



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIOLOGI OCH ARBETSVETENSKAP

# Homeless women's emergency housing situation in the city of Gothenburg

Stories from the women's own experience of being vulnerable

A qualitative study

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## **Abstract**

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The aim with this study is to gain an insight into how homeless women, who already are a vulnerable group in the society, experience an even more vulnerable environment when an emergency accommodation only for women relocated and became part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live. In order to fulfil the purpose two questions were the core of my material: *How do the women get affected in a practical sense, when moved from a separate women's emergency accommodation and become part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live?; What are these women's feelings and perceptions of living close to a gender mixed accommodation?*

This essay consists of interviews with five women who lives in an emergency accommodation in Gothenburg county. The data has been analysed using content analysis, where theoretical underpinnings from Goffman and the intersectionality theory has been used to interpret the results. The study results show that these women's feelings are ambiguous regarding their new living location. These women experience both greater security and greater insecurity. The security they experience is based more in the physical aspects, as they now have guards around the clock and camera surveillance. The insecurity stems more from the fact that they now live so close to men. The results indicate that these women have different needs that are not met by the municipality.

**Keywords:** Women, Homeless, Vulnerability, Emergency Accommodation

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# **1. Introduction**<sup>1</sup>

## **1.1 The research problem**

According to The National Board of Health and Welfare (2019) the definition of homelessness includes acute homelessness, persons who do not have housing after institutional stay, and/or persons who do not have their own accommodation. This also includes short-term housing with family, relatives or other private person and the secondary housing market. Notice, secondary housing means that the municipality is responsible for the housing and rent it out second-hand to the person in need of housing (Socialstyrelsen, 2019). During spring 2019 Gothenburg County did a mapping to look at how many people were homeless during this time, the result shows that there were around 3000 people living in homelessness in Gothenburg County. These numbers regard both adults and children (Göteborgs Stad 2019). Today there are three emergency accommodations in Gothenburg County for people living in homelessness.

There is a lot of research about homelessness, drug addiction and violence against women out there to be found, most research about these topics have been done separately. Nevertheless, these topics meet, relates and reinforce each other in some research. The National Board of Health and Welfare (2011) have done an educational material regarding violence against women with substance abuse or addiction problems. The report shows that abused women with addiction problems are a vulnerable group in society. Women with addictions oftentimes find themselves being in a circumstance of life where the risk of being exposed to violence is high. Additionally, these women found it more difficult to get support and the help they need, then other women who are exposed to abuse (Socialstyrelsen, 2011:9). Reasons for this are that some women feel that there is no help to get, as long as they have an addiction. The feeling is that the social services demands that the addiction have to stop before one can get help with the violence (Kuldius, 2013:12). Further, reports have shown that there are very few emergency accommodations that work/focus on both the addiction these women have, and the violence they live through. The main reason for this is that women vulnerable to violence with their addiction are not welcome to stay in regular women shelters (Socialstyrelsen, 2011:9; Holmberg, Smirthwaite & Nilsson, 2005:29-30).

Looking at the living situation today in Gothenburg County for homeless women having an addiction one can see, as mentioned above, there are three emergency accommodations, and only one of these focuses exclusively on women.

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction is taken from my own thesis in qualitative method course SC1301 Social Sciences methods

The aim of this essay is to increase the understanding of how women in homelessness with substance abuse get affected by moving from a separated emergency accommodation only for women and become part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live. In this essay, fictitious names are used for the two emergency accommodations that will be presented. The fictitious name for the emergency accommodation for only women will be Arizona, and the fictitious name for the gender mixed emergency accommodation will be Georgia.

## **1.2 Background**

There are a few separate accommodations for women with substance abuse, it is more common with gender mixed accommodation for people with substance abuse in Sweden. The explanation for this can be lack of economic aid from the county, and/or lack of knowledge from social welfare authorities about how a gender mixed accommodation affects the safety for women with substance abuse (Holmberg, Smirthwaite & Nilsson, 2005:11; Bergman, Stenberg, 2015:32). A Women's Aid have recently criticised a county in Sweden after they established their first health and rehabilitation clinic for women with substance abuse, in the same building where men with substance abuse go for treatment. The Women Aid argues that from a safety and security point of view it is not appropriate to have a health and rehabilitation clinic for both men and women with substance abuse in the same building, this due to that these women are subjected to physical and mental violence by the men they have a dependency state towards (SVT, 2020).

The emergency accommodation Arizona was established year 2001 on an address in the inner city of Gothenburg. Due to renovation, a few years later, Arizona needed to move out from this accommodation and into another emergency accommodation by the name Georgia, in this accommodation both men and women lived. Women who lived in Arizona needed to share elevator and courtyard with the people living in Georgia. After a few months Arizona needed to move out from that building, this due to the treats and violence some of the women experienced (Göteborgs Stad, 2020).

In a newsletter, when Arizona celebrated its 10 years anniversary, the branch head of Arizona mention that 90% of homeless women with a substance abuse are vulnerable to violence. She also discusses how violence against women with substance abuse are an exposed group in the society, due to that these women cannot turn to Women's aid for help with the violence. Further, she also mentions how important Arizona was for Gothenburg County. Before Arizona there was not any emergency accommodation for only women with

substance abuse (Vårt Göteborg, 2011). Although there is an awareness of these women's vulnerability Arizona moved on 28th of January 2020, to their location into the same house as another emergency accommodation by the name Georgia, where both men and women live. Arizona has its own entrance and courtyard.

