

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Homelessness, Housing Precarity, and COVID-19

Working Group Description:

This Working Group brings together academic and practitioner perspectives to focus on the unique issues faced by those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity during the COVID-19 pandemic. We address the root causes of homelessness and disaster vulnerability and how COVID-19 provides both challenges and opportunities for ways forward. Concurrently, we highlight examples of positive responses and creative coping strategies by homeless and precariously housed individuals and the organizations and entities that serve them. Facing the dual crisis of pandemic and homelessness, many individuals and organizations are finding innovative and creative ways of providing safer options for those who are homeless, but the effectiveness and sustainability of such programs are yet to be determined. Central to these efforts, our Working Group documents and discusses the implications of varying government and community-based interventions across scales and contexts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and looks to previous research and practice to inform our understanding of the intersections between COVID-19, housing precarity, and other hazards.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. Challenges and capacities of people experiencing housing precarity and homelessness during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What unique challenges do homeless and precariously housed individuals and groups face in responding to and (eventually) recovering from COVID-19? For instance, how are migrant laborers coping with the threat? University students who do not have secure homes? Homeless and precariously housed immigrants and asylum seekers? And how are these individuals negotiating with guidelines that are often not geared to their unique needs and situations? • What factors have the potential for heightening the risks of acquiring COVID-19 within different societal settings and among different precariously housed populations? How are these factors manifesting themselves in the current pandemic?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using an intersectional approach, what are the differential impacts of COVID-19 among those experiencing housing precarity (e.g., examining the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class or caste, LGBTQ status)? Specifically, what are the COVID-19 experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) who are precariously housed/experiencing homelessness? • What are examples of positive responses and/or experiences in the context of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity? • How are people who are experiencing homelessness and housing precarity collectively organizing and supporting each other during the COVID-19 pandemic?
<p>2. Understanding how structural realities and patterns of housing precarity and homelessness intersect with the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do power relations within institutions (with or without formal policy) function to reduce or increase the marginalization of homeless populations before and during the pandemic? To what extent is culture (e.g., notions of who is deserving of assistance), racism, and other forms of oppression mobilized to further disenfranchise precariously housed people during the pandemic? • How is exclusion exercised politically, socially, culturally? What are the implications of exclusion during COVID-19 among precariously housed populations? • What factors have the potential for making the risks of acquiring COVID-19 higher within different societal settings and among different homeless populations? How are these factors manifesting themselves in the current pandemic? • What were the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of people affected by homelessness and housing precarity before COVID-19 and what changes in these patterns (e.g., sociodemographic, spatial) have been observed? • How has the pandemic provided an opportunity (positively or negatively) for powerful actors and interests to influence housing issues and urban practices that have historically disenfranchised precariously housed individuals - particularly BIPOC?
<p>3. Governance and policy response across contexts regarding homelessness and housing precarity during COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the context of the current crisis, how do policies that are reflective of different philosophies or ideologies of governance (e.g., neoliberalism, European welfare-state policies, “Nordic/Scandinavian values”) influence policies and programs targeting homelessness and housing precarity? • How do responses to COVID-19 regarding homelessness and housing precarity differ by governmental bodies at various scales? Relatedly, what contexts are understudied? And what can we learn from a deeper understanding of these communities’ differential experiences to COVID-19 across the globe? • What explains the variation in COVID-19 policies pertaining to precariously housed populations and the timing of policy implementation across a range of jurisdictions, especially variation among municipalities? • How much sharing of new policies has gone on among jurisdictions, especially among municipalities, to improve the safety, health, and livelihoods of precariously housed people during COVID-19? How has sharing been facilitated? (e.g., Role of academia? Role of pre-existing networks of cities? Role of media?) • How is COVID-19 education, updates, and risk communicated by formal institutions/governing bodies to those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity? To what extent are messages tailored to the needs and concerns of these communities?

