelessness have found a link between romantic relationships and homelessness. Nilsson et al. (2019) examined predictors for exiting homelessness and found that being in a romantic partnership increased the likelihood of exiting homelessness. Similarly, Aubry and colleagues (2021) observed that partnered homeless individuals are more likely to experience improvements in stable housing over time. These findings suggest that having a partner may positively impact the transition out of homelessness, although the mechanisms behind this effect were unexplored. To better understand these mechanisms, qualitative studies and literature reviews that have examined sexual and romantic relationships among people

experiencing homelessness could provide more detailed insights.

A recent review of partner relationships (i.e., sexual and romantic relationships) among people experiencing homelessness (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022) identified only 13 studies examining consensual partner relationships with some substantial focus (e.g., including a reference to consensual partner relationships when discussing objectives). In contrast, the majority of studies, numbering in the hundreds, examined sexual health or risk, sexual victimization, or survival sex. All 13 studies employed qualitative methods and identified several common themes including love, romance, and emotional support. These findings suggest that partner relationships may provide substantial positive support amid the difficulties of homelessness.

Such relationships contribute to a sense of normalcy, offer hope during unstable times, and reduce feelings of isolation. Support often includes pooling resources, which can facilitate exits from homelessness. Additionally, forming partnerships, particularly for women, may provide physical protection from the dangers associated with homelessness. Common findings also highlighted barriers to forming and maintaining these relationships, such as shelter policies, societal stigma, and circumstances that push people into transactional sex. These latter findings suggest a need for policies that support the development of healthy, consensual relationships among people experiencing homelessness (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). Despite the benefits that partner relationships can offer, such as aiding in exiting homelessness or making the challenging experience more bearable, the unique circumstances of homelessness may compel individuals to enter into some partnerships that could be unsafe.

Survival sex, defined as the exchange of sex for essential material goods like shelter, food, and drugs, is often considered to occur largely, if not uniquely, among homeless

populations in higher-income countries (Heerde & Hemphill, 2017a; Ivanich et al., 2017; Srivastava et al., 2019). Individuals experiencing homelessness often face extreme deprivation of the resources needed to survive, which significantly diminishes their ability to exercise sexual agency from a sexual consent perspective. This lack of agency increases their vulnerability to engaging in survival sex or entering transactionally-based partner relationships, which often do not provide the benefits and support that can help alleviate the hardships of homelessness or assist in exiting such conditions (Czechowski, Sylvestre, et al., 2022; Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). Further, while supportive relationships can be crucial for those experiencing homelessness, some may inadvertently hinder the process of exiting homelessness. Often, these individuals form bonds with others in similar situations for safety, social support, and access to resources. Consequently, these relationships are often based more on survival needs than emotional connection (Bower et al., 2018, 2023). Homelessness may also limit opportunities to form relationships with non-homeless individuals, who could potentially provide access to beneficial resources and opportunities.

Taken together, the deprivation-related pressures that drive individuals into transactional relationships, along with the social bonds that may isolate them from opportunities to form connections that facilitate exiting homelessness, suggest that the mere presence of a partner relationship may not be enough to positively impact housing stability. Instead, research should focus on distinguishing high-quality relationships that are more likely to be sensitive to predicting positive outcomes, such as housing stability. However, the path from homelessness to housing stability is complex, involving varied patterns and trajectories. It is crucial to understand these diverse homeless experiences when studying their relationship with partner relationships.

Patterns in Homelessness Experiences

Homelessness is not a homogeneous experience. Typologies of homelessness are commonly used to categorize the differences in homelessness experiences among single adults. In a seminal study, Kuhn and Culhane (1998) analyzed administrative data on the use of public homeless shelters by single adults in New York City ($n = 73,263$) between 1988–1995 and in Philadelphia ($n = 6,897$) between 1991–1995. Patterns of shelter stays were categorized based on two variables: the average number of days spent homeless and the number of episodes (defined as instances separated by 30 days) over three years in New York City and over two years in Philadelphia. The authors identified three patterns of shelter stays in both cities, which they labelled transitional, episodic, and chronic (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). Individuals classified as transitionally homeless generally constitute the majority of the homeless population. Typically, this group experiences a single, brief episode of homelessness, representing about 80 to 94% of the homeless population. In contrast, 2 to 10% of individuals are episodically homeless, facing multiple short-term episodes, and about 3 to 11% are chronically homeless, enduring fewer but longer-lasting episodes. (Aubry et al., 2013; Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Culhane et al., 2007; Hong et al., 2018; Kneebone et al., 2015; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Rabinovitch et al., 2016; Waldron et al., 2019).

Despite representing a smaller segment of the overall homeless population, individuals experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness account for a more significant portion of shelter use (Aubry et al., 2013; Jadidzadeh & Kneebone, 2018; Kneebone et al., 2015; Waldron et al., 2019). Those in the chronically homeless category are also known to use a broader range of services more extensively (Aubry et al., 2013). People within the episodic and chronic clusters of homelessness often experience a higher prevalence of physical or mental health concerns, including histories of substance use (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). The clustering method developed

by Kuhn and Culhane to categorize homelessness has primarily been conducted with data representing single adults. However, researchers have also adapted this methodology to examine the experiences of families experiencing homelessness (Culhane et al., 2007; Jadidzadeh & Kneebone, 2018).

The typologies method has consistently been replicated across studies, offering a stable framework for understanding homelessness patterns (Aubry et al., 2013; Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Culhane et al., 2007; Hong et al., 2018; Kneebone et al., 2015; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Rabinovitch et al., 2016; Waldron et al., 2019). This approach's clear categorization facilitates comparison and benchmarking across different regions or through time, making findings readily comparable to existing research. The typologies approach classifies people into established categories recognized by government bodies (e.g., government organizations use “chronic” and “episodic” labels Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018; HUD, 2015; Infrastructure Canada, 2022). This consistency is crucial for developing targeted interventions and services that address the specific needs of each identified group. Such simplicity is especially valuable in the under-explored and less visible area of how romantic and sexual relationships impact homelessness. By generating clear and straightforward results, the typologies method may enhance the relevance and application of findings, encouraging the development of policies and interventions focused on fostering healthy and supportive partner relationships within this population.

Current Study

This study conducted a secondary analysis of data from the Health and Housing in Transition Study (HHiT), which is a longitudinal study tracking homeless and vulnerably housed adults without dependent children under 18 years old. Participants were interviewed annually

over four years in Ottawa, Toronto, and Vancouver (Hwang et al., 2011). We analyzed the partner status and romantic satisfaction among people experiencing homelessness in three Canadian cities. This study is unique given that it includes a sample of people who are experiencing residential instability (i.e., vulnerably housed) and homelessness, including hidden homelessness, while others have typically used administrative shelter data. Further, this is the first study to examine the romantic satisfaction of people experiencing homelessness in such a large sample.

Our study specifically examined the experience of individuals we classified into four groups based on their homelessness patterns: chronic, episodic, transitional (as identified by Kuhn & Culhane, 1998), and a fourth group of those who were vulnerably housed and never homeless during the study period (i.e., zero days homeless). To investigate the joint effects of partner status and romantic satisfaction, we implemented a K-means cluster analysis, just as we did to the homelessness data, to group individuals based on their frequency of partnership and levels of romantic satisfaction over four years. We also examined these aspects across various demographic characteristics within the sample. The following research questions and hypotheses guided our research:

RQ1. What are the proportions of individuals classified into the three homelessness clusters and two clusters based on romantic satisfaction and partner status?

The following hypotheses were based on the expectation of identifying typologies in our data that align with those developed by Kuhn & Culhane. Additionally, we anticipated discovering two distinct clusters when jointly examining partner status and relationship satisfaction; one cluster would represent a ‘better relationship’ pattern characterized by higher satisfaction and more frequent partner status. The other cluster would represent a pattern marked by lower

satisfaction and less frequent ‘partnered’ status over the four years. Previous research linking partner status and housing stability did not differentiate between the quality of relationships, we used romantic satisfaction as a proxy for relationship quality. These hypotheses are designed to explore how relationship patterns are associated with homelessness, both categorically by predicting membership in three typologies with vulnerably housed as a reference group (H1), and numerically by predicting the number of days homeless (H2).

H1: Greater levels of romantic satisfaction and partner presence over 4 years will be predictive of group membership characterized by higher levels of housing stability (i.e., transitionally homeless) and not of those characterized by lower levels of housing stability (i.e., episodically homeless, chronically homeless), compared to the reference category of being vulnerably housed, while controlling for demographic variables.

H2: Higher levels of romantic satisfaction and a higher presence over 4 years of a partner (i.e., the high satisfaction and high partner presence cluster) will be predictive of fewer days spent homeless, while controlling for demographic variables.

Finally, taking advantage of the longitudinal design of our dataset, we tested three path analysis models (H3). In each model, all variables were measured at one time point, with the dependent variables being measured in the subsequent year.