### **1.3 Research Purpose**

The aim with this study is to gain an insight into how homeless women, who already are a vulnerable group in the society, experience an even more vulnerable environment when an emergency accommodation only for women relocated and became part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live.

### **1.4 Research questions**

- How do the women get affected in a practical sense, when moved from a separate women's emergency accommodation and become part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live?
- What are these women's feelings and perceptions of living close to a gender mixed accommodation?

## **2. Literature review:**

This section describes previous research on the area homeless women, and also violence towards women with substance abuse. By reason of there not being much research to be found regarding how homeless women are affected when moved from a separate women's emergency accommodation and becoming part of a gender mixed accommodation, the focus on literature have been on women in homelessness in general and violence women with substance abuse may experience. Previous research in these areas can contribute to an increased understanding about homeless women's experience in general.

### **2.1 Literature search**

In order to find previous research on women in homelessness and violence women with substance abuse may encounter, the database of Gothenburg University library search function has been used. The main focus has been to find presented research in scientific journals, dissertations and reports. Also, google scholar has been used as an extra search engine to find as much relevant data as possible. Keywords that have been used when doing a literature survey are, *homeless, women, violence, substance abuse, accommodation, shelter,*

*emergency accommodation. Also sentences as homeless women, homeless women with substance abuse, homeless women emergency accommodation, homeless women with substance abuse, homeless women violence.*

## **2.2 Violence against women with substance abuse**

Women with addiction and addiction problems, and women who are living in homelessness are groups in society that are more exposed to abuse than other women in general. These women go under the category specific vulnerability. Reasons for this is due to that the awareness of their vulnerability is low and estimated numbers of unknown cases are very high (Blom et al, 2015:78-79). Further, knowledge about women vulnerable to violence, who have an addiction, has been discussed for years. Municipalities have offered women vulnerable to violence with substance abuse different support efforts. However, these support efforts come with one term that these women first need to become drug-free. Thus, efforts have mainly been directed at women who have been subjected to violence, and not to women who have been subjected to violence with substance abuse (Linköpings stadsmission, 2016:8).

For many women vulnerable to violence with substance abuse the violence against them has become a normalised part of their every-day life. Holmberg, Smirthwaite & Nilsson (2005) have interviewed women who have a substance abuse. All women had experience of violence within the circle of people they live and interact with. The physical violence that these women encounter is the most common type of violence. The women could be abused in public, but not one interrupted the violence. Many women explained that violence has become so normalised in groups where people use drugs. Also, many of these women accused themselves of the violence they encountered. In addition, rape is also a common violence that these women encounter, and something that a woman who have been exposed to violence with substance abuse has been subjected to (Holmberg et al, 2005).

A reason why women vulnerable to violence with substance abuse do not seek help for the violence they encounter is due to that most of these women often have previous negative experiences with humanitarian efforts. Even though women vulnerable to violence with substance abuse have regular contact with Social services, studies have shown that there is a big dissatisfaction towards administrative authority. Many women wished that the Social services had been able to discover the violence without these women having to tell them about it, and offered support for it (Larsson, 2019:6).

### **2.3 Homeless women's experience of vulnerability**

Historically, when talking about homelessness, the image has mostly been about single adult men. Shelters for homeless people have been socially constructed as predominantly for the male gender. However, the number of homeless women is increasing and will continue to increase (Gonyea & Melekis, 2016). Studies in America have shown that homeless women are more vulnerable than men in terms of having fewer financial resources and having more physical and mental health needs. Further, as mentioned above, homeless women are a vulnerable group in the society. Most of the women encounter different kinds of violence. Nonetheless, most facilities in America do not provide appropriate gender-specific accommodation for their homeless women on a governmental level, however, there are non-profit organisations that are offering supportive housing for only homeless women (Kim et al, 2019; Winetrobe et al, 2017).

In a study from United Kingdom homeless women discusses that they prefer being in a women-only environment. The reason for this was that many women had experienced that gender mixed accommodations were a hostile environment to be in. Some women experienced that men in these accommodations thought they had the right to a women's body whenever they wanted to. Further, the women in this study also discussed about how they wished they had a choice regarding specialist services, such as women-only services, rather than being fit into existing services that do not meet their needs (Cameron et al, 2016).

Another study, from Sweden, are discussing in which extent homeless women are being vulnerable to both economic and social factors. Women in this study refer to that there are not as many homeless women as there are men, it is more common to meet men in different shelters. Further, other women refer to that women are more likely to have a short-term homelessness than men (Berglund & Lundin, 2019:20). Additionally, homeless women are to a greater extent more exposed to end up in prostitution, a reason why prostitution have become a source of income for homeless women can be due to that it gives them access to drugs, shelter, food etc. Further, as women mention in this study, they are using their own bodies to get what they need (Berglund & Lundin, 2019:17). Further, some women in homelessness start different kinds of relationships with men as a survival strategy, to negotiate some form of security with the help of these relationships (Reid et al, 2005).

Cecilia Löfstrand and Catharina Thörn (2004), who are both sociologists, have been researching about women in homelessness for years. These two researchers discuss about how the society in general can portray women in homelessness as vulnerable, which



can risk creating/reinforcing the image of a homeless woman as a victim. In addition to when people in society are contributing to categorise these women as particularly vulnerable, this may also mean that we ignore the women who do not agree with this picture.