<p>4. The role of homeless serving organizations, mutual aid and informal networks in addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing precarity during COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are homeless serving organizations (HSOs) responding to or mitigating risks to COVID-19 for clients and staff? What barriers are they facing? Opportunities? What challenges do shelter and service providers face? How have shelters and social services previously serving those who are homeless or housing insecure adapted to COVID-19? • How are HSOs coordinating to provide services for homeless populations with multiple needs? How can funding and other institutional structures be realigned to enhance coordination? • Are new alliances forming between shelter and affordable housing advocates and other networks such as poor people's organizations, unions, mutual-aid groups or other grassroots organizations? If so, how do these networks mobilize to advocate and apply pressure for improved health care access and address the needs of homeless and precariously housed groups? Can these alliances and efforts lead to long-term change?
<p>5. Implications of narratives, discourse, and perceptions of those experiencing homelessness and housing precarity both before and after COVID-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the relationship between public narratives regarding the causes of homelessness and policy responses both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic? • How do public narratives of homelessness compare with self-described causes offered by people experiencing homelessness? What pandemic-related interventions does each narrative suggest as being necessary? In what ways might the pandemic open spaces for the lived experiences of homeless persons to be given a mainstream platform thereby assisting with a paradigm shift? • How has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced public perceptions of homelessness, commodified housing, and housing rights? • How does social stigma influence criminalization policies that further marginalize the lives and livelihoods of precariously housed individuals? What are the implications of homeless criminalization on COVID-19 experiences (e.g., shrinking of public spaces, ordinances requiring masks and stay at home orders that preclude these individuals)?
<p>6. COVID-19 as opportunity for positively influencing policy and practice surrounding housing precarity issues within and outside of a disaster context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent is the current crisis opening opportunities to resist the exercise of economic and political power to further exclude, stigmatize and marginalize the homeless and to advocate for resources and programs to assist homeless populations?(E.g., To what extent is the current crisis opening opportunities to resist opportunistic use of the “shock” of crisis for narrow elites to block demands for rent control and affordable housing (see Naomi Klein’s “The Shock Doctrine”)? • How are people experiencing homelessness and housing advocates using the COVID-19 pandemic to mobilize resources and/or change perceptions of homelessness? • What innovations in sheltering and housing have taken place as a result of COVID-19? To what degree are these innovations and efforts sustainable, and can they help to transition people out of precariously housed situations? • How have the housing and harm reduction services provided during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the overall health, well-being, and resilience of local vulnerable people who struggle with homelessness (and mental health and addiction problems)? What other outcomes have occurred as a result of these services and policies?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

While research conducted with human subjects should undergo institutional review board (IRB) processes, this should be viewed as a minimum standard of adherence to ethics when working with vulnerable communities and individuals. IRB processes vary across universities, nations, and contexts, and the pandemic notwithstanding, unique ethical and methodological issues need to be considered before planning to conduct research with individuals or communities defined as homeless or precariously housed. However, COVID-19 warrants additional care to methodological design and engagement with these communities to ensure that research is conducted in an ethical, safe, and beneficent manner. Given our group's focus on collaboration and co-learning among practitioners, researchers, and those with lived experiences of homelessness and housing precarity, many of these considerations apply to service provision. We acknowledge the cross-cutting nature of these recommendations and how they should be applied beyond research endeavors. ***Researchers and practitioners need to think more deeply about what “do no harm” means - especially in the context of the pandemic.*** We outline key overarching ethical and methodological considerations that apply to researchers and practitioners working with these communities:

- Access and engagement (e.g., how to engage with communities with limited resources during a time in which much work is completed virtually)
- Reciprocity in study design (e.g., how to relay information back to communities; how to carry out research/work that benefits or identifies solutions for the community being studied)
- Establishing trust and building connections with communities in light of physical distancing
- Engaging in culturally responsive research and practice; and
- Constant reflection upon positionality and power dynamics when working with these communities.

Other Frameworks, Considerations for Collaboration, and/or Resources:

The first two visualizations below represent working frameworks or heuristics that we discussed as a group in an effort to organize the myriad processes and factors at play when understanding homelessness, housing precarity, and the effects of COVID-19 on precariously housed populations. We iterated the current versions of the framework multiple times to not only capture these processes, but to succinctly illustrate the various perspectives and interests of the working group and how we all fit together within a common framework. For the purpose of brevity, we wanted to provide a high-level overview of how we have mapped our understandings of homelessness, including causes and potential ways forward. The figure to the left (Figure 1) illustrates the social, economic, and biological processes, social collectives, and institutions that *interact* to produce and worsen homelessness/housing precarity. The Figure to the right (Figure 2) is an everted version of the initial visualization to show how we can envision ways to reduce or eliminate housing precarity, thus reducing these communities' vulnerabilities to COVID-19 and other disasters. The intended use of these visualizations are as heuristics for research and application. Figure 3. illustrates a framework for social transformation of homelessness. The three models are complementary in that Figure 3. highlights the mechanisms and pathways by which the ultimate goal of housing for all those who want it can be attained (for more information about this framework of social change, see Haglund & Stryker 2015 and Haglund & Aggarwal 2011).¹

¹ Haglund, L. and R. Stryker. 2015. "Introduction: Making Sense of the Multiple and Complex Pathways by which Human Rights are Realized." Closing the Rights Gap: From Human Rights to Social Transformation, eds. L. Haglund and R. Stryker. University of California Press.

Haglund, L. and R. Aggarwal. 2011. "Test of Our Progress: The Translation of Economic and Social Rights Norms Into Practice." Journal of Human Rights 10(4): 494-520.