H3: We anticipate a statistically significant indirect path from partner status to housing stability, mediated by romantic satisfaction while controlling for demographic variables.

Method

Participants and Data Collection

The Health and Housing in Transition (HHiT) Study was a project that examined the housing of 1,192 homeless and vulnerably housed people at baseline and then at one-year

intervals for four years in three Canadian cities (Hwang et al., 2011). Participants were randomly selected from various settings across the three cities between January and December 2009.

Participants experiencing homelessness were recruited from shelters and meal programs. In shelters, they were randomly selected, while convenience sampling was used at meal programs to proportionally recruit unsheltered participants based on estimated numbers in each city.

Unsheltered individuals identified at meal programs were eligible if they had not stayed in a shelter within the past seven days. Vulnerably housed participants were initially recruited through random sampling from rooming houses in Toronto and Ottawa and single-room occupancies (SROs) in Vancouver. Due to access limitations, the strategy was adjusted to include recruitment from meal programs, drop-in centers, and community health centers to meet the target sample. The HHiT team recruited adults without dependent children under 18 years old participating in meal programs. Eligibility for these participants was contingent upon them being homeless and having used a shelter for more than three nights within the preceding week.

Participants who were vulnerably housed were sampled from rooming houses, single-room occupancy hotels, drop-in centers, and community health centers. Participants who were *doubled up* or temporarily living with friends or family were considered vulnerably housed if they were paying rent and homeless if they were not paying rent. The aim was to recruit a total of 600 people who were homeless at baseline and 600 who were vulnerably housed in total (200 homeless and 200 vulnerably housed from each city). The final sample was 1,192; some participants were excluded because they completed more than one interview using a different name. Interviews at baseline (BS) were all completed in person, and follow-up at each year (Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4) interviews were primarily conducted in person; some were conducted over the phone if a participant had moved to another city. Participants provided written informed consent

and were provided a \$20 honorarium for each interview. The research ethics boards approved this study in each of the three cities, including St.-Michael's Hospital in Toronto, the University of Ottawa, and the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (Hwang et al., 2011).

Variables

Demographic Variables. Participants were asked about a range of demographic characteristics, including their age, education, gender, ethnicity and city.

Partner Status. Measured by one dichotomous question, "Do you have a partner?" with two response options: "yes" or "no."

Relationship/Romantic Satisfaction. Measured using a question asked to all participants about their romantic situation. Those who are currently partnered are instructed to comment on their relationship with their partner: "Next, I want to ask about your romantic situation. This could include your relationship with a spouse, boyfriends or girlfriends, or sexual partners. It could also include *not* having such a relationship, or a recent change in a relationship, such as living apart, divorce, or death of a partner. On the whole, how do you feel about your current romantic situation." Response options range from one (very dissatisfied) to seven (very satisfied). This item was taken from The Quality of Life for Homeless and Hard to House Individuals Short Version 1 (Hubley et al., 2009).

Days Homeless. Count data of the days individuals were homeless over one year (365 days) and four years (1,460 days) from the first to the fourth follow-up year (Y1-Y4). We defined a participant as homeless for each night they lacked permanent housing, whether they were staying in a shelter or experiencing "hidden homelessness." We defined "hidden homelessness" as nights when a participant was without shelter, including times spent on the

streets, at a campground, or temporarily staying with friends or family without paying rent (e.g., couch surfing) due to a recent loss of housing.

Homeless Episodes. Calculated within the four-year period. We defined a homeless episode as a transition from being housed to becoming homeless. Additionally, for any transition to be considered a new episode, there must be a gap of at least 30 days between each state of homelessness. A transition sequence from homeless to institutionalized (e.g., hospitalized, substance use treatment, jail) to homeless was not recognized as a new episode. Conversely, a transition from housed to institution to homeless qualified as one new episode.

Days Housed. For each year, a count of days that people were housed (i.e., not homeless). We consider the number of days housed as an indicator of housing stability. We had a count for each year (Y1-Y4).

Data Analysis Methods and Data Preparation

For this study, we used four distinct versions of the dataset for our analysis. The first dataset comprised data spanning four years (Y1 to Y4), to inform Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Hypotheses 1 and 2 (H1 and H2). The other three, used specifically for Hypothesis 3 (H3), consisted of three separate datasets we refer to as panels. Each panel included data from two consecutive years: Panel 1 included data from Y1 and Y2; Panel 2 from Y2 and Y3; and Panel 3 from Y3 and Y4. We did not use baseline data because partner status was not measured at that time; it was only assessed in later time points.

Cluster Analyses (RQ1)

To prepare our dataset of data spanning four years (Y1 to Y4), we removed people who were missing full yearly data for at least one of 4 years ($n = 341$). We also removed people who

did not provide an answer to "are you partnered" for at least one of the four years ($n = 14$). The final sample size used for analysis was 737. We observed missing data for the Romantic Satisfaction variables across four years, with missing percentages of 2.8%, 3.1%, 1.6%, and 0.9%, respectively. To address this issue, we used the expectation maximization technique to impute the missing data.

Our analysis method for our research question (RQ1) drew upon the foundational approach by Kuhn and Culhane (1998), who used the K-means clustering procedure to examine emergency shelter use patterns within the homeless population to produce the three typologies of homelessness: transitional, episodic, and chronic. Kuhn and Culhane (1998) introduced a widely adopted method that analyzes the duration and frequency of homelessness episodes. They used a K-means clustering procedure to categorize patterns of emergency shelter usage. The K-means clustering algorithm is applied to the data, arbitrarily assigning initial centroids (i.e., central points representing the heart of each cluster). Each person's shelter use pattern is compared to these centroids based on their number of homeless episodes and total homeless days over a given period. Individuals are grouped based on which centroid their data is closest to in terms of the defined variables. The algorithm iteratively adjusts the centroids by calculating the mean of the variables for the individuals in each cluster. The algorithm regroups people in each iteration until the centroids stabilize and the grouping no longer changes significantly. The final clusters represent distinct patterns of shelter use.

For our analysis, we excluded people who were never homeless and used that group to create a fourth category: vulnerably housed and not homeless. We analyzed each participant's homelessness pattern based on two variables: the number of days homeless and the number of homeless episodes they encountered within the four years, with episodes distinguished by at least

a 30-day gap from one another. Before the clustering process, we applied z-score standardization to the *days homeless* and *homeless episodes* variables to transform them to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Through z-score standardization, we ensured that both variables were scaled equivalently, permitting equal influence in the cluster analysis. We performed the K-means clustering procedure under the premise that an ideal solution would reveal three distinct groups of shelter users characterized by specific shelter usage patterns as originally delineated by Kuhn and Culhane.

To develop the relationship clusters, we used a K-means clustering procedure, expecting that the algorithm would categorize individuals into two distinct groups: one characterized by high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner status and another by lower satisfaction and less frequent partner status over four years. We expected that higher partnership rates may be associated with longer term relationships, that may also be more satisfactory. We calculated two variables for this analysis from data collected at each of four years: total *relationship/romantic satisfaction* score, ranging from 4 to 28, and total *years partnered*, ranging from 0 to 4. Prior to clustering, we standardized both variables using z-score transformation to ensure each had a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Table 1 displays the demographics of the sample as a whole and by relationship cluster. Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for partner status, romantic satisfaction, and days homeless for each year.

Choice of Control Variables

Our selection of control variables was based on the premise that each could plausibly affect the relationship between the independent variables (partner status and satisfaction) and the dependent variables (housing stability/homelessness). Researchers should justify why each control variable does not bias estimates by blocking a causal path or inducing a spurious

correlation before including it in their model (Wysocki et al., 2022). This section examines each control variable, showing how they act as confounders in the models tested. Ultimately, the interpretation of this study's results relies on the validity of these associations. Descriptive statistics for the control variables are available in Table 1.

Age. A continuous variable representing calculated age. Age is a significant predictor of both the duration and severity of homelessness. Younger individuals are less likely to experience chronic homelessness compared to older adults (Odd & Erfani, 2024), while older age is associated with increased health vulnerabilities that make it more difficult to exit homelessness (Lutchmun et al., 2022). Additionally, the age at which individuals first experience homelessness can significantly impact the length of time they remain homeless, with older adults often facing longer periods due to various socioeconomic factors (Scutella et al., 2013). At the same time, as people age, they often develop longer-term, more stable relationships. The quality of these relationships improves over time due to increased emotional maturity and interpersonal skills (Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Relationships also tend to become more satisfying and stable with age (Allen et al., 2020; Furman & Collibee, 2014).

If age is not controlled for, the effects of age-related relationship stability (more common in older adults) or age-related homelessness (worse outcomes for older adults) might be mistakenly attributed to romantic partner status. This could falsely strengthen or weaken the association between romantic partner status and homelessness, leading to misleading results.