### **3. Theoretical underpinnings:**

This thesis will take a point of departure from Goffman's (1963) theory of stigmatisation. The theory about stigmatisation will contribute to get an understanding of to which extent these women in homelessness with substance abuse are excluded in the community. Further, the theory about intersectionality will also be part of the analysis. The concept of intersectionality will be discussed through different understandings of the concept, mainly through De Los Reyes and Mulinari (2005). The reason for this is that this theory will contribute to get an insight about the subordination in several dimensions' women with substance abuse encounter.

#### **3.1 Goffman – stigmatisation**

Goffman (1963) in his book *Stigma – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* identify stigma as a deep discredit attribute of an individual person, meaning that this attribute transforms a person to only be what the stigma symbolizes. Additionally, not all attributes are an issue, only those which are inappropriate with the stereotype of how a given type of individual should be. Stigmatization means when members of a social category are being discriminated by other members of the society (Goffman, 1963:11-12).

Goffman differentiates between three different types of stigma: 1) *Abominations of the body* (Various physical deformities); 2) *Undesirable characteristics* (mental disorder, addiction, alcoholism, imprisonment etc.) and 3) *Tribal stigma* (religion, race, nationality etc.). Those who do not meet these discredited characteristics are addressed by Goffman as *normal*. The attitudes *normal* individuals have and react towards a person with stigma is according to Goffman well known. According to the author this means that *normal* individuals believe that a person with stigma is not quite human, and due to this assumption, we exercise varieties of discrimination (Goffman, 1963:14-15).

Goffman also refers to something he calls *sympathetic others*; it differentiates between two types: *The Own* and *The Wise*. The description of sympathetic others is that there are individuals who do not contribute to stigmatisation, but rather take a stand towards the stigmatised and make them feel '*normal*'. The Own includes individuals who share the same stigmatisations. These individuals can receive moral support from each other, feel normal and

relaxed, and also share feelings of being connected to one another. The Wise refers to individuals who are not part of the stigmatised group, meaning she herself is not stigmatised but rather someone who is interested in and engaged in the group (Goffman, 1963:31-32).

### **3.2 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a theoretical analysis that observes different power structures, and how to explain these different power irregularities together instead of separately. Meaning, intersectionality observe how relations between superiority and subordination are created and perceived when interacted between *race, genus, class, religious* etc. (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005:7). Further, instead of taking a point of departure through one-dimensional understanding of power structure, intersectionality gives the opportunity to see processes that maintain relation between superiority and subordination between individuals and groups of individuals. This theoretical analysis also contributes to understand the welfare states priorities. In the welfare state the notion of others are class affiliation, gender and culture important to understand regarding the political priorities and the welfare authorities' approach to clients, on this case homeless women. Additionally, exercise of power and subordination are always embedded into a complex network of structural relations, political processes and human actions (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). Intersectionality can, for example, reveal how specific efforts for some groups in the society, in this case women with substance abuse, do not take into account that people can belong to several target groups at the same time and have needs that require a combined effort (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005:52).

Sjöberg (2016) discuss about risk through an intersectionality perspective. The researcher points out that when people experience security or insecurity those feelings are not only based on the risk that something might happen, but rather it depends on who you are; man or woman, young or old and so on. A person's identity and gender role play a crucial role in how to identify, perceive and manage risks (Sjöberg, 2016:19).

Another dimension, when talking about intersectionality perspective, is spatial dimensions. Molina (2007) in her article argues for the need to regard the room as one of the relationships that must be understood through an intersectionality perspective. Molina mean that the spatial reality is created by, and at the same time creates relations of power (Molina, 2007:7-8). How do the intersectionality perspective look in the spatial when looking at class differences and gender, and how access to public places looks, regarding the representation of the female, but also the security and/or construction of access to the urban space where the fear of falling victim to masculine violence are topics that often appear. It can be seen that

class differences affect the access to the city's resources, and who owns the city's public space is then important here (Molina, 2007).

## **4. Methodology**

The aim with this study is to get a better understanding of how women, who live in the emergency accommodation Arizona, are affected when becoming a part of another emergency accommodation where both men and women live. In order to do so the main focus has been to capture these women's own perspectives when it comes to safety. This study is due to this a qualitative study where individual semi-structured interviews have been done with women living in the emergency accommodation Arizona. This type of interview is often aimed at finding out what the informant thinks, feel and the experience she has (Dalen, 2007).

### **4.1 Data collection**

The women in this study are living in an emergency accommodation, meaning they are homeless. Some of them may not even have a proper phone to contact them through. I started by contacting the branch head of Arizona, explained the study and that I would like to come in contact with the women living in Arizona. Additionally, what is important to establish is that I have an employment in the gender mixed emergency accommodation Georgia. That means I am well-grounded in this environment and it could due to this give me easier access to these women. Further, it also makes it important for me to see my own part in this study and have an open mind and be neutral.

The interviewing took place on three different days, these days were spontaneously picked out and so was the timeframe for the visit. Reasons for this was that an emergency accommodation is rarely permanent for these women, and one cannot be sure that the person one has booked a meeting with will still live at that resident. Also, if the woman has an active substance abuse it is most likely to obstruct both the opportunity and the will to sit down at a scheduled meeting and conduct an interview.

