Loughborough University

Hidden from harm, hidden from help

A Photovoice study exploring women's experiences of homelessness

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Introduction



What can we identify from women's narratives about the support they need to transition out of homelessness, and to prevent recurring experiences of homelessness?

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Hidden women

Women's homelessness is hidden by the way the current system is structured and there has been a failure to acknowledge, record and respond effectively *(Bretherton & Pleace 2021).*



Women are the fastest growing subgroup of homeless populations worldwide and reported figures are likely to be underestimated *(Phipps et al., 2019).*

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Violent home(lessness)

The persistent factor influencing women's homelessness is the violent behaviour of others (Phipps et al., 2019).

This violence could be from intimate partners, family members, or exposure to violence where they live. (Watt, 2018)



An increase in homelessness due to domestic abuse in England, rose by more than a third from the start of the Covid pandemic *(Dept. for Levelling Up, 2022)*

Women can also experience multiple forms of physical and sexual abuse when homeless *(Oudshoorn et al., 2018)*

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A woman's place

Women can transition in-and-out of different types of homelessness, from insecure housing, to temporary accommodation, to rough-sleeping, to shelters, and are caught in a cycle.

Studies in Canada, the UK and USA have found that women who experience rough sleeping are often those who couldn't access safe housing ***after*** exiting a shelter or temporary accommodation.



A lack of gender-informed services further obscures the realities of women's homelessness.

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Policy and practice

- Increase women-only supported accommodation
- Recognise and count women's experiences of homelessness to improve data and service provision
- Address the intersection of gender-based violence and women's homelessness through cross-departmental strategies

- Improve gender-informed practices to better reach and support women experiencing homelessness
- Focus on women's safety as a priority to prevent recurring homelessness
- Work collaboratively across services as women tend to come into contact with other services, such as hospitals
- Deliver trauma-informed wraparound services in parallel to safe housing provision



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Overview of studies



This research used qualitative multi-methods to collect data across two studies.

The first study had two parts:

a) In-person semi-structured interviews
b) Word prompts exercise

The second study had two parts:

a) Photovoice project
b) In-person photo elicitation interview

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Method in focus: Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory research method that uses the power of pictures to identify, represent, and convey the needs of a community.

Participants become co-researchers, using images to express their narratives, highlight issues and bring visibility to their experiences.

Photovoice can be particularly helpful when the issue of concern is one that is traditionally difficult to discuss.



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Elicitation interviews: photo + voice



The photo elicitation interview is a reflexive process where the researcher and the participant consider what the images mean and represent.

Participant photos are used as prompts for discussion of the research themes.

The pivotal aspect of this method is what the participant says about the image – adding their voice.

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The best
things in life
are the people
we love
the places we've been
and the memories
we've made along the way






Danger
Live wires
below














Wallflower
by Noon
“Even in the most miserable, or unexpected situations – there is hope. Even if it doesn’t look like it… We think that this lovely plant, with beautiful flower, would survive alone, but I think behind the scene there’s a small network.”



