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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

A Qualitative Analysis of the Experience of Referring Clients to S.H.A.R.E and Exploring the Relevancy of S.H.A.R.E's Housing Model.

Liam O'Mahony

CARL Research Project

in collaboration with

S.H.A.R.E

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Date completed:	27th of April, 2021

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a community engagement initiative provided by University College Cork to support the research needs of community and voluntary groups/ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These groups can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also structured community organisations. Research for the CSO is carried out free of financial cost by student researchers.

CARL seeks to:

- provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;
- provide their services on an affordable basis;
- promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;
- enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and
- enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the UCC website?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public through the publication of the final research report on the CARL (UCC) website. CARL is committed to open access, and the free and public dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

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Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

Declaration of Originality

This is to declare that this dissertation titled "**A Qualitative Analysis of the Experience of Referring Clients to S.H.A.R.E and Exploring the Relevancy of S.H.A.R.E's Housing Model**" submitted to the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master in Social Work is my own work.

Any work that is not my own has been acknowledged and referenced appropriately. This dissertation has been submitted through TurnItIn and any changes necessitated by the originality report generated, have been addressed.

Name: Liam O'Mahony

Date: 27th of April 2021

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Abstract

Housing is a constant talking point in Irish society. The housing sector is frequently associated with structural and systemic issues that permeate throughout society. A common challenge faced by people is gaining access to suitable and affordable housing. This is especially true for older members of the population and in particular those who are seeking access to supported accommodation. S.H.A.R.E is a housing charity who provide supported independent living accommodation for the over 60 population in Cork City. The research undertaken is an exploration and discussion of the process of connecting clients to the organisation. The aim of the research is to explore the referral pathway to S.H.A.R.E and to discuss the overall relevancy of the housing model of S.H.A.R.E.

This research was undertaken in collaboration with S.H.A.R.E and completed as part of a CARL initiative in UCC. The research conforms to social constructionism, an interpretivist approach and a community-based research process. The primary research was completed through conducting six semi-structured interviews with professionals working in the housing sector. The findings of the research illustrate the importance of providing suitable housing for older people in Ireland and the value of having a housing model that allows for 'ageing in place'. The research also alludes to the importance of communication and collaboration between different housing providers for the benefit of their clients. A number of recommendations informed by the findings are outlined and put forward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the aims, rationale, and the background to the research topic. This research project was in collaboration with the housing charity, S.H.A.R.E, as part of the Community Academic Research Links (CARL) initiative. The chapter will then highlight the research aims, objectives, and research questions which informed the dissertation. Finally, a chapter overview of the dissertation will then be outlined.

1.2 Research Title

A Qualitative Analysis of the Experience of Referring Clients to S.H.A.R.E and Exploring the Relevancy of S.H.A.R. E's Housing Model.

1.3 Background to the research

S.H.A.R.E (Students Harness Aid for The Relief of the Elderly) is a registered charity and approved housing body that provide sheltered accommodation for the over 60 population in Cork City. There are 140 single units available in Cork City providing supported independent living. S.H.A.R.E was founded in 1970 and has grown and developed as an organisation providing a range of different services including their day centre, dementia outreach programme, various medical and social supports, and an intergenerational student befriending initiative. S.H.A.R.E offer a unique form of social housing as they provide sheltered accommodation helping bridge the gap between living alone and residential and nursing care.

This research was completed in collaboration with S.H.A.R.E through the University College Cork CARL initiative. This provided the researcher with an opportunity to take part in a community-based research project and to work closely with a housing organisation in order to provide information and learning for their future planning and development.

The project will raise questions around the effectiveness of current Irish housing policies and how they are impacting the most vulnerable and older members of society. The focus of this

dissertation specifically will look at the referral process and explore how referring agents find the experience of connecting their clients to S.H.A.R.E. The primary research that underpins this research will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and the participants taking part are professionals working in the housing sector with direct experience of referring clients to the organisation.