Education. A categorical variable with three categories representing educational attainment: some high school, completed high school, and some post-secondary. The association between higher education and a reduced risk of homelessness is well-documented in the literature. A bachelor's degree or higher is associated with lower homelessness rates, whereas a

lack of a high school diploma and lower educational attainment generally correlates with an increased risk of homelessness (Brakenhoff et al., 2015; Cebula & Alexander, 2020). Further, educational attainment significantly influences romantic partner desirability. Individuals with higher education are often seen as more attractive partners, and they tend to seek partners with similar educational backgrounds. This phenomenon, known as educational assortative mating, suggests that people prefer partners with comparable or higher education, which can enhance compatibility in values and aspirations (Andersson, 2019; Stauder & Kossow, 2021).

If education is not controlled for, one might mistakenly attribute the reduced risk of homelessness to having a romantic partner, when in fact, it could be higher education—associated with both stable housing and relationships—driving the effect. This could make it appear as though romantic partner status is more protective against homelessness than it actually is. The protective effect may be due to socio-economic advantages, such as higher education, rather than the relationship itself.

Gender. A binary variable with categories for men and women. Although some individuals in the initial dataset identified as transgender, we lacked detailed information about their specific identities (e.g., trans men, trans women, non-binary etc.), so they could not be meaningfully included. As a result, our analyses only account for two genders: men and women. Gender affects both the experience of homelessness and romantic relationships. Male gender has consistently been identified as a risk factor for prolonged homelessness (Myrstol & Fitzpatrick, 2011; Scutella et al., 2013; To et al., 2016). In romantic relationships, women tend to prioritize emotional support and open communication to enhance relationship quality (Stafford & Canary, 1991) and expect greater emotional intimacy and support (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). This focus

may enable women to seek partners who value emotional support, helping them better cope with the challenges of homelessness.

Emotional support could be a key mechanism through which partner relationships reduce homelessness duration or make it more bearable (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). Without controlling for gender, the study may overestimate the protective effect of having a partner for women (who experience shorter homelessness durations and may benefit more from social support) or underestimate it for men (who tend to experience longer durations). This could lead to a misleading relationship between romantic partner status and homelessness.

Ethnicity. A categorical variable representing ethnic backgrounds, including Indigenous, black, white, and mixed/other. Research shows that certain ethnic groups, particularly Indigenous populations, experience homelessness differently from non-Indigenous groups. Indigenous individuals are overrepresented in Canada's homeless population and often experience homelessness at a younger age, which is linked to longer durations of homelessness compared to non-Indigenous people (Bingham et al., 2019). Black individuals are also overrepresented in the homeless population in Canada and face unique challenges that may contribute to longer periods of homelessness (Wilkinson et al., 2023). Racial and ethnic discrimination is linked to romantic relationship instability, largely due to its association with psychological distress (Ogan et al., 2024). Additionally, racism can negatively impact relationship satisfaction within a mixed-race relationship (A. M. Brown et al., 2023).

Ethnic discrimination could lead to worse homelessness outcomes and also impact relationship satisfaction and partner selection. If ethnicity is not accounted for, the correlation between romantic partner status and homelessness might be confounded by these underlying ethnicity-related disparities driven by discrimination, creating a misleading relationship.

City. A categorical variable representing cities, including Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver. The city in which someone lives affects access to housing, social services, and opportunities for forming relationships among those experiencing homelessness. There is a strong association between city-level rents and homelessness rates, with local economic conditions in urban areas directly influencing homelessness prevalence (Curtis et al., 2013). Urban renewal initiatives that displace low-income residents can also increase homelessness (Grainger, 2021). Additionally, municipal policies on shelter privacy, gender segregation, and rules regarding sexual intimacy impact the ability of homeless individuals to form and maintain partner relationships (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022).

Without controlling for city, differences in homeless duration could be wrongly attributed to romantic partner status when they are actually due to the city's economic conditions or policies. Differences in homelessness rates between cities could create a false correlation between romantic partner status and homelessness. For instance, a city with better housing support may show lower homelessness rates among partnered individuals, not because the partner relationship itself reduces homelessness but due to stronger local policies and services.

Association Between Relationship Patterns and Homelessness Patterns (H1)

For analyses that informed both H1 and H2, the sample size was 707 participants from an initial 737, given that we excluded 30 participants who were missing demographic variables we used for controls. We conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis to investigate the hypothesis (H1) that people with higher levels of romantic satisfaction and partner presence over four years would predict homelessness categories associated with higher housing stability while controlling for demographic variables. The dependent variable included four categories: transitional homeless, episodically homeless, chronically homeless and the reference category of

vulnerably housed. The independent variable was the partner-satisfaction clusters, a binary variable with two cluster levels that include high combined values of partner status and romantic satisfaction and lower combined values while controlling the demographic variables (age, education, gender, ethnicity and city). The assumptions of no perfect separation, sufficient sample size, linearity of the logit for continuous variables, and independent observations were checked and met.

Association Between Relationship Patterns and Homeless Days (H2)

To investigate how relationship patterns are associated with homelessness numerically (H2), we first applied a logarithmic transformation to *days homeless* given its positive skewness and the presence of many ‘zero’ homeless days entries. The transformation was the natural logarithm of days homeless of days homeless + 1, which successfully normalized the distribution and stabilized the variance of the dependent variable, making it more amenable for subsequent linear regression analysis (see Table 3). We conducted a linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between the logarithmically transformed number of days homeless as the dependent variable and partner-satisfaction clusters as the independent variable while controlling for demographic variables (age, education, gender, ethnicity and city). The assumptions of linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, and normality of residuals were checked and met.

Testing Path Analysis Models from Partner Status to Relationship Satisfaction to Housing Stability (H3)

From an initial dataset with all interviews at all time points (n=1190) we created three datasets, which we refer to as panels, removing participants who had missing data for one of two years or both years. In Panel 1, we initially had 878 participants with data for both Year 1 (Y1)

and Year 2 (Y2). We excluded 43 participants due to missing demographic control data. We then used expectation maximization to impute missing values for romantic satisfaction ($n=22$), resulting in a final sample of 835 for analysis.

For Panel 2, we started with 903 participants who had data for both Year 2 (Y2) and Year 3 (Y3). We removed 43 participants for missing demographic control data. We imputed missing values using expectation maximization for Y2 Romantic Satisfaction ($n=28$), ending up with a final sample of 860 for analysis. Finally, in Panel 3, we began with 862 participants with data for both Year 2 (Y2) and Year 3 (Y3). We excluded 41 participants due to missing demographic control data. We imputed missing values for Y3 Romantic Satisfaction ($n=14$) using expectation maximization, resulting in a final sample size of 821 for analysis. Based on published guidelines (Kline, 2016), a recommended minimum sample-size-to-parameters ratio for structural equation modelling is 10:1; all three of our path analysis models exceed this minimum.

In our preliminary analysis, we assessed item-level statistics and verified that our data met the statistical assumptions necessary for conducting path analysis. We checked for normality by analyzing histograms of the score distributions, reviewing the standard error of skewness and kurtosis, and confirmed that there were no significant outliers. Next, we applied path analysis using maximum likelihood estimation and enhanced the robustness of our analysis with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. We analyzed three hypothesized models, each depicting both direct and indirect (mediating) relationships among the variables. Categorical control variables were dummy coded. The models examined the pathways from the independent variable (partner status) to the dependent variable (housing stability) through the mediator (satisfaction with romantic relationships), while controlling for covariates. All variables were measured at one time point, with the dependent variable assessed in the following year. This indirect effect was

classified as either full mediation (no direct effects) or partial mediation (both direct and indirect effects are significant). Each model is just-identified, meaning there are exactly as many estimated parameters as there are unknown values (observed variances and covariances). This results in a perfect fit by definition, which precludes further fit assessment using model fit statistics. All path analyses were conducted using AMOS (Version 29), with data cleaning procedures performed in SPSS (Version 29).

Results

Identification of Clusters (RQ1)

Guided by our research question (RQ1), we examined the proportions of individuals classified into distinct homelessness and partner satisfaction clusters. Of the 531 individuals in the sample who experienced homelessness during the four years of the study, three distinct clusters emerged from the K-means clustering procedure, each following expected patterns of homelessness (see Table 4). The transitional cluster, which comprised 50.7% of the sample ($n=374$), was characterized by a low number of shelter episodes (mean = 1.30) and a relatively small total number of days spent in shelter (mean = 184.83 days). The episodic cluster accounted for 14.9% of the sample ($n=79$) and was marked by many shelter episodes (mean = 3.53) but fewer total days in shelter (mean = 455.77 days). Finally, the chronic cluster, representing 14.7% of the sample ($n=78$), consisted of individuals with few shelter episodes (mean = 1.63) but a high total number of days in shelter (mean = 1008.27 days). The entire dataset, including those who were never homeless over the 4-year study period, comprised 737 individuals categorized into four groups: episodic ($n = 78$, 10.6%), transitional ($n = 373$, 50.9%), chronic ($n = 78$, 10.6%), and vulnerably housed ($n = 204$, 27.8%).