After the first visit no interviewing was done, reasons for this was that there were not many women home, and those who were home did not feel good, mentally or physically, to participate in an interview, or just did not want to be interviewed. The second time I decided to visit Arizona was after their breakfast, this time three interviews were done. The first woman who participated was a woman I knew from when working in the emergency accommodation Georgia, she told me the reason she was willing to participate was due to that she knew me. After the interview I sat in their living room with other women, the first woman

I interviewed told the other women who I was and the purpose of the interview. After that two more women wanted to be interviewed. The next, and last, visit took place an afternoon. This time two women were interviewed. Furthermore, the staff in Arizona helped me through knocking on the women's doors and inform them about me and my purpose of being there, through this way I was able to interact more with the women.

Totally five interviews were accomplished. As regards to time, the conversations lasted mostly twenty minutes, another for one hour. However, the time of the data from the interviews was shorter, between five to seven minutes. Reasons for that the interviews were so short is due that the women had said everything they needed to and/or could not concentrate anymore. I interacted with them before starting the interviews and after ending the interviews, which for me was important so they felt I was there to listen to whatever they wanted to share with me. Additionally, homeless women with substance abuse are a group who may not easily trust people. Being able to get five interviews was good, due to that most of them did not know me from before, and due to the timeframe one has I did not have time to visit and interact with them before starting the interviews as much as I had wanted to.

#### **4.2 Selection of participants**

This study is directed to women living in the emergency accommodation Arizona, so I knew from the beginning which women's stories I wanted to hear. It is the women living in Arizona who can tell me their experience of moving into their new location.

The selection method that have been used are purposive samplings, it is a selection method were I, as researcher, do not intend to make a random selection. Rather I have chosen participants in a strategic way in order for them to be relevant for this study's research purpose (Yin, 2011:93). Nevertheless, when I visit Arizona to do my interviews, I believed that it did not matter which one of the women who participated in an interview, as long as they lived in Arizona.

#### **4.3 Analytical method**

In order to analyse the collected data material a qualitative content analysis have been chosen. This method helps to create an understanding for a material and capture the respondent's own opinion, in this case, what their feelings and perceptions are regarding living close to a gender mixed accommodation. This is done by simplifying and creating an overview by incorporating it into a larger context (Bergström & Boréus, 2005:48-49). Further, I

transcribed all the interviews, however the interviews continued after pausing the recorder, or in other cases we started talking before I started to record. Notes were made by me after every interview about things that did not go into the recorder. Further, all the interviews were done in Swedish, but I will translate the quotes that are used to English. This can influence the significance in some words or phrases.

The analysis started with reading through the transcribed material several times, in order to get an overall feeling about the material. After doing that every interview was read through more accurate and separately, and during this reading minor markings were made in the text. These markings formed supporting words and/or underlining words, it also formed sentence and phrases that were related to this study's purpose. Thereafter these words, sentences and phrases were picked out to be coded and eventually categorised. To capture the essential content of the interviews, the categorise were thematised. Through this process the interviews are being breached down one by one and will at the end provide material to which I can answer my purpose and research questions (Yin, 2011;189-190).

**Table 1. The different steps of the content analysis**

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3 (coding)	Step 4 (categorisation)	Step 5 (thematization)
The material is being read through several times	Minor markings of relevant parts are made in material	The markings are coded	The codes are categorised	The categories are thematized

In table 1 one can see the steps that were done in the analysis. The codes were mainly only words or short sentences, and/or phrases that substantially could describe what the informers said and gave feedback about. After that the codes were categorised, the categories consisted of reasoning and phenomenon that occurred in the interviews. At last the categories were thematised and these themes ended up being four and was labelled to the following; *safeness*, *unsafeness*, *“normal” people* and *solidarity*. These themes will be presented and discussed later in the thesis.

#### **4.4 Ethical consideration**

The Swedish Research Council ethical consideration for the social-science research describe it should accommodate four ethical demands, they are; information requirement, consent requirement, confidential requirement and utilise requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

The information requirement means that the researcher is obligated to inform all the concerned participants about what this studies aim is, and the consent requirement describe that all the participants have the right to decide for themselves if they want to participate in the study or not (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). In order to accommodate these requirements, I first contacted the branch manager of Arizona, to introduce myself and explain what the study was about and also to ask if it was ok that I came to Arizona and introduced myself. The branch manager of Arizona explained that she first wanted to inform the women about this and hear if it was ok for them that I came to visit. After a while, the branch manager contacted me and said that the women did not mind me coming and visiting them. My first visit was short; I introduced myself for the few women who were sitting in the living room. I told them who I was and explained the study I aimed to do. I left my information letter to the staff, so they could talk with the women about the study. The reason I chose leave the information letters to the staff was due to that my experience are that letters are usually nothing they read. I thought it was better that the staff explained for the women what it was about and could at the same time tell them they knew who I was. Every woman, who participated in an interview, got the information separately before I started the interview. I explained to them what the study was about, that their contribution was voluntary and that they could stop anytime, also during the interviews they could themselves decide not to answer questions they do not want to answer.