1.4 Research Rationale

Through the preliminary conversations between the researcher, supervisor, and the liaison person for S.H.A.R.E, it was clear that S.H.A.R.E do not want to operate in a place of stasis and were looking to learn and grow as an organisation. The focus of the research was developed through these conversations and it was decided the emphasis will be placed on the referral pathway and exploring the overall relevancy of the housing model of S.H.A.R.E. The research rationale is to gain valuable information and insights from different housing professionals in Cork City.

The researcher has been fortunate enough to work in the housing and homeless sector in both Cork, Dublin and Vancouver and has been employed in a variety of different roles. Also, the researcher was familiar with the organisation of S.H.A.R.E and excited with working with a local housing provider. There was a natural interest in the prospect of working with an agency that supports and works with older members of society especially in terms of their housing needs.

In terms of professional development, this CARL project will provide a seminal opportunity for the researcher to further develop and harness the skills required in social work. The research process is underpinned by strong communication between multiple professionals while always ensuring that the research and ethical protocols are adhered to and followed diligently. Conducting research on behalf of an organisation requires an immediate level of professionalism, responsibility, and commitment to the project. The research carried out will mirror the CORU (Social Workers Registration Board) standards of proficiencies that are required for practitioners as the study places a strong emphasis on interviewing, communication, collaboration, and quality assurance.

1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to explore the trends of applications to S.H.A.R.E and the overall relevancy of the housing model of S.H.A.R.E. The findings of this data will be put forward to S.H.A.R.E in order to allow S.H.A.R.E to plan and develop effectively for the future.

The core objectives of the research are:

1) To look into the referral pathway for potential clients of S.H.A.R.E and access is there a need to change, alter or restructure its criteria for accepting clients?
2) To carry out semi-structured interviews with referring agents who have direct experience referring their clients to S.H.A.R.E.
3) To explore and ascertain pertinent information from referring agents to investigate if S.H.A.R.E is meeting the needs of their clients.

1.6 Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1) Does the S.H.A.R.E referral system need to be adapted or changed?
2) Is the criteria for accepting clients deemed satisfactory or do referring agents find there is a need for this to be changed?
3) Are referring agencies satisfied that S.H.A.R. E's model is a viable option for their clients or is there a gap in services that should be highlighted?
4) What is the current government policy in relation to responding to housing and homeless crisis and how is S.H.A.R.E working within that current sphere?

1.7 Research Project Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one introduces background information to the partner organisation and also discusses the research rationale of the project. The research aims and objectives are presented, as well as the research questions which informed the project. Chapter one concludes by outlining a full chapter overview of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two consists of the review of the relevant literature and explores the housing sphere in Ireland and the challenges faced within that sector. The literature review also discusses certain themes which include social housing, the marketisation of housing, homelessness, ageing in place, ageing positively and housing for older people.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter three provides an overview of the research process and addresses the epistemological and the theoretical perspectives underpinning the research. The chapter will discuss the CARL initiative and highlight the community based participatory research (CBPR) aspect of the project. This chapter will then provide a comprehensive overview of the chosen methods, research methodology and also the challenges and limitations of the research. The chapter will conclude with addressing the ethical considerations and reflexive positioning of the research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

This chapter will outline and discuss the findings of the data collection and the qualitative research undertaken. The findings will be presented through thematic analysis. The analysed data will be discussed in conjunction with the relevant literature discussed in chapter two.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter five is the final chapter of the project. There will be concluding comments made by the researcher and a number of recommendations will be put forward. The recommendations will be based on the findings demonstrated in chapter four. This chapter finishes with a

reflective piece highlighting the experience of conducting the research and taking part in the CARL project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss in detail the relevant literature and provide an indebt analysis of the academic material relating to the research project. The literature review will highlight the housing sphere in Ireland and explore the interconnectedness of the public and private housing markets. The chapter will then discuss certain themes and explore its relevancy to the research. Specific themes include social housing, the marketisation of housing, homelessness, ageing in place, ageing positively and housing for older people.