As displayed in Table 5, participants were also classified using the K-means clustering procedure in two distinct clusters based on romantic satisfaction and years partnered. The low romantic satisfaction, low partner status frequency cluster comprised 69.7% of the sample (n=514), with a mean of 0.42 years partnered and a mean romantic satisfaction score of 13.56. The high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner status cluster accounted for 30.3% of the sample (n=223), with a mean of 3.06 years partnered and a mean romantic satisfaction score of 21.14.

Association Between Relationship Patterns and Homelessness Patterns (H1)

We used multinomial logistic regression to analyze how partner-satisfaction clusters influence three homelessness typologies: episodic, transitional, and chronic homelessness. We used the vulnerably housed group as the reference category and controlled for city of residence, ethnicity, age, education levels, and gender. The analysis included a dataset of 737 participants, using data from all four years (Y1 - Y4).

The final model showed a significant improvement over the intercept-only model, $\chi^2(30) = 75.38, p < .001$. The pseudo R-squared values indicated that the model explained a small but meaningful proportion of the variance in homelessness typologies: Cox and Snell $R^2 = .081$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .089$, McFadden $R^2 = .036$.

Table 6 presents results from the multinomial logistic regression. Although the odds of people in the high satisfaction, high partner cluster across all homelessness typologies are lower compared to those who are vulnerably housed, none of these differences are statistically significant. This indicates that our hypothesis (H1) was not supported. However, we observed some significant effects in demographic variables.

Relative to vulnerably housed, age and educational attainment were significant predictors of transitional homelessness. Each additional year of age decreased the likelihood of being transitionally homeless by 3% ($B = -0.03$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.97$, 95% CI [0.95, 0.99]). Moreover, having completed high school or equivalent was associated with nearly doubling the odds of being transitionally homeless ($B = 0.63$, $p = .01$, $OR = 1.88$, 95% CI [1.16, 3.04]), and having some post-secondary education increased the odds by 57% ($B = 0.45$, $p = .03$, $OR = 1.57$, 95% CI [1.04, 2.37]).

Relative to the reference group, individuals residing in Toronto were significantly less likely to be categorized as episodically homeless ($B = -0.87$, $p = .044$, $OR = 0.42$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.98]). Additionally, age was a significant predictor; with each additional year, the likelihood of being episodically homeless decreased by 5% ($B = -0.05$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.95$, 95% CI [0.92, 0.98]). Higher educational attainment, particularly some post-secondary education, significantly increased the odds of being categorized within the episodically homeless category ($B = 0.83$, $p = .009$, $OR = 2.29$, 95% CI [1.23, 4.25]).

Finally, in terms of categorization within chronic homelessness, residence in Ottawa significantly increased the odds ($B = 1.02$, $p = .008$, $OR = 2.78$, 95% CI [1.31, 5.90]), as did residence in Toronto ($B = 0.84$, $p = .04$, $OR = 2.31$, 95% CI [1.06, 5.04]). Age again played a role, with each additional year decreasing the likelihood of being chronically homeless by 3% ($B = -0.03$, $p = .04$, $OR = 0.97$, 95% CI [0.95, 1.00]). The effect of ethnicity was notable in this category; individuals with a mixed ethnicity or other were significantly more likely to be chronically homeless compared to the white reference ethnicity ($B = 1.01$, $p = .04$, $OR = 2.75$, 95% CI [1.06, 7.11]).

Association Between Relationship Patterns and Days Homeless (H2)

We performed a linear regression analysis to investigate the relationship between the logarithmically transformed number of days homeless as the dependent variable and partner-satisfaction clusters, while controlling for demographic variables including age, education, gender, ethnicity, and city; the reference categories for control variables were the same as for the multinomial regression. The analysis used a dataset of 737 participants, incorporating data from all four years (Y1 to Y4).

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(10, 696) = 3.28, p < .001$, explaining 4.5% of the variance in the logarithmically transformed number of days homeless ($R^2 = .045$, Adjusted $R^2 = .031$). The variable representing high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner status had a negative association with the logarithmically transformed number of days homeless, though this predictor narrowly missed statistical significance ($\beta = -.18, t(696) = -1.91, p = .057$). This suggests that higher satisfaction within partner relationships might be associated with fewer days of homelessness, though the effect is not statistically conclusive at the .05 level. This suggests that our hypothesis (H2) was not supported. We did, however, observe some significant effects on demographic variables. Significant predictors included age, with older participants likely experiencing fewer days homeless ($\beta = -.15, t(696) = -3.83, p < .001$), and education, where having completed high school was associated with more days homeless ($\beta = .11, t(696) = 2.76, p = .006$). Table 7 displays a complete list of predictors in the model.

Three Path Analysis Models from Partner Status to Relationship Satisfaction to Housing Stability (H3)

We tested three path analysis models to examine Hypothesis 3. In each model, the independent variable and mediator were measured at one time point, with the dependent variable measured in the following year. Control variables (age, education, gender, ethnicity, and city), all

measured at the initial time point, were used when predicting both the mediator and the dependent variable. We refer to each dataset as a panel. Panel 1 = Y1-Y2, $n = 835$; Panel 2 = Y2-Y3, $n = 860$; Panel 3 = Y3-Y4, $n = 821$). Each model is just-identified; this results in a perfect fit by definition, which means that further fit assessment using chi-square or other fit statistics is not applicable.

Direct effects within the three panel models are summarized in Table 8, including effect sizes and confidence intervals. Across the three panels, we did not identify any significant direct effects when examining the association between partner status and housing stability. In terms of the direct effects of partner status on romantic satisfaction, analyses showed a consistent and significant positive effect of partner status on romantic satisfaction across all three panels. In the first panel, the effect was significant ($\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI = [1.45, 2.01], $p < .001$), as it was in the second ($\beta = 0.29$, 95% CI = [1.47, 2.09], $p < .001$) and third panels ($\beta = 0.31$, 95% CI = [1.5, 2.1], $p < .001$). This suggests that the presence of a partner was consistently associated with greater levels of romantic satisfaction. Finally, in terms of the effects of romantic satisfaction on housing stability, we observed a significant effect only in the third panel ($\beta = 0.11$, 95% CI = [2.33, 11.79], $p = .003$), indicating that increased romantic satisfaction predicted higher levels of housing stability from Y3 to Y4.

The indirect effects of partner status on housing stability through romantic satisfaction did not show significant results in the first ($p = .525$) and second panels ($p = .376$). However, in the third panel, there was a significant indirect effect ($p = .002$), suggesting that romantic satisfaction may serve as a full mediator of the relationship between partner status and housing stability over time. This was a full mediation given that there was no significant effect from

partner status to housing stability in the third panel model. The direction of the insignificant effects for Panel 1 and Panel 2 were the same as in Panel 3, but were not statistically significant.

Discussion

This study analyzed partner status and romantic satisfaction among people experiencing homelessness across four years from the Health and Housing in Transition Study (HHiT), a longitudinal study tracking homeless and vulnerably housed adults in Ottawa, Vancouver, and Toronto. Our analyses suggest that the presence of partner relationships characterized by higher levels of satisfaction is directionally associated with increased housing stability, although only one analysis achieved statistical significance. This indicates a clear need for further research in this area. Our findings reveal that a notable proportion (approximately a third each year) of individuals facing homelessness or residential instability are in partnerships; this observation is notable, given that romantic partnerships are often overlooked in studies on factors contributing to housing stability. In subsequent sections, we will discuss specific results, highlight limitations that may have affected our ability to detect significant effects, and consider the implications of our findings.

Homeless Typologies and Relationship Clusters

We classified participants into three groups based on their homelessness patterns (as identified by Kuhn & Culhane, 1998) plus a fourth vulnerable housing category of those who were never homeless during the four-year study period (i.e., zero days homeless). Cluster analysis results revealed the expected three proportions of chronic, episodic, and transitional patterns among those experiencing homelessness.

Our reporting on homeless typology proportions itself is an important contribution to the well-established homeless typology research. Our results differ slightly from the earlier

proportions discussed in the literature and outlined in the introduction (i.e., Aubry et al., 2013; Benjaminsen & Andrade, 2015; Culhane et al., 2007; Hong et al., 2018; Kneebone et al., 2015; Kuhn & Culhane, 1998; Rabinovitch et al., 2016; Waldron et al., 2019). As shown in Table 4, our findings indicate that 70.4% of the population we studied were classified as transitionally homeless, which contrasts with the typical range of 80 to 90%. Additionally, 14.9% were classified as episodically homeless, compared to the commonly found 2 to 10%, and 14.7% were classified as chronically homeless, versus the usual range of 3 to 11%. The most notable difference between our research and previous research is the lower proportion of individuals classified as transitionally homeless. Our study sampled people who are experiencing residential instability (some of whom become homeless over the study period) and homelessness, including hidden homelessness, while others have typically used administrative shelter data to sample people experiencing homelessness. Approaches that rely solely on shelter data are likely to undercount individuals experiencing homelessness who do not use shelters (i.e., hidden homelessness). As a result, previous research that used only shelter data may have overestimated the number of transitionally homeless people while underestimating those in the episodic and chronic categories. Conversely, if our study oversampled people outside of shelters, the reverse may be true.