The requirement of confidentiality for the participant means that all the participants must be given the greatest possible confidentiality during the course of the study and in the final result (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). I explained to the women before starting the interviews that they did not have to say their names, I explained that I would not use their real name in this study, instead I will use fictional names. The same goes for the names of the two emergency accommodations that is presented in this essay. As mentioned under introduction, the fictional names for the emergency accommodations are Arizona and Georgia. Even so, all the interviews took place in the emergency accommodation Arizona. The staff working those days I was there interviewing could see which women participated, also other women in the accommodation could see which women chose to participate. I gave them the opportunity to meet me outside somewhere, if they felt more comfortable with it, but all the women wanted

to be interviewed in their own room or in a meeting room. One woman wanted to be interviewed in the living room. It is important that the woman herself may choose where she wants to be interviewed, a place where she feels safe and comfortable. Besides for the one interview that took place in the living room, no one could hear our conversation. Further, all the collected material during this study has been stored so that only I, the researcher, can access it.

The last one, utilise requirement, means that the collected data is only allowed to be used in research purpose (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). This has been met in this study, due to that the only material that is open to the public is the conclusive and de-identity version, where the data cannot be deduced to specific participants.

#### **4.5 Methodological reflections**

In order to get a better understanding of the quality and critical review of a study, validity and reliability is being used (Bergström & Boréus, 2005). Validity and reliability are concepts that are more used in a quantitative study than in a qualitative study. However, validity and reliability can be adjusted to a qualitative study, and I will use it to discuss about this study consistency.

To be able to assess the consistency of my study it requires the ability to openly reflect on how my choices and approaches may have affected its results. As mention above, I have an employment in the emergency accommodation Georgia, I am well-grounded in this environment and that can affect the outcome of the data. Meaning before and after the interviews I discussed things with the women that a person who do not work in this environment would not be able to do, due to less access and trust. Even so, I cannot know if the women's stories would turn out the same way as they did if someone else had interviewed them, or if me myself had done it at a different time. Stories will change overtime as a result of these women's physical and mental health and circumstance of life. Additionally, Arizona moved into their new location 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, if this study would have been done a year after Arizona moved into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation the results could have been different as well.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed shortly after the interviews. This is to prefer due to that the interviews and your own reflection are still fresh, and thus increase credibility. Nevertheless, the recorded interviews were short. This can also lead to less credibility. However, I believe that the interviews that have been done for this study have enabled me to produce a comprehensive description around the understanding of how these

women feel regarding feelings and perceptions when moved from a separate women's emergency accommodation and become part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live.

## **5. Results/Analysis**

The following section will present the results of this study, and the layout of the presentation has been chosen based upon the central themes that have been drawn up from the material. These are; *safeness, unsafeness, solidarity* and “*normal*” *people*. This section also contains an analysis, each theme is therefore analysed in direct connection with the empirical report, where the theoretical underpinnings are applied to the results of the interviews. As been pointed out under the method section is all the participants names are de-coded and the ones used in this paper are made up, however, the quotes that are used to exemplify the theme and reasoning are personal. Additionally, material that were said and written down before or after the interviews will be used, but not quoted. Some of the themes can sometimes interweave with each other.

### **5.1 Safeness/Unsafeness**

The results show that these women perceive practical differences when talking about safeness and unsafeness. Safeness seems to be focusing more on physical security and unsafeness more on mental security. The results will be presented separately below.

#### **5.1.1 Safeness**

When discussing safeness with the women during the interviews it turned out that security for some of them had more to do with practicalities of Arizona's new location rather than having something to do with living in the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. These practical parts can be seen as *sympathetic others* (Goffman, 1963). Sympathetic others are individuals who do not partake in stigmatisation, but rather take the point of view of the stigmatised and make them feel normal and give them a sense of acceptance. It can then be debated if the guards and staff contribute to make these women feel more *normal* and safer.

*Here we have guards around the clock, that is very good, everything that is happening inside will be on video [...] (Lisa)*

*I think it is good here because you feel calm and sensed here and good staff and such. (Anna)*



Even so, one woman mention how she choose to consciously avoid certain places in the area or go a different route. This can be seen as she tries to take control over her own security. To avoid being exposed to something one methodically chooses to take another path.

*Me – is there anything that has felt safer for you? Or more unsafe so far?*

*Josefine – So I have chosen to stay away from Georgia side. So, for example when I go to the bus or something, I go another way, so I do not have to pass there.*

Two of the women were very short in their answers regarding their own perceived security. One of the women mention how she first felt a bit insecure because she had no one to talk to. This can be seen as safeness for some people are also about knowing the people where one lives. To have a connection and someone to talk to. This can be drawn to Goffman's (1963) perspective of *The Own*, where in this case the women share the same stigma. This makes the individual person feel a sense of belonging, which is very important for the individual's well-being and sense of security, to be connected to one another.

*Noo. In the beginning I just felt a bit insecure, because I had no one to talk too. The only one I have talked to is \*\*, she is in the same age as me. (Sara)*

*Here it feels very safe. Plus, it is a bit fun that one can meet men on the other side of this building, if one wants to. (Jenny)*

### **5.1.2 Unsafeness**

When discussing what made the women feel unsafe different themes were presented. Mostly it was about the area Arizona had moved to. Some women, when talking about what made them feel insecure, mentioned a bus-stop that is located near the building, the gate and some of them mention living so close to men. Even though some women felt safer in the new location due to it had guards around the clock and camera surveillance, some women were not happy with Arizona moving into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation.