Figures 1. and 2. Understanding and Addressing Homelessness (illustrations by JC Gaillard)

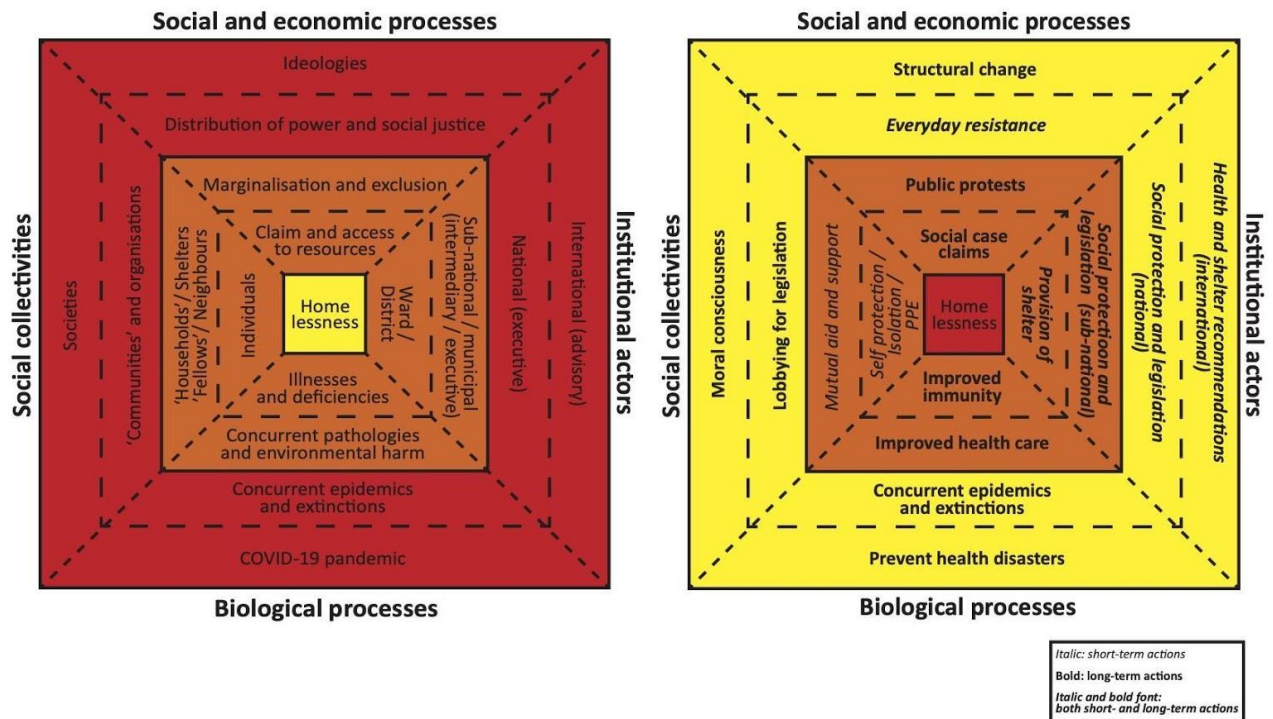
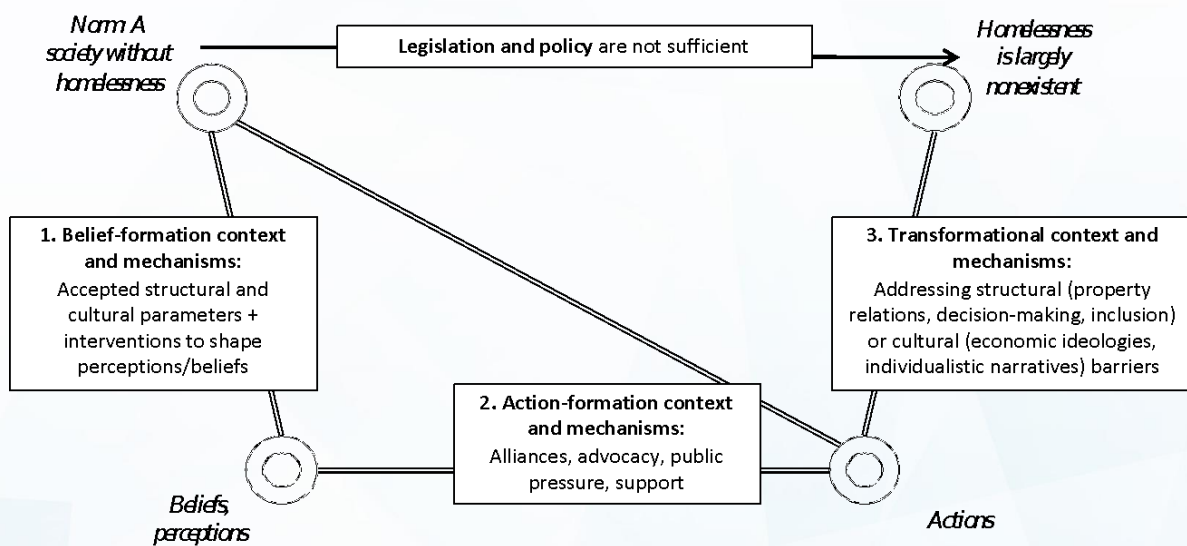


Figure 3. Transformation of Homelessness (illustration by LaDawn Haglund)



Note this is an iterative rather than a stagebased model, with continual feedback among the various mechanisms and processes

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