We also examined the combined effects of partner status and romantic satisfaction. Using the same K-means cluster analysis, we grouped individuals based on the frequency of their partnerships and their levels of romantic satisfaction over a four-year period. This resulted in a “low romantic satisfaction, low partner status frequency” cluster and a “high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency” cluster. To our knowledge, we are the first to complete an analysis jointly considering these two variables therefore there is no previous

research we may compare with. These findings allow for an illustration of who is partnered and provide a first illustration of the profile of people within our sample who are in the high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency category (see Table 1). Annually, approximately 30% of the sample are partnered. Over a four-year period, when considering both partner status and romantic satisfaction, nearly 30% of the sample fell into the cluster characterized by high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner status.

The Impact of Partner Relationships on Homelessness

Following the cluster categorizations of homelessness and relationship patterns, we examined how the relationship patterns (clusters) were associated with homelessness (H2, H3). The results directionally support the idea that individuals in the high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency group are less likely to fall within the three homelessness typologies compared to the vulnerably housed group (H2), but this result was not statistically significant. Additionally, while also not statistically significant, being in the high romantic satisfaction, the high partner status frequency group was directionally linked to fewer days spent homeless (H3). Finally, although we hypothesized we would observe a statistically significant indirect path from partner status to housing stability, mediated by romantic satisfaction in all three panels, we only observed a statistically significant full mediation effect in the third panel (Y3-Y4) while observing directionally consistent but statistically insignificant effects in the other two panels. Our results suggest a possible positive link between satisfactory partner relationships and housing stability, both mirroring and expanding on previous research.

Lending further support to the link between partner relationships and housing stability, using the same dataset as we did, Aubry and colleagues (2021) identified time-patterned trajectories of housing stability over three years among both homeless and vulnerably housed

individuals. The homeless group (n=502) includes four trajectories: low to moderate, low to high, moderate rise followed by a fall, and moderate to high sustained stability. The vulnerably housed group (n=518) comprises four trajectories labelled as moderate to low, moderate to high, high to moderate, and high sustained housing stability. Among the variables they examined was the association between partner status and each of the four trajectories in both groups. Among the homeless group, participants in the trajectory class characterized by a transition from moderate to high sustained housing stability were significantly more likely to be partnered at study entry compared to those in a reference group with low to moderate housing stability. However, the authors did not find this association between housing stability and partner status among their four trajectories among the vulnerably housed group. Although our study examined partner status at each year and romantic satisfaction, the study by Aubry and colleagues (2021), which focused on partner status at their first time point, further supports our findings. Other studies have also found similar associations between housing stability and the presence of a partner.

In their meta-analysis examining individual-level predictors for transitions into and out of homelessness, Nilsson et al. (2019) discovered that being in a committed partnership, significantly increased the likelihood of exiting homelessness. Most studies referenced in the Nilsson review incidentally discovered the association by including partner status as a demographic variable in their analyses, including married/cohabiting status (Donley et al., 2017), current stable relationship status (Cheng et al., 2013), marital history (Cohen et al., 1997), and marital status (Greenberg et al., 2006). A fifth study that specifically focused on sexual partner relationships as a central aim, found that among drug users in an HIV prevention program, having a primary partner was linked to transitioning from homelessness to housing by the final

follow-up (Davey-Rothwell et al., 2011). Our study expands on this body of literature by considering satisfaction with the relationship in addition to relationship presence. Although our study centrally focused on partner relationships, it was a secondary analysis of an existing dataset. Given that most studies, including ours, only either incidentally uncover a link between partner status and homelessness or do so through secondary analyses, research designed specifically to examine this relationship is essential to understand the role partner status and relationship quality play potentially play in impacting or facilitating housing stability. Few researchers have explored the potential positive effects of consensual partner relationships, with most opting to focus on sexual partnerships as a risk factor instead (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022). While we do not suggest that partner relationships alone have a strong causal impact on housing stability, our findings, alongside previous research, indicate that partner relationships may be considered as one of many factors that may cumulatively contribute to housing stability or, at the very least, help individuals cope with the harsh realities of homelessness.

Limitations

We acknowledge several limitations in this research. Primarily, this was a secondary analysis of data that was not originally intended to evaluate romantic relationships, although it used homelessness measures aligned with best practices. More detailed assessments of the nature, duration, and quality of relationships could yield more accurate results. Specifically, employing measures that delve deeper into aspects of romantic relationships—such as sexual compatibility, satisfaction, conflict resolution, emotional support, and trust—might enhance the sensitivity of our findings, potentially revealing more statistically significant effects that align with our hypotheses, or may confidently disprove them. Similarly, while we did not observe significant effects when comparing various homeless typologies to the vulnerably housed, the

effects might have been more pronounced if we had individuals with stable housing within our data as the reference group.

Our analysis was limited by the covariates selected in the original study, which influence homelessness. While we believe these covariates are conceptually justifiable, a primary study might have included additional or different covariates. This highlights the importance of considering all relevant variables before data collection to ensure comprehensive measurements (Rohrer, 2018). Further, people recruited for our study were adults without dependent children under 18 years old. It is possible that the inclusion of adults with dependent children may have impacted results. Finally, since our data was collected (Hwang et al., 2011), some important socio-cultural dynamics may have changed. Although we believe that time has not significantly altered the relationship between partner relationships and homelessness, the evolving landscape of homelessness in Canada (e.g., the increased prevalence of homeless encampments since the data collection) may complicate the measurement of homeless typologies. This is especially true if researchers rely solely on shelter data, which may not capture these broader changes. It is unclear how new dynamics may have affected typology proportions.

Conclusion

Given the known benefits of romantic partnerships in general populations, it is crucial to incorporate the study of these relationships into homelessness research. Comparability and consistency are essential when examining partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness, given the dearth of research that has been completed on the topic. Integrating the study of these relationships within established homelessness typologies provides a deeper understanding of how partner dynamics and support from a romantic partner vary with the stability and duration of an individual's housing situation. This insight is crucial as we aim to

understand how partner relationships can influence efforts to achieve stable housing. This approach not only addresses a notable gap but also supports the development of targeted interventions that foster healthy relationships, potentially enhancing strategies to help individuals transition out of homelessness more effectively.

We found that around a third of the sample are partnered relatively frequently and are satisfied with their romantic partnership (i.e., the high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner cluster). We hope future research will delve deeper into this group, and particularly if further evidence supports it, interventions could be designed to enhance these positive relationship dynamics. Independent of any evidentiary link to residential stability, everyone, including those experiencing homelessness, deserves safe, satisfactory, and supportive relationships. (e.g., see sexual citizenship in Czechowski, 2022); that itself is enough reason to pursue policies that seek to expand the *high romantic satisfaction and frequent partner status* proportion past 30%.

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Tables

Table 1

Demographic and Characteristics by Participants by Relationship Cluster

Variable	Total Sample (n = 737)	Low Satisfaction & Low Partnership (n = 514)	High Satisfaction & High Partnership (n = 223)
Age (Mean, SD)	44.07 (9.84)	44.07 (9.841)	38.96 (10.57)
Gender			
Man (%)	65.1	68.3	60.1
Woman (%)	34.9	31.7	39.9
Ethnicity			
White (%)	61.9	66.3	54.7
Black (%)	7.7	7.5	8.5
Indigenous (%)	19.4	18.1	23.3
Mixed/Other (%)	8.7	8.1	13.5
Education			
Some High School (%)	45.2	47.3	39.9
Completed High School (%)	21.8	21.9	22.0
Post-Secondary or Higher (%)	32.4	30.8	37.7
City			
Vancouver (%)	33.9	31.5	39.5
Toronto (%)	30.8	33.9	23.8
Ottawa (%)	35.3	34.6	36.8

Note. Percentages for gender, ethnicity, education, and city data are based on valid responses; SD = Standard Deviation.

Table 2

Annual Descriptive Statistics: Partner Status, Romantic Satisfaction, and Homelessness Duration

Variable	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Partnered	30.4%	31.8%	30.7%	28.9%
Romantic Satisfaction (m, SD)	3.89, 2.03	3.92, 1.98	4.02, 1.92	4.02, 2.01
Days Homeless (m, SD)	97.39, 123.23	58.04, 107.96	47.79, 100.86	46.15, 101.24

Note. N=737, The range for romantic satisfaction is 1-7. Days homeless range of 0-365 days annually.