*Me – what are your thoughts that Arizona have moved into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation?*

*Lisa – it is crap (laughs a bit)*

Me – *it is crap?*

Lisa – *yes*

Me – *would you like to elaborate?*

Lisa – *Yes... it is not good at all. They do not think about whether you have a protected ID and should avoid some people you are exposed to. That is not very good... The bus-stop is right here, and if someone is after you, they just sit at the bus-stop and wait, you do not even have time to cross the street and reach here if someone is after you. It is very bad...*

Me – *So it felt safer living in old Arizona?*

Lisa – *Yes definitely, it did.*

As Lisa mentioned, she thinks it is safer here due to the guards and camera surveillance, but however Lisa do not feel safe outside the building, and the gate is something she finds hard dealing with.

Lisa - [...] *But what happens on the outside here, they have no control over. So it is...no.. I do not feel safe.. factually... so when you stand here at the gate and want to go in, it sometimes takes a while before you are let in, it can happen anything when you stand there waiting for them to open.*

Me – *What is it that feels so unsafe there by the gate? Is it the position?*

Lisa – *No, or almost, if you know you are exposed or if someone is chasing you and stand out there and wait and wait and then they have to come out sometimes and open, and it can take a few minutes, and that can be enough in order for something to happen.*

Sara mentions how she does not feel safe in the area. The area Arizona have moved to is very sparsely populated, consisting more of industries and daytime offices. This means there are not many people walking around in the area in the evenings or nights.

*I do not like this area. Yesterday when I got home I called one of the girls and asked her to come and meet me at the bus-stop.. I did not dare.. it was dark, 11pm..not so fun.. I had the keys in my hand all the time (laughs a bit) not used to this.. (Sara)*

What can be important to notice is that before Arizona relocated it was located in another district in Gothenburg. This area was more of a residential area. Nevertheless, reasons why these women feel more unsafe in their new location can be because they are more exposed to risks that might occur. Women tend to have noticeably higher insecurity in public places in relation to men (Sjöberg, 2016;19-20). This kind of insecurity in public places can be due to

gender power in the society, where women are more often subordinated than men. In this case the women are subordinated in several dimensions, they are women, homeless, some have substance abuse and can be vulnerable to violence (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). As Lisa mention, sometimes they have to wait by the gate to be let in, this can be a great stress for the women mentally if they feel exposed in the environment they are living in.

Josefine's thoughts were more about why the county had decided to place Arizona in the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. As Josefine mentioned above, she has chosen to stay away from the emergency accommodation Georgia side, instead she takes other ways to, for example, the bus. This however can also be seen as a way to take control over a situation one can feel is unsafe.

*Hmm... Well it really depends on why they have decided to place us here. Hmm... Because it should be a little protected and so.. then it may feel a little reluctant to put us next to such a big other emergency accommodation where a lot of men and a lot of fights and such occur. Hmm... when it should be a bit more protected and safer. (Josefine)*

Josefine continues to talk about her thoughts about why Arizona have been relocated, other feelings she had was;

*[...]more than it feels...a little humiliating almost that we... we are a bit trapped in their backyard. (Josefine)*

Thoughts about that Arizona have moved into new accommodation also came up during an interview with Jenny.

Me – [...] *But what was your thoughts before the relocation?*

Jenny – *Yes then I thought it was really weird.*

Me – *In what way was it weird?*

Jenny - *Hmm... they have a bus-stop right outside, and it is a protected accommodation for women [...]*

The women during the interviews mention that Arizona is a protected accommodation for homeless women. My interpretation it that these women feel some kind of betrayal from Gothenburg county. People living in homelessness are a stigmatised group in society and it is common knowledge that this group in the society do not get much aid. These women can be

seen as being subordinated towards the county, who can be seen as superior. Meaning it is a power position between them, where political processes come in and were basic women's rights are not considered or discussed. Additionally, after the interview with Lisa she mentions how she feels that it is a very vulnerable environment for women with substance abuse to live so close to men who, as she put it, is "stepping" on them so easily. The fact that authorities overlook the power structures that create vulnerability among these women can be interpreted as marginalizing these women because of the patriarchal violence, where men are the superior in the society. It can be pointed out that women in homelessness have needs that requires combined efforts, and to understand that vulnerable groups are not homogeneous (De Los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005).

Another unsafe experience a woman had was that other women, during conflicts, could threaten to know men living in the gender mix accommodation. It seems as threaten with knowing men from the gender mixed accommodation gave these women some sort of power over the other women. This can be drawn to what Molina (2007) calls the spatial reality that is created by relations of power. Having male contacts in the neighbouring accommodation seem to cause concern for other women, the reason may be that the woman is afraid of becoming a victim of male violence. As Josephine mentioned below, she felt she became more paranoid after that. This in turn can be seen as some women living in Arizona are being subordinated towards other women living there, that within Arizona there are also power configurations.