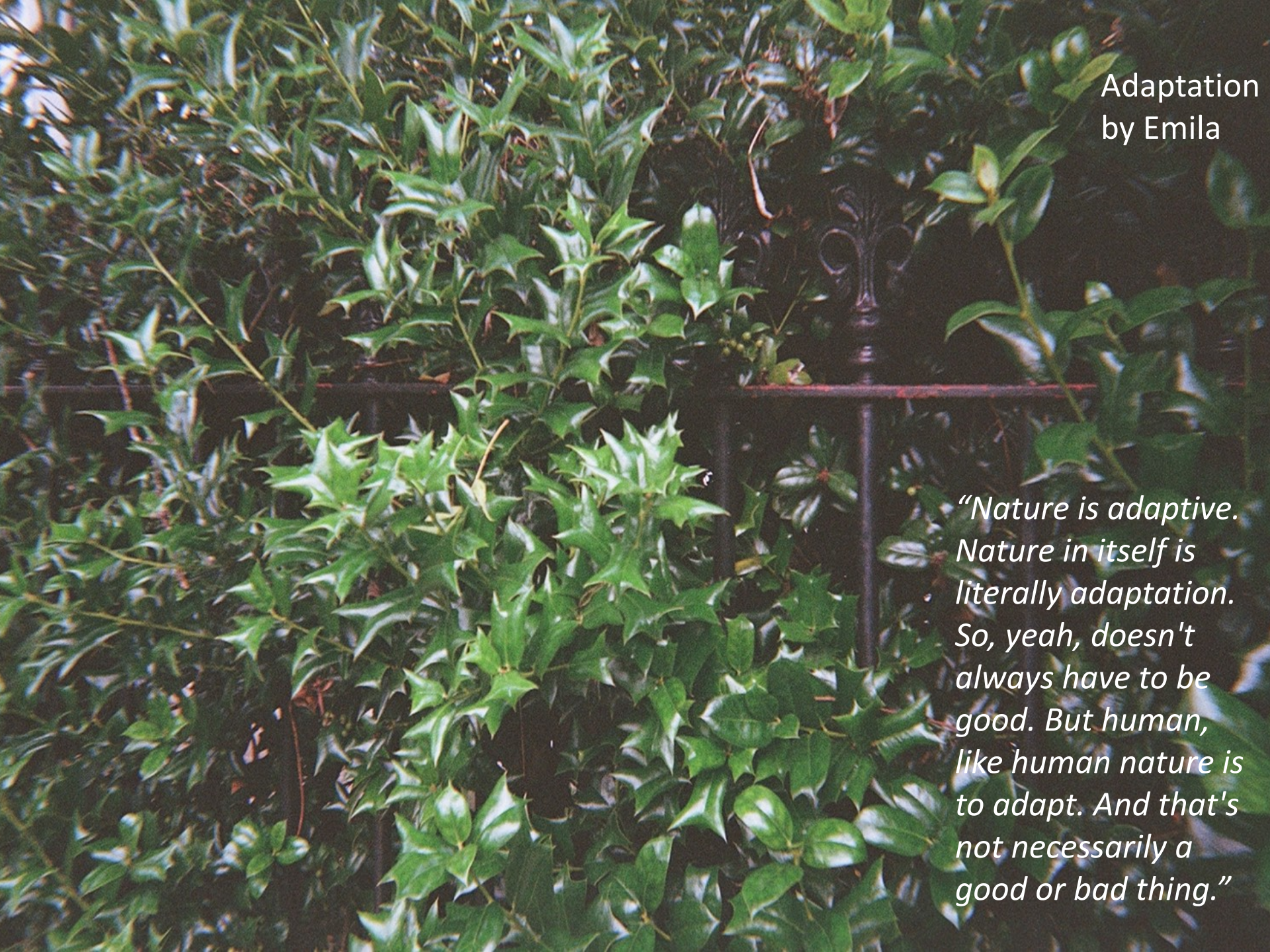
Sound of water
by Liebchen

“I like the sound of the water coming down… It makes me happy going there, it's very uplifting and it's so peaceful.”



A quiet spot
by Star

“Just relax, sometimes when I'm feeling exhausted. And if I found a quiet spot, yeah, just put myself on it and let myself have that rest then… helped keep myself sane and happy.”


Adaptation
by Emila
“Nature is adaptive. Nature in itself is literally adaptation. So, yeah, doesn't always have to be good. But human, like human nature is to adapt. And that's not necessarily a good or bad thing.”

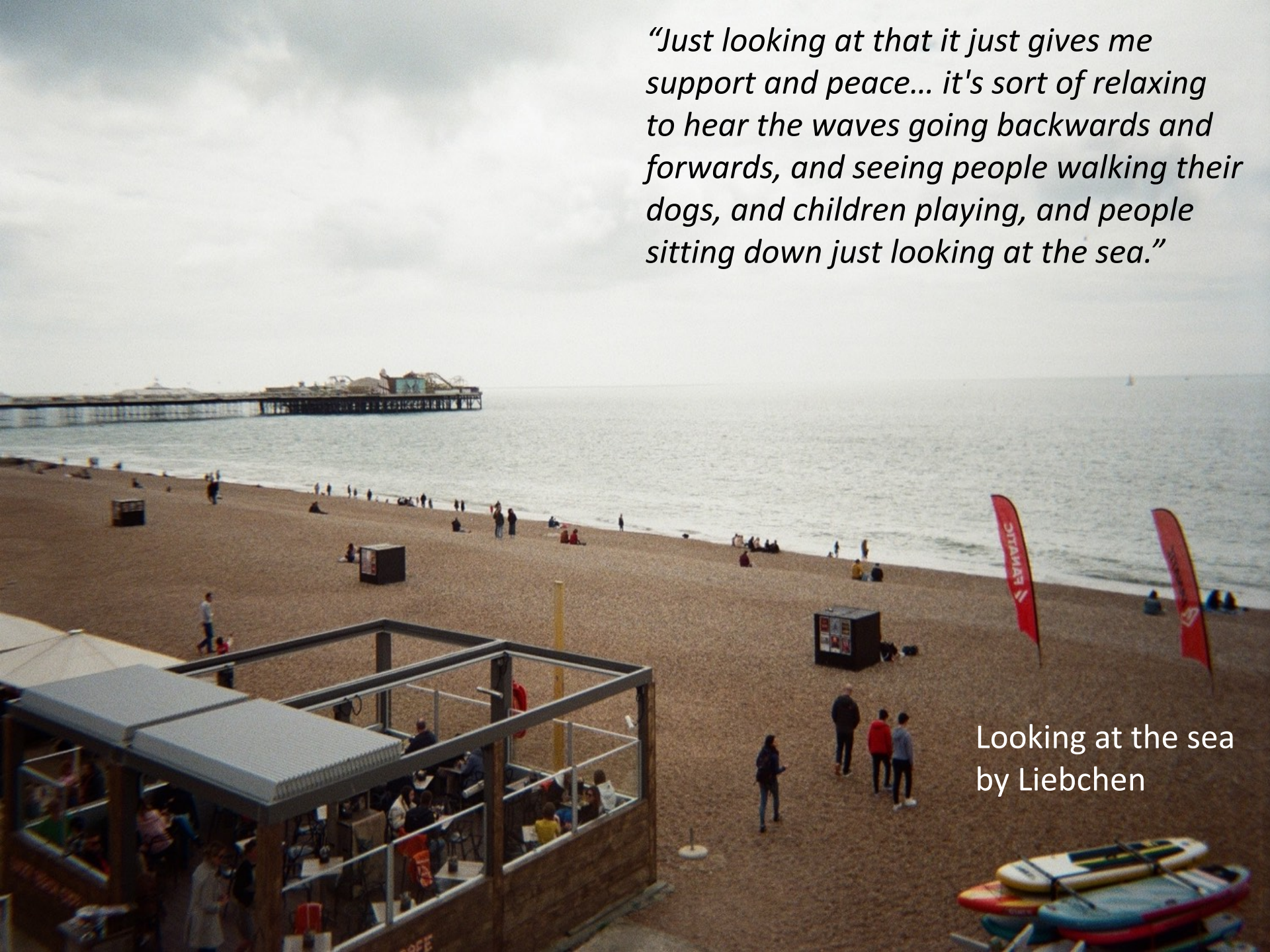

“The flowers. They're fresh, you have a fresh life. You start your life new… So even I can live better, I can grow. I shouldn't give up on life.”
Fresh life
by Green


“It's a place where I keep fit. A place where I connect with locals. I like to walk through greenery for my mental health.”
Through greenery
by Sarah



Roses
by Sugar

“There’s a lady, she lets me pick one rose a day… One day she was out there. I said, I hope you don't mind. She said, darling, that's what the flowers are there for.”



“Just looking at that it just gives me support and peace… it's sort of relaxing to hear the waves going backwards and forwards, and seeing people walking their dogs, and children playing, and people sitting down just looking at the sea.”

Looking at the sea
by Liebchen

THE MEANING OF HOME PODCAST

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Thank you

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