Table 3*Descriptive Statistics: Original and Log-Transformed Days Homeless Variables*

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Days Homeless	737	0.00	1460.00	249.36	334.33	1.73	2.61
Log Transformed Days Homeless	737	0.00	3.16	1.62	1.14	-0.45	-1.40

Note. M = Mean SD = Standard Deviation

Table 4*Cluster Sizes, Homeless Episodes, and Days Homeless*

	Transitional	Episodic	Chronic	All Three Typologies
Sample Size	374	79	78	531
% of Sample	70.4	14.9	14.7	100
Mean No. of Episodes (SD, Min, Max)	1.30 (0.46, 1, 2)	3.53 (0.81, 3, 7)	1.63 (0.65, 1, 3)	1.68 (0.96, 1, 7)
Mean No. of Days Homeless (SD, Min, Max)	184.83 (160.82, 1, 615)	455.77 (228.81, 56, 980)	1008.27 (276.37, 557, 1460)	346.10 (348.82, 1, 1460)

Note. This table includes people in the three clusters, excluding the non-homeless vulnerably housed group

Table 5*Partner-Satisfaction Cluster Sizes, Years Partnered, Romantic Satisfaction*

	Low Satisfaction Low Partner Status	High Satisfaction, High Partner Status	Full Sample
Sample Size	514	223	737
% of Sample	69.7	30.3	100
Mean Years Partnered (SD, Min, Max)	0.42 (0.66, 0, 3)	3.06 (0.93, 0, 4)	1.22 (1.43, 0, 4)
Mean Romantic Satisfaction Total Score (SD, Min, Max)	13.56 (4.80, 4, 27)	21.14 (4.11, 8, 28)	15.85 (5.77, 4, 28)

Note. Romantic satisfaction is calculated at each year (scale: 1-7); partner status is measured at each of four years (partnered =1).

Table 6

Parameter Estimates for Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Homelessness and Housing Vulnerability Typologies

Typology	Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
Episodic	(Constant)	1.1	0.7	2.48	0.12	-	-
	High satisfaction high partner cluster	-0.06	0.31	0.04	0.85	0.94	[0.52, 1.72]
	Toronto	-0.87	0.43	4.07	0.04*	0.42	[0.18, 0.98]
	Ottawa	0.36	0.32	1.28	0.26	1.44	[0.77, 2.68]
	Black	-0.06	0.58	0.01	0.92	0.94	[0.31, 2.92]
	Indigenous	-0.11	0.37	0.09	0.76	0.89	[0.43, 1.85]
	Mixed ethnicity/Other	0.1	0.62	0.03	0.87	1.11	[0.33, 3.74]
	Age	-0.05	0.01	12.83	< .001***	0.95	[0.92, 0.98]
	Completed high school/equivalent	0.29	0.4	0.53	0.47	1.33	[0.61, 2.90]
	Completed some post-secondary	0.83	0.32	6.91	0.01**	2.29	[1.23, 4.25]
	Gender (woman)	-0.6	0.32	3.57	0.06	0.55	[0.30, 1.02]
Transitional	(Constant)	1.78	0.47	14.1	< .001***	-	-
	High satisfaction high partner cluster	-0.26	0.2	1.56	0.21	0.78	[0.52, 1.16]
	Toronto	-0.14	0.23	0.35	0.55	0.87	[0.55, 1.37]
	Ottawa	-0.12	0.22	0.3	0.59	0.89	[0.57, 1.37]
	Black	-0.06	0.35	0.03	0.86	0.94	[0.47, 1.87]
	Indigenous	-0.2	0.24	0.66	0.42	0.82	[0.51, 1.32]
	Mixed ethnicity/Other	0.52	0.36	2.06	0.15	1.68	[0.83, 3.43]
	Age	-0.03	0.01	10.12	< .001***	0.97	[0.95, 0.99]

Typology	Predictor	B	SE	Wald χ^2	p	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)
Chronic	Completed high school/equivalent	0.63	0.25	6.63	0.01**	1.88	[1.16, 3.04]
	Completed some post-secondary	0.45	0.21	4.67	0.03*	1.57	[1.04, 2.37]
	Gender (woman)	0.02	0.19	0.01	0.92	1.02	[0.70, 1.49]
	(Constant)	-0.69	0.74	0.88	0.35	-	-
	High satisfaction high partner cluster	-0.32	0.32	0.98	0.32	0.73	[0.39, 1.37]
	Toronto	0.84	0.4	4.42	0.04*	2.31	[1.06, 5.04]
	Ottawa	1.02	0.38	7.09	0.01**	2.78	[1.31, 5.90]
	Black	0.47	0.5	0.9	0.34	1.6	[0.61, 4.25]
	Indigenous	0.51	0.37	1.96	0.16	1.67	[0.82, 3.42]
	Mixed ethnicity/Other	1.01	0.49	4.35	0.04*	2.75	[1.06, 7.11]
	Age	-0.03	0.01	4.16	0.04*	0.97	[0.95, 1.00]
	Completed high school/equivalent	0.9	0.35	6.64	0.01**	2.45	[1.24, 4.84]
	Completed some post-secondary	0.3	0.34	0.8	0.37	1.35	[0.70, 2.62]
	Gender (woman)	-0.53	0.32	2.86	0.09	0.59	[0.32, 1.09]

Note. Reference categories: Typology = Vulnerably Housed, City = Vancouver, Education = Some High School, Ethnicity = White. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = Standard error; Wald χ^2 = Wald chi-square statistic; Exp(B) = Odds ratio; 95% CI for Exp(B) = 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio.

Table 7

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Logarithmically Transformed Number of Days Homeless

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	2.15	0.21		10.04	< .001*
High Partner High Romance	-0.18	0.1	-0.07	-1.91	0.057
Gender (woman)	-0.08	0.09	-0.03	-0.83	0.409
Age	-0.02	0	-0.15	-3.83	< .001*
Completed high school/equivalent	0.3	0.11	0.11	2.76	.006
Completed some post-secondary	0.17	0.1	0.07	1.77	0.077
Toronto	0.07	0.11	0.03	0.67	0.505
Ottawa	0.2	0.1	0.09	1.96	0.051
Black	-0.01	0.16	0	-0.07	0.943
Indigenous	0.03	0.11	0.01	0.26	0.795
Mixed ethnicity/other	0.23	0.16	0.06	1.51	0.133

Note. Reference categories: Typology = Vulnerably Housed, City = Vancouver, Education = Some High School, Ethnicity = White. B = Unstandardized coefficients; SE B = Standard error of the unstandardized coefficients; β = Standardized coefficients; t = t-value; p = Significance level. $R^2 = .045$ (Adjusted $R^2 = .031$), $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 8

Direct and Indirect Effects of Partner Status and Romantic Satisfaction on Housing Stability: A Panel Analysis

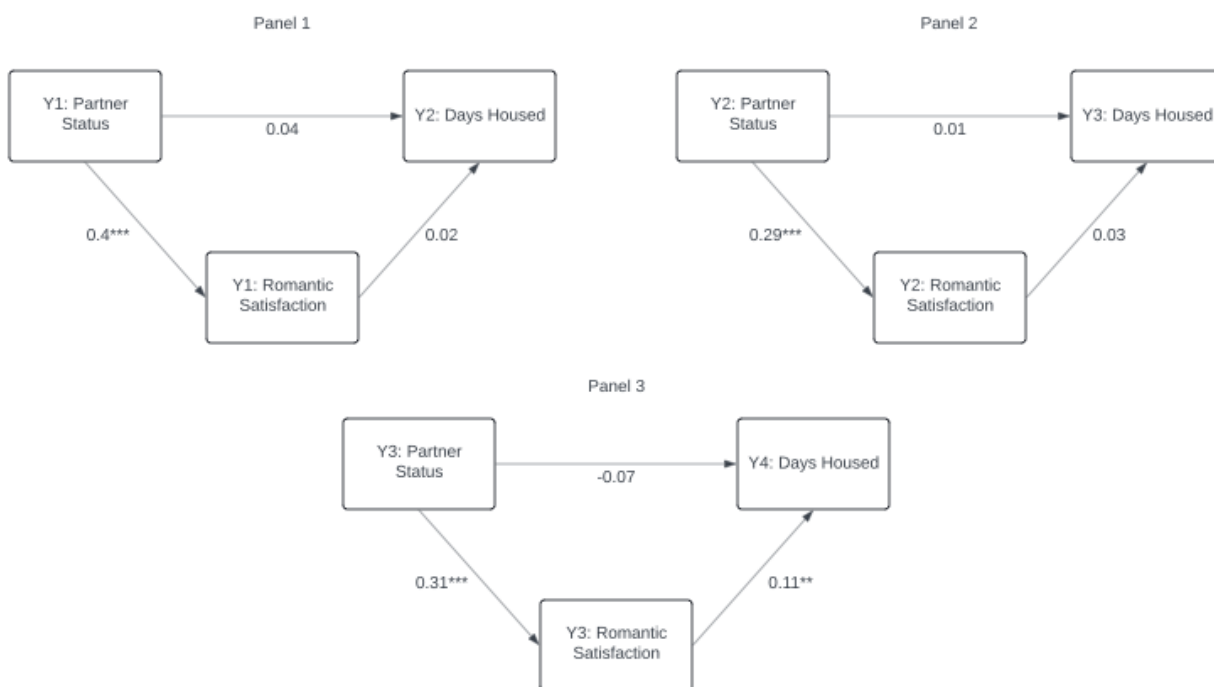
Panel	Predictor	Outcome	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value	95% CI	Effect Size (β)
Partner Status --> Housing Stability								
1	Y1 Partner Status	Y2 Days Housed	10.12	10.15	0.99	0.319	[-9.90, 28.39]	0.04
2	Y2 Partner Status	Y3 Days Housed	2.71	9.72	0.28	0.780	[-16.16, 21.28]	0.01
3	Y3 Partner Status	Y4 Days Housed	-17.39	10.05	-1.73	0.084	[-37.98, 1.16]	-0.07
Partner Status --> Romantic Satisfaction								
1	Y1 Partner Status	Y1 Romantic Satisfaction	1.75	0.14	12.59	<0.001***	[1.45, 2.01]	0.40
2	Y2 Partner Status	Y2 Romantic Satisfaction	1.78	0.14	12.43	<0.001***	[1.47, 2.09]	0.29
3	Y3 Partner Status	Y3 Romantic Satisfaction	1.8	0.14	12.78	<0.001***	[1.5, 2.1]	0.31
Romantic Satisfaction --> Housing Stability								
1	Y1 Romantic Satisfaction	Y2 Days Housed	1.29	2.32	0.56	.579	[-3.13, 5.69]	0.02
2	Y2 Romantic Satisfaction	Y3 Days Housed	1.73	2.23	0.78	.438	[-2.35, 6.12]	0.03
3	Y3 Romantic Satisfaction	Y4 Days Housed	7.05	2.4	2.94	.003**	[2.33, 11.79]	0.11
Partner Status --> Romantic Satisfaction --> Housing Stability								
1	Y1 Partner Status to Y1 Romantic Satisfaction	Y2 Housing Stability	2.25	3.98		0.525	[-5.46, 10.25]	0.008
2	Y2 Partner Status to Y2 Romantic Satisfaction	Y3 Housing Stability	3.12	3.95		0.376	[-4.25, 11.35]	0.009