*Josefine - [...] There have been some threats and such things between the residents here. By threatening with that guys moves around in this area, if there is trouble in here.*

*Me – Oh you mean that if there is a conflict here in Arizona one can threaten to know someone who lives in Georgia?*

*Josefine – Yes like their guy friends or so.. with such things. And it has not felt so good, when that have happened, I have notice that I have become a little more paranoid and so. And not want.. mm.. aahh.. I have pulled myself away more so to speak.*

## **5.2 Solidarity**

There are women who lives in these kinds of emergency accommodation that can have a protected ID. What has been noticed during the interviews is that women, who do not see

themselves as victims of violence, reflects over that Arizona has moved into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. Reasons for this can be that these women know other women who are victims of violence, and due to that feel solidarity with these women. Individuals who share the same stigma in the society often support one another, makes each other feel *normal* and relaxed (Goffman, 1963). Josefine and Lisa both talks about how Arizona should be a protected emergency accommodation for women. Both of them do not understand what the county was thinking of when placing Arizona in the same building as another emergency accommodation where men live. Further, Lisa and Josefine discuss how some women have to avoid certain people that they may be exposed to. Living in their new location can make it hard to avoid these people. When discussing the solidarity between these women it can be pointed to Goffman's (1963) two groups of persons who may be more accepting of those who are stigmatised, the "own" and the "wise". The "own" are those who share the same stigma, in this case women vulnerable to violence, and the "wise" are those who sympathize with the women who are vulnerable to violence. As will be pointed out below, Jenny does not see herself as a victim of violence but rather feels for the women who are. Jenny can be seen as being the "wise" because she sympathizes with the other women and because of that it feels wrong that Arizona now share's building with a gender mixed accommodation.

Jenny mentions how she does not see herself as a victim of violence but feels for the women who are. Also, Jenny asked the staff about why Arizona had to relocate at all. However, Jenny did not get an answer to that question. It can be seen as the women living in Arizona just had to take it as it is, without even getting a real explanation as to why they should now share building with a gender mixed accommodation. The women are subordinated in the public space where class differences affect access to the municipality's resources. Thus, gender issues can also affect access to these resources (Molina, 2007). The women in accommodation Arizona are homeless and belong to the low class in society, it is then possible to debate if this is the reason why there is now no separated emergency accommodation for women in Gothenburg county anymore. Moreover, because women living in homelessness are subordinated in several dimensions, it can also be debated whether these women are so used to not having their voices heard that instead they simply choose to accept it as it is, as they are at least given a roof over their head and food.

Me – [...] *Mm.. and you thought it was weird then? That they moved Arizona to the same house that men live in?*

Jenny – *Yes.. although I am not a abused woman who is afraid of men so.. but there are many women here who are.*

Me – *but for you personally it does not feel awful?*

Jenny – *no... [...]But I did not get a good answer how they thought before we moved.*

Me – *oh so you asked about the relocation?*

Jenny – *haha yes, I asked the staff... [...]But I thought it turned out good anyway, however as I said I am not a vulnerable woman in that way. It might be worse for the women who have a threat level over them.*

When asking Sara about what her thoughts was that Arizona relocated into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation she answered shortly;

*mm .. I do not know, for some it may be good, but for others it may not be good at all ..[...] But I have a home. (Sara)*

### **5.3 “Normal” people**

During the interviews the subject of old Arizona came up. The women felt that there were differences between living in the area where old Arizona was located and living in the area where Arizona is located today. Old Arizona was located in a residential area, the women thought it gave a better feeling living among ordinary people, and that it was easier to blend in. Where Arizona is located now is, as has been mentioned, a sparsely populated area with more industries and daytime offices.

*Lisa - [...] There it was more that you lived more among ordinary people. Here it is more like... well it goes without saying, you are more exposed here and it is an industrial area, so when you are here you are here for a reason. In the other place it was easier to blend in, I think.*

*Me – Yes, it was more of a neighbourhood area there, and here are as you say, more industries.*

*Lisa – Yes, over there you could sneak between the houses and become invisible, but here it's completely open. When you leave the bus stop it is fucking hard.*

*[...] I think it felt better living there, here you are very cut off from the world..hmm.. somehow it is not so.. if you go out around here most of the people you meet are other who lives here, and most of them*

*are addicts and then it becomes a lot.. a lot... it is a different feeling if you go out on the street in \*\*  
and meet ordinary people. (Josefine)*

Goffman (1963) talks about discredit attribute of an individual person, meaning that this attribute transforms a person to only be what the stigma symbolizes. It can be discussed if these women, when now living in the new area, identify themselves more to the category *homeless*. As Lisa herself expressed it, “*so when you are here you are here for a reason*”, gives the feeling that the community know what kind of people lives in that accommodation and automatically stigmatise them due to that they do not fit in with the stereotype of how a given type of individual should be. Further, as Josefine expressed it, that around where Arizona now is located you mostly only meet other people living there, and most of them are addicts. This can be seen as she herself does not want to be symbolised with “those kind of people” and be part of that stigmatised group the “own” (Goffman, 1963). Furthermore, the “own” may not always be more accepting of a stigma one belongs to. Some individuals want to distance themselves from others, in this case homeless people with substance abuse, to try and minimize their stigmatisation and ‘being like them’. Moreover, Lisa and Josefine both mention how it gave a better feeling living among ordinary people, and that it was easier to blend into the community. It can then be debated whether these women were seen more as *normal* people by the community when they lived in old Arizona. That it was more difficult for society to know that these women were homeless, and because of that did not automatically stigmatize them.

## **6. Concluding discussion**

In this essay I wanted to increase my understanding of whether these women have been affected by moving into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. Thus, in doing so through Goffman and the intersectionality perspective I have been able to understand their experiences of now living in an even more vulnerable environment.

The following questions have been the basis for this study:

- How do the women get affected in a practical sense, when moved from a separate women's emergency accommodation and become part of an emergency accommodation where both men and women live?
- What are the feelings and perceptions of living close to a gender mixed accommodation?

