

Faltering Care: An anthropological study of the relationship between long-term homelessness and losing child custody amongst women in Dublin, Ireland

Aim

To investigate the impact of losing child custody on women's trajectories through long-term homelessness in Dublin

Context:

- Current homelessness crisis in Ireland
 - High rates of female homelessness relative to European counterparts
 - Sub-group with long-term histories of homelessness and substance use
- Dublin North Inner City
 - Concentration of social deprivation and homelessness

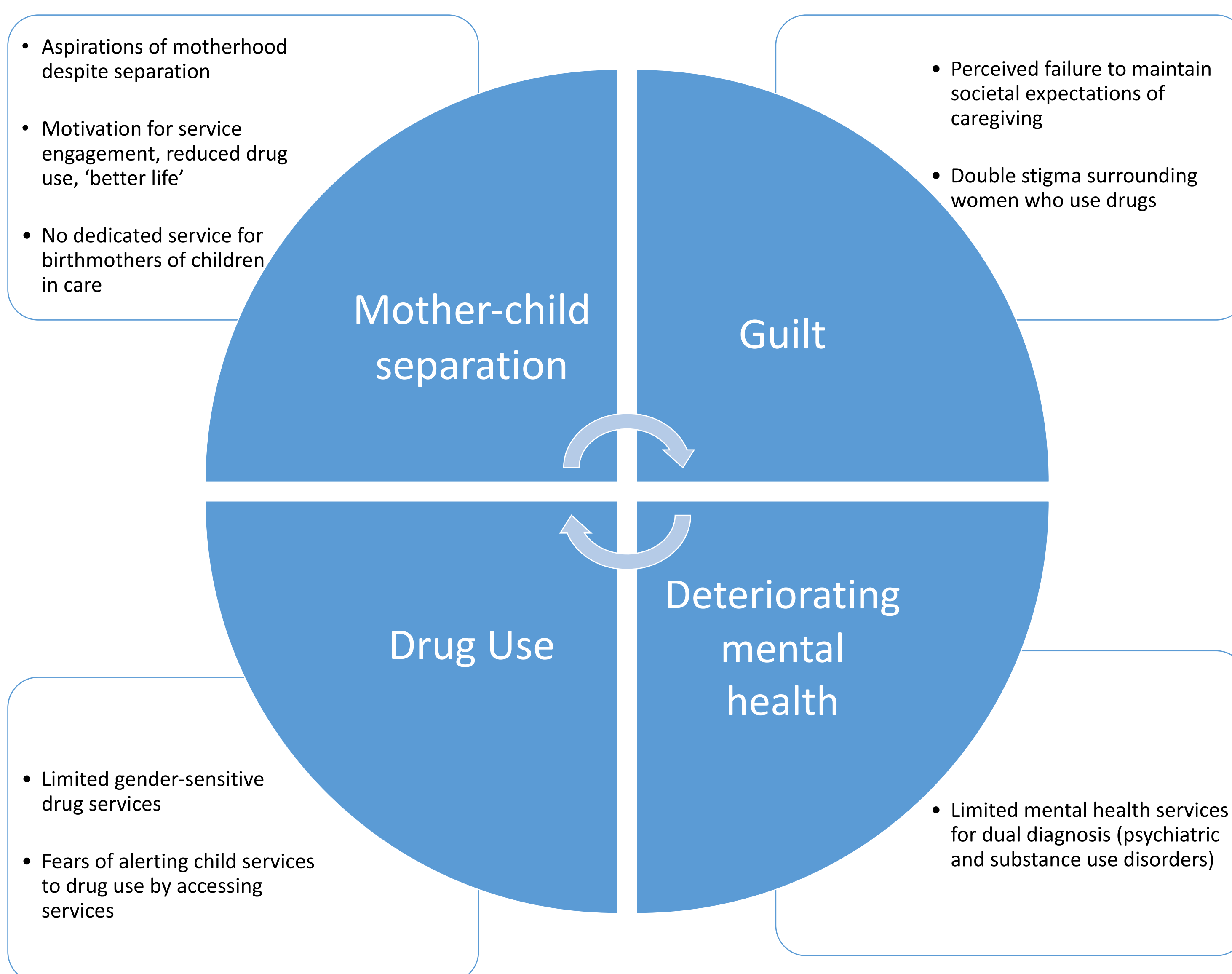
Methodology:

- 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork
 - July 2020 – January 2022
- Embedded in multiple settings
 - GP's waiting room, community addiction centre for women, local streets
- Semi-structured interviews with service providers

Participants:

- Over 30 women
- ≥1 year homeless
- Substance Use Disorder
 - Heroin/crack cocaine/benzodiazepines/alcohol etc.
- Without primary custody ≥1 children
- Majority had experienced gendered victimization
 - Childhood sexual abuse/intimate partner violence etc.
- Common characteristics:
 - Growing up in state care/ethnic minority (Traveller)/ HIV positive/interactions with criminal justice system

Results



Motivation

Despair

"If I go into treatment, I'll have more of a chance with my baby"

"I was given two weeks to find a place, or the baby would go into care. So, I handed him over voluntarily to the grandparents, and that's when it all started. That's when the drugs started."

"The thing is ... I'm just missing my baby so much. I think that's why everything is getting worse, with the injecting [heroin], and the overdose. I don't have anyone to say that to. I can't even say it to my partner. I just miss my baby so much."

Discussion

- Women's trajectories through homelessness and substance use disorder are often shaped by their mothering relationships and the quality of their opportunities to fulfil caregiving aspirations
- Public Health initiatives tackling long-term homelessness need to recognise and respond to the significance of women's affective, interpersonal relationships, including those they share with their children