Panel	Predictor	Outcome	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P-Value	95% CI	Effect Size (β)
3	Y3 Partner Status to Y3 Romantic Satisfaction	Y4 Housing Stability	12.03	4.2		0.002**	[4.12, 20.79]	0.034

Note. S.E. = Standard error; C.R. = Critical Ratio, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figures

Figure 1. Main Paths Without Displayed Covariates for each Path Analysis Panel Model



Note. **p < .01, ***p < .001.

General Discussion

This dissertation investigated the complexities of sexual and romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness, including a focus on how these relationships may impact housing stability. This research offers an analysis of the dual nature of partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness, highlighting both their positive potential for emotional support and stability and their negative potential when forming relationships for transactional necessity. By exploring partner relationships from diverse perspectives, rarely studied in the context of homelessness, this dissertation deepens our understanding of the complex social and emotional challenges faced by homeless populations. This multi-faceted approach informs future research with greater specificity and guides policy development to foster healthy relationships among people experiencing homelessness.

This research illustrated that understanding the dynamics of romantic and sexual relationships among those experiencing homelessness is important for several reasons. First, these relationships can significantly impact individuals' emotional well-being and overall quality of life. Secondly, they can play a role in the strategies people employ to navigate their homelessness, potentially influencing their pathways out of homelessness or, at minimum, making the arduous experience of homelessness more tolerable. Third, people experiencing homelessness have the same needs, desires, and rights as others, yet their partner relationships receive minimal academic attention. Acknowledging and valuing these relationships can lead to more empathetic and effective interventions that address people's need for housing and the emotional and social well-being of the homeless population. Recognizing and supporting partner relationships in both academic circles and beyond will facilitate their sexual civic participation, elaborated on later in this discussion section, particularly in the context of sexual citizenship.

Discussion of Research Findings and Their Implications

The three studies conducted for this dissertation were completed sequentially, with each study informing the scope and objectives of the next. This section will outline the progression and connection between these studies and their implications for the broader study of romantic and sexual relationships in this population.

Study 1 (Czechowski, Turner, et al., 2022), reported on a scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), that was guided by two principal research questions using an open-ended methodology. The review initially took a broad approach, and that was gradually refined as our understanding of the literature deepened. The research questions guiding this study were: How has the existing empirical literature examined sexual or romantic relationships among people who are homeless? And what are the extent, nature, and range of findings regarding consensual sexual or romantic relationships among this population? Analysis of the first research question revealed that the majority of existing research focuses primarily on the risks associated with sexual activities among people experiencing homelessness, particularly in terms of victimization (e.g., Tyler & Schmitz, 2018), sexual health risk (e.g., De Rosa et al., 2001), and survival sex (e.g., Fogel et al., 2017). This suggests that researchers have predominantly approached sexual or romantic relationships among people experiencing homelessness as a risk factor rather than considering potential positive aspects.

In response to our second research question, we synthesized findings from 13 studies focusing on consensual partner relationships. We found that in studies that thoroughly explored consensual sexual or romantic relationships, recurring themes emerged, such as love, romance, emotional support, support through hardships associated with homelessness, casual sex, and pleasure. Some studies detailed barriers described as unique to homelessness, such as concerns

related to living in a shelter, the stigma associated with being homeless and substance use (e.g., Loates & Walsh, 2010). Finally, many studies described transactional dynamics within partner relationships, creating a complicated dynamic where studies described the necessity of forming intimate relationships for physical protection or safety (e.g., Watson, 2016) or trading sex for the partner's resources, such as access to housing (e.g., Blais et al., 2012). These findings suggest that people experiencing homelessness derive similar benefits from partner relationships as those in the general population, such as love, pleasure, and emotional support. The transactional element, along with literature focusing on survival sex in this population, informed the development of the second study, which aimed to explore further the transactional nature of partner relationships among those experiencing homelessness. While the first study provided a broad overview of the literature to synthesize findings on consensual partner relationships and their positive aspects, the purpose of the second study was to examine the more exploitative and harmful potential of some partner relationships in the context of homelessness.

Study 2 (Czechowski, Sylvestre, et al., 2022) was a scoping review using similar methods to the first, guided by two research questions. The first examined what factors, identified in the existing literature on survival sex, increase vulnerability or deprivation, ultimately leading individuals to engage in survival sex. The second question focused on the sexual agency and consent implications associated with survival sex, as highlighted by previous literature. To guide analysis related to the first question, we applied Pearce's Social Model of Consent (Pearce, 2013), which emphasizes that factors like poverty and deprivation diminish people's capacity for sexual agency, making them more vulnerable to exploitation (i.e., coercion into survival sex). Our goal was to identify the specific factors that push people to survival sex by compromising their ability to exercise full sexual agency and fully consent to sex. We identified several 'push

factors' that increase vulnerability to survival sex, including hunger, patriarchy, poverty, substance use, and insecure housing. These factors can be categorized into structural levels, such as food insecurity while supporting a family, and more immediate, proximal levels, such as the physical hunger someone feels in the moment. For the second question, we utilized the Continuum of Volition, developed by Weissman and colleagues (2006), which views sexual relationships as existing on a spectrum from voluntary to coerced. This model acknowledges that survival sex, though often closer to coercion, can still reflect a form of agency driven by material needs. Survival sex exists at various points along this continuum, with motivations ranging from survival security to coercion, depending on the specific circumstances and materials exchanged. The push factors identified in response to the first research question significantly compromise an individual's ability to fully exercise sexual agency, challenging traditional definitions of consensual sex due to the stark power imbalances revealed by our findings.

Study 2 provided deeper insight into the context in which transactional relationship dynamics emerge among people experiencing homelessness. The analysis helped us better understand the factors that drive individuals into survival sex in these circumstances and to examine a 'darker side' of partner relationships within this population. The findings suggest that when a relationship is primarily or partly motivated by survival, it may lack the traditional benefits identified in Study 1, such as emotional support during homelessness or the ability to pool resources for housing stability. As previously discussed in this dissertation, certain forms of bonding capital can lead to adverse outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, often referred to as the dark side of social capital (van Deth & Zmerli, 2010). Our analysis in both first studies revealed that some relationships, especially those driven by necessity—such as survival sex and transactional dynamics—can exemplify a dark side of partner relationships. This

highlights the importance of not merely examining the existence of relationships but also considering their quality, characteristics, and motivating factors.

Study 3 expanded the exploration of partner relationships by using romantic satisfaction as a key measure to distinguish between individuals in higher-quality relationships and those in more problematic ones when assessing the potential impacts of partner relationships on housing stability. Using data from the longitudinal Health and Housing in Transition (HHiT) study across four years, participants were categorized into four groups based on their patterns of homelessness: chronic, episodic, transitional (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998) and vulnerably housed. Participants were also classified according to their partnership status and levels of romantic satisfaction over four years, resulting in a “low romantic satisfaction, low partner status frequency” cluster grouping and a “high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency” cluster grouping. We expected that people in the “high romantic satisfaction, high partner status frequency” group would have greater housing stability, and while results showed a consistent directional relationship to support this hypothesis, results were not statistically significant.