The women's stories reveal that their feelings are ambiguous regarding Arizona's new location. As the result showed, these women experience both greater security and greater insecurity. The security they experience is based more in the physical aspects, as they now have guards around the clock and camera surveillance. The insecurity stems more from the fact that they now live so close to men. These women are stigmatised as a group but interpret it differently. The interviews show that some of the women see themselves more as victims in the new environment they now live in, they feel that they are more afraid and threatened. Other women do not at all see themselves as victims, but rather feel sympathy towards the other women who experience an insecurity in their new environment.

What is important here is to not look at this group of women as a homogeneous group, rather one needs to look at them as individuals with different needs. Studies have shown that homeless women prefer being in a woman-only environment. Women's experience towards gender mixed accommodation was that those environments are hostile, homeless women wished they had a choice, regarding living situations, rather than being fit into existing services that do not meet their needs (Cameron et al, 2016). By analysing various aspects and dimensions of vulnerability and being subordinated I have shown that some of the women living in Arizona do not get their needs met. Rather, some of these women have become more exposed to violence, in a practical sense, when Gothenburg county have decided to place them in the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. Additionally, this can make those women who are exposed to violence even more vulnerable in the sense that these women do not often seek help for the violence they encounter. As studies have



shown, homeless women have a great dissatisfaction with administrative authorities (Larsson, 2019).

Women living in homelessness are often automatically categorised by the society as being vulnerable (Löfstrand & Thörn, 2004). This due to that homeless women with substance abuse are more exposed to violence. By categorising women like this the society ignores the women who do not see themselves as vulnerable. The interviews show that some of the women living in Arizona do not see themselves as victims or exposed to violence. However, my analysis showed that women within this group felt solidarity towards those women who were exposed to violence and did not get their needs met. Even though they themselves do not agree with belonging within the category vulnerable women. Individuals who share the same stigma in the society often supports one another.

Some of the women's stories also reveal how a location affected how they saw themselves. Some women felt more "normal" when Arizona was located in a residential area, than living in a sparsely populated area where Arizona is located today. The interviews showed that the women felt it was easier to blend in in a residential area, and that they experienced more stigma by the society when lives wall to wall with a big emergency accommodation. My analysis showed that some individuals want to distance themselves from a category the society put people in, in this case homeless people, in order to try and minimize their stigmatisation and 'being like them'. Studies have shown that shelters for homeless people have mostly been constructed predominantly for the male gender (Gonyea & Melekis, 2016). My analysis also showed that women are subordinated in various dimensions towards the county, it can be seen as that there is a power position between them, where political processes comes in and due to that women's rights are not discussed or considered.

The results of this study are important for municipalities out there, both in terms of gaining a better understanding of people living in homelessness, but also how one cannot categorise an entire group. The results show the importance of not looking at this group of women as a homogeneous group, but rather see them as individuals with different needs. Some of these women are more vulnerable to violence, and the vulnerability to violence is recognised as a problem that should be solved. Hopefully these women's stories can help professionals that interact with these women to better understand their needs and allow women to participate in such a big decision as the municipality made when they moved their housing to another area, and into the same building as a gender mixed accommodation. A municipality should not contribute to stigmatise women in homelessness more. Furthermore, these results can also contribute to understand that there should be a separated emergency

accommodation for women in homelessness with substance abuse, that is not located near another accommodation where men live.

Finally, what is important to understand is that this is a group of people who are difficult to reach and gain confidence from in order to have honest conversations with. I have succeeded in bringing out their ambiguous feelings, regarding moving into the same building where men live. I personally feel that this study is a contributing material to the research on homeless women's perceived feelings when it comes to safeness and unsafeness.

I would like to conclude this essay with a big thank you to the women who were willing to take part in the interviews. Without these women and their stories, this essay would never have been done.

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# Bilagor

## Bilaga 1 - Informationsbrev och förfrågan om medverkan i en intervjustudie

Jag heter Emelie Ekbrand och studerar kandidattermin i Sociologi på Göteborgs Universitet. I utbildningen ingår det att genomföra en studie, som kommer presenteras på universitetet.

Syftet med denna studie är att få en inblick i hur kvinnor som bor på akutboendet Arizona upplever säkerhet och trygghet, när blivit förflyttad till samma byggnad där ett akutboende för både män och kvinnor bor.

Deltagandet i studien innebär att en intervju kommer att genomföras personligt. Hela intervjun kommer att spelas in på band. Intervjuerna kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt, vilket betyder att intervjuerna kommer att aidentifieras och behandlas med bestämmelser med Vetenskapsrådet etikregler. Din medverkan är frivillig och du kan när som helst avbryta.

Hälsningar,  
Emelie Ekbrand

## **Bilaga 2 – Intervjufrågorna**

Hur länge har du bott på akutboendena, alltså inte haft en fast bostad?

Vilka akutboenden har du bott på?

Vad är din erfarenhet av dessa/det boende(n)?

Hur länge har du bott på Arizona?

FF Har du bott på "gamla" Arizona?

Vad är dina tankar om att Arizona har flyttat till ett könsblandat boende?

Hur var din upplevelse av din boendetid på gamla Arizona gällande säkerhet- och trygghetskänsla?

FF kan du beskriva mer detaljerad...

Hur är din upplevelse av din boendetid på Arizona sedan de flyttade rörande samma känsla?

FF kan du beskriva mer detaljerad...