2.2 Housing in Ireland

A perennial issue in Ireland has been housing and in particular the availability of suitable housing for the most vulnerable members of society. The housing crash and crisis that emerged post the breakdown of the 'Celtic Tiger' brought significant issues and challenges to society. The identity of Irish housing policies and legislation has taken the shape of fundamentally 'locking' individuals out of the opportunity to acquire affordable and sustainable housing (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018). This is the backdrop for Irish social policy which has led to an unprecedented housing and homeless crisis. It has brought about a plethora of systemic and structural challenges that have placed the housing system in Ireland and systems across the world in a state of 'shock' (Hearne, 2020). The characteristics of this within the Irish context show a dramatic visible increase in "housing inequalities and exclusion, [a] rise in homelessness, mortgage arrears and foreclosures, to the collapse in home-ownership rates and, in particular, the emergence of 'Generation Rent' and 'Generation Stuck at Home' (Hearne, 2020, p. 1). The reality for society is that the housing and homeless crisis impacts everybody. Worsening housing stocks and a general lack of available housing can affect individuals and communities as a whole (Hearne and Murphy, 2018). The argument to be put forward is that a lack of available housing can lead to a decline in social cohesion and bring about an erosion of the social fabric (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018).

2.3 Social Housing

Social housing is a frequent talking point in the Irish political sphere. The hangover of the aforementioned financial crash of 2009 arguably has not subsided, leading to profound issues for the Irish housing landscape. The literature highlights that Ireland's social housing model mirrored the boom/bust structure of the private market (Dukelow and Kennett, 2018). Irish social housing funding was high during the housing boom but when the financial crash occurred social housing stocks and availability greatly reduced. The public and private housing spheres were fundamentally interconnected: thus when any volatility was faced in the housing markets it led to the Irish social housing sector being greatly impacted. Internationally speaking Denmark's model contrasted to the Irish approach, as Denmark limited its social housing output during its boom and was able to increase it after the financial crash. This has resulted in many seeing the social housing sector in Denmark as something built with 'resilience' while the Irish social housing sphere being marred with 'fragility' (Byrne and Norris, 2020). These contrasting dynamics place Ireland in a far more socially and politically precarious position and as to why, quite simply, that "Ireland is currently facing an intense housing shortage and homelessness crisis while Denmark is not" (Byrne and Norris, 2020, p.2).

For Ireland post-crash the social housing supply became crippled due to a number of factors. The money owed to the IMF/EU, the neoliberal philosophies underpinning the Irish government and the backdrop of the global financial crisis itself all played significant roles to the severe decline of housing options in Ireland (Norris and Fahey, 2011). Byrne and Norris (2018) make the argument that the relationship between the public and private housing sector has a very complex and deep-rooted history with each other. This dichotomy of the public and private housing sectors has greatly affected policy as it has moved away from the traditional counter cyclical model of social housing acquisition and to something that has become "strongly procyclical and enhanced rather than alleviated the private housing market bubble and accentuated rather than mitigated the social effects of the crash that followed the bursting of that bubble" (Byrne and Norris, 2018 p. 51).

2.4 Marketisation of Housing

In terms of housing policy, the academic literature highlights that there was a plethora of substandard housing conditions across the country after the financial crash. A combination of austerity measures, a reduction or ceasing of regeneration plans compounded by intolerable conditions left society arguably having little to no faith in housing authorities (Hearne, 2020). Also, low level of funding towards more progressive housing policies like Housing First meant there is a still dearth of supported and social housing options available to the most vulnerable (O'Brien, 2019). There is often a conflict between tenants and local authorities of who bore the responsibility to maintain the accommodation (Hearne and Kenna, 2014).

As a result, the housing sphere has become dependent on the private sector with housing increasingly seen more as a commodity than a public good (Dukelow and Kennet, 2018). A central tenet of housing policies in Ireland is that there is a significant reliance on private investors to provide housing options as opposed to having robust policies that provide homes to suit the social need. Ireland faces a housing crisis that is rooted in neoliberalist thinking which is arguably having a profound impact for society. For Hearne (2020, p. 11) the housing crisis results from "specific neoliberal housing and economic policies pursued by government and the interlocking effects of growing social inequality and financialisation".

There is a prevailing view, within the literature, that Irish housing policy has moulded into a marketisation model and provided an unwanted bridge for individuals into the private sector (Dukelow and Kennet, 2018). Austerity measures in the past has led to a rapid decline in the construction of social housing leading to only 75 new local housing authority houses being built in 2015 (Hearne, 2017). For Hearne and Murphy (2018) the current policy of *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (2016) represents a decisive shift towards marketisation and placing individuals into the private sector. This is a move away from the original Rent Supplement (RS) scheme which morphed into the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and in 2014 it became reshaped and restructured into the current policy of HAP (Housing Assistance Payment). The idea in the creation of HAP was that it was new a form of social housing to be provided by local housing authorities across Ireland. However, there is a dichotomy at play here as to be able to gain entry to this form of social housing the access point is through the private sector. Hearne and Murphy (2018, p. 11) convey this marketisation as a transfer from the state to market forces through "concessions, delegated

management contracts, leasing and public–private partnerships, as well as the transformation of how welfare is delivered and paid for by using market concepts such as competition into the public sector". For Murphy and Dukelow (2016) what is pivotal here to acknowledge is that the acquisition of social housing is continuously stemming from the private rental sector. Furthermore, having policies that have shifted towards an overreliance of the private sector to provide suitable and affordable social housing has created conditions that have led more and more families into precarious housing positions and towards homelessness.

2.5 Homelessness

The United Nations defines homelessness as:

> "an egregious violation of human rights occurring in all countries, threatening the health and life of the most marginalized. Homelessness is the unacceptable result of States failing to implement the right to adequate housing. It requires urgent and immediate human rights responses by the international community and by all States" (UN, 2017 p.1).

In 2016 *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* was introduced to address the homeless crisis in Ireland (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2016) which was an expansion on previous housing policies *Construction 2020* and *Social Housing Strategy 2020* (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2014). For Hearne (2020) this was the first government strategy in over two decades that did not set out the aspiration of ending homelessness. A focus shifted towards the 'inputs' of housing as opposed to 'outcomes' of addressing homelessness.

Arguably this places an extra strain on housing providers as there is an unheralded amount of pressure for organisations to work in a social sphere where homeless figures are constantly on the rise. Current homeless figures in Ireland show there were 8,238 people homeless in Ireland for the month of February in 2021 with 408 of those adults were in Cork (Department of Housing, 2021). In the South West region (Cork and Kerry) there were 42 families homeless with 107 children within those families (Department of Housing, 2021). For Hearne (2020, p.

49) the structural causes and factors that have caused the huge rise in homelessness in Ireland "are the housing crisis, weak tenant protections and a lack of social housing, interlinked with economic issues of inequality, low wages, discrimination and poverty". There has been less of an emphasis on procurement of suitable social housing towards an expectation that the private market will be able to ameliorate the lack of available housing and increase housing stocks. This also coincides with there being a myriad of insecure, unaffordable, and substandard accommodation options for families and the most vulnerable members of society throughout the country (Byrne and Norris, 2018).

2.6 Homelessness and the Elderly

Sermons and Henry (2010) state the rates of homelessness among the elderly will increase significantly in years to come. With an increasing ageing population there is the potential for increasing financial uncertainty too. The literature demonstrates that often older people reside in accommodation that is deteriorating and frequently in decline. Older people often reside in accommodation which are often owner occupied for long periods of time. However, a common challenge faced is that the accommodation is frequently "large, with poor accessibility and a lack of adaptation for functional limitations and the owner may be responsible for the upkeep and maintenance" (Abramsson and Andersson, 2016, p. 218). Ytrehus and Fyhn (2006) suggest that knowledge amongst older cohorts of the population around moving and potential housing options is typically quite low and this could arguably play a significant part in why individuals often stay in dwellings even when they may be deemed unsuitable. For Roy et al. (2018) older people often lack the relevant information to make valued based informed housing decisions. In an Irish context, Boyle (2012) highlights that older people often have limited knowledge of sheltered accommodation options and there are often misconceptions around these schemes as there is an automatic association with a loss of freedom and independence. Fox et al. (2017) puts forward the need to introduce more education and communication towards older people to ensure that they are more aware of the housing options potentially available to them.

2.7 Sheltered Accommodation

A viable and often misunderstood housing option for older people is accessing sheltered and supported accommodation. Under the rubric of social housing, sheltered housing can be defined as a "group housing schemes for older people or disabled people where the residents have their own apartments or houses" (Fox et al., 2017, p.3). Cullen et al. (2007) assert that this housing option is typically means tested and managed by city or county councils or other housing charities. The research demonstrates that in Ireland older people's views and experience of sheltered accommodation is overall positive (Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, 2013). The literature distilled is that sheltered accommodation provides a "combination of independence and security which accounts for the generally high levels of satisfaction among tenants of sheltered housing" (Fox et al. 2017, p.12). Croucher, Hicks, and Jackson (2006) add that remaining connected to a community and social network is a central reason as to why older people report high levels of satisfaction in relation to sheltered accommodation.

2.8 Ageing Society in Ireland

One of the core goals of the National Positive Ageing Strategy directly mentions the importance of "enable[ing] people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible" (Department of Health, 2013, p. 21). It is imperative for public policies to be underpinned with the need to promote and to support the ageing population to have healthy lives in their community and in their homes. The argument can be made that the concept of 'ageing' goes beyond just a health issue as society "needs a collaborative response to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our ageing citizens" (Positive Aging, 2006, p. 4). The Irish Longitudinal Study on Aging (TILDA) project that 14.1% of the population of Ireland will be over the age of 65 by 2021 meaning that polices need to respond adequately to this emerging societal trend (TILDA, 2017).

2.9 Ageing in Place

The prevailing view within the literature is that older people choose to remain in their accommodation due to the common desire to 'age in place'. Older people derive a significant level of meaning from their home environment and develop an important sense of attachment and familiarity (Hillcoat-Nallétam and Ogg, 2017). The literature contends that older people value highly the meanings derived from home like "autonomy, independence, security and continuity of self-identity, c

reate[ing] strong preferences for ageing in place and continuing to live in one's own home" (Stobes and Gullifer, 2016, p. 454). Sun et al. (2020) conveys that 'ageing in place' has benefits for individuals as it ensures that social relationships are maintained, promotes having a routine and structure and provides individuals control of their lives.

This physical space for an individual is also deemed critical in terms of ageing positively and ensuring that older people successfully 'age in place' (Grove, 2020). Age Action Ireland (2017) state that 10.4% of individuals over the age of 55 struggle to keep their home warm all year-round while around a quarter of individuals would struggle to maintain and keep their physical home in adequate condition. The literature highlights that the condition of the home environment can have a profound effect on the quality of life and the physical and mental health of the older population. Orr et al. (2016) highlight that in Ireland older adults who struggle to heat their home have poorer self-rated health, are twice as a likely to exhibit clinically depressive symptoms and report chronic pain as opposed to those without heating difficulties. Coleman et al. (2016) stresses that policies need to incorporate the diverse circumstances of older people and address the emotional side of home maintenance and the managerial aspects of a home. The literature demonstrates that there is a correlation between the home environment of an older person with their physical and mental health. In substandard accommodation or accommodation that has been consistently deteriorating there is often a mirroring of an individual's mental and physical health (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015).

Fox et al. (2017) study on the housing needs of older people in sheltered and social housing reinforce the assertion that older people's preference in Ireland is to 'age in place'. The literature suggests that the 'oldest old' (aged 85 and above) have one of the highest housing

mobility rates in society but have the lowest in terms of intentions and wanting to move (Abramsson and Andersson, 2016). There is a paradox of mobility here and this should be considered when developing and constructing positive policies that incorporate 'ageing in place'. The research indicates, for both Ireland and internationally, that older members of the population are very resistant to moving to other more suitable accommodation whether those are care facilities or sheltered accommodation. Abramsson and Andersson (2016, p.218) denote that for older members of society "poorly adapted housing can become a reason for moving to institutional care or necessitate costly modifications of the current dwelling if other housing options are not available