Further, we developed three path analysis models from our four-year dataset using datasets referred to as panels. Panel 1 included data from Year 1 and Year 2, Panel 2 from Year 2 and Year 3, and Panel 3 from Year 3 and Year 4. We tested three hypothesized models for each panel, examining both direct and indirect (mediating) relationships among the variables. The models explored pathways from the independent variable (partner status) to the dependent variable (housing stability), with romantic satisfaction as the mediator. While we hypothesized a statistically significant indirect path from partner status to housing stability, mediated by romantic satisfaction, in all three panels, a statistically significant full mediation effect was only observed in Panel 3 (Y3-Y4). The effects were directionally consistent in the other two panels

but not statistically significant. Our results indicate a potential positive link between satisfactory partner relationships and increased housing stability. Although the evidence is of weak, this area warrants further exploration. As this was a secondary analysis, our choice of variables was limited (e.g., partner satisfaction is an imperfect measure of relationship quality). Furthermore, although our study is based on the assumption that higher levels of relationship satisfaction are generally associated with better quality and less coercive dynamics, it is possible that even relationships perceived as satisfactory may involve some coercive or transactional elements. Future research can build on the three studies presented in this dissertation to examine the potential impact of partner relationships on housing stability or their role in helping individuals cope with homelessness.

Given the findings across these studies, it becomes clear that partner relationships in the context of homelessness involve complex dynamics that extend beyond risk and protection. To further explore this complexity, we draw on the concept of sexual citizenship introduced in Study 1. Expanding on the implications of this dissertation's findings through a sexual citizenship analytic framework allows us to consider partner relationships not only as sources of support or housing stability but also as fundamental rights that underscore autonomy for individuals experiencing homelessness. This framework provides a rights-based rationale for continued research in this area, emphasizing the importance of examining partner relationships as a fundamental aspect of human rights and dignity in the context of homelessness.

Sexual Citizenship

Sexual citizenship concerns how civic participation is restricted for individuals whose sexual behaviours or identities deviate from socially accepted norms, focusing on the intersection of sexuality, rights, and civic engagement (Czechowski, in press). Early discussions of sexual

citizenship primarily focused on the sexual expression and marginalization of LGBTQ+ populations, particularly the LGB community. The concept was initially developed to challenge heteronormative assumptions and advocate for the recognition and inclusion of diverse sexual identities and practices (Evans, 1993; Richardson, 2000). However, sexual citizenship has evolved into a framework that can be applied to examine how people's sexual rights and civic participation are restricted beyond the LGB context.

Sexual Citizenship in the Context of Homelessness

We use the framework of sexual citizenship to examine the impact of homelessness and deprivation on civic sexual participation. Homelessness not only involves a lack of housing but also a deprivation of essentials like food, clothing, and shelter. The obstacles to forming and maintaining safe and supportive partner relationships, as identified in the first study—such as single-sex shelter policies and the lack of private spaces (Brown et al., 2013)—are further intensified by the deprivation of basic needs. This deprivation heightens vulnerability to transactional or survival sex, as explored in the second study. Moreover, severe resource deprivation in partnered relationships can lead to profound power imbalances (Watson, 2011). Such disparities can diminish individuals' ability to consent to sex and undermine their sexual agency, further limiting their capacity to exercise complete and free sexual civic participation.

From a broader societal standpoint, individuals experiencing homelessness are frequently denied the right to sexual expression, as societal measures often seek to regulate or control their behaviour. One key aspect of this denial is the systematic deprivation of the right to privacy for those without stable housing (Sparks, 2010). The first study also revealed that much of the existing research on sexuality among people experiencing homelessness focuses primarily on its

risks, such as sexually transmitted infections or sexual victimization, while largely neglecting consensual relationships. This research bias obscures the fact that homeless individuals, like their housed counterparts, have similar needs and desires for positive sexual relationships.

This research highlights the potential value of rights-based approaches, which are currently underexplored, in examining partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness. Respecting sexual citizenship rights requires, at a minimum, the removal of barriers to forming and maintaining sexual or romantic relationships. Ideally, policymakers should go further by implementing policies that ensure people experiencing homelessness have the privacy and space needed to develop and sustain these relationships. The sexual citizenship framework offers valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, clinicians, and advocates, providing tools to understand how unsafe environments not only impede healthy relationships but also violate individual autonomy and personhood.

Conclusion and Implications

This dissertation has made clear in the first study that research examining partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness is scant, and the final study produced evidence that suggests there may be a link between satisfactory partner relationships and housing stability. Taken together, this highlights the need for more research to build a solid empirical foundation to conclusively determine whether partner relationships can increase housing stability or provide crucial support in making the experience of homelessness more tolerable. However, our discussion of sexual citizenship emphasizes that, beyond empirical evidence, there is a rights-based rationale for promoting the development and maintenance of healthy, supportive relationships.

Policymakers should recognize that partner relationships can play a vital role in emotional support, housing stability, and overall well-being. Policies that facilitate safe environments for people to form and maintain relationships, such as revising shelter policies that limit privacy or enforce single-sex occupancy, would provide a foundation for fostering healthier relationships. Policies that reduce the need for transactional sex by addressing the root causes of deprivation—such as access to stable housing and comprehensive social services—are essential for protecting individuals from exploitative dynamics. For example, to reduce reliance on transactional relationships for shelter, policies should aim to expand Housing First initiatives (Aubry et al., 2015; Sylvestre & Kerman, 2024; Tsemberis, 2011), which prioritize rapid access to permanent housing without preconditions such as sobriety or treatment compliance. This approach has been shown to effectively address the needs of people experiencing homelessness by ensuring immediate access to stable housing. Additionally, policies that directly target food insecurity, such as increasing funding for meal programs or implementing community-based food assistance initiatives (Bowen et al., 2016; Okeke-Ogbuafor & Gray, 2020), can alleviate the need for individuals to engage in survival or transactional sex to secure basic resources. Further, ensuring access to harm reduction programs for individuals with substance problems would help mitigate the deprivation of drugs that often drives people into transactional relationships. Expanding safe consumption sites, providing free or low-cost access to addiction treatment services, and offering substance replacement therapies (Milaney et al., 2021; Pauly et al., 2019) could reduce vulnerability to exploitation by addressing the cravings associated with substance dependence, which often drive individuals to exchange sex for drugs.

Researchers should shift focus beyond viewing sexual relationships among the homeless population solely as a risk factor. While previous studies have predominantly centred on the

dangers of sexual activity—such as victimization or sexually transmitted infections—future research should explore the potential positive impacts of consensual relationships, including their role in enhancing emotional well-being and improving housing stability. Future research should focus on romantic and sexual partner relationships as a primary objective, ensuring that best practices in measuring these relationships are applied. A central focus should include conducting more detailed assessments of relationships' nature, duration, and quality. Employing measures that explore critical aspects of romantic relationships—such as sexual compatibility, satisfaction, conflict resolution, emotional support, and trust—will provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics. A more detailed analysis of partner relationships will enhance the ability of research to identify specific factors within these relationships that may have a protective impact against homelessness, such as differences between casual and committed relationships. Additionally, researchers should explore the pathways through which partner relationships either hinder or facilitate exits from homelessness, incorporating perspectives on sexual agency and autonomy.

Clinicians and service providers should integrate the complexities of partner relationships identified in this research into their clinical practice when working with individuals experiencing homelessness. Training for mental health professionals, social workers, and shelter staff should encompass an understanding of the role partner relationships can play in either supporting individuals through homelessness or fostering problematic transactional dynamics that compromise agency within a relationship. This training should include identifying and supporting clients experiencing coercive or transactional relationships while also helping them maintain healthy, consensual connections. Clinicians must also be prepared to address the complex emotional and psychological impacts transactional sexual relationships may have on their clients.

Advocates can use the concept of sexual citizenship as a framework for promoting the rights of people experiencing homelessness to engage in safe and consensual sexual relationships. By emphasizing the importance of sexual and romantic relationships as fundamental human rights, advocates can push for policy changes that address privacy and safety concerns, as well as the broader social and emotional needs of homeless populations. This rights-based approach underscores the importance of enabling homeless individuals to exercise their autonomy and agency in romantic and sexual contexts, helping to improve their overall quality of life and dignity. Overall, this research emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to understanding partner relationships among people experiencing homelessness, not just as a means to an end (e.g., achieving more stable housing) but as valuable in their own right. By recognizing the benefits and challenges of these relationships, stakeholders can collaborate to create environments that support individuals in forming relationships free from coercion while fostering autonomy, emotional support, and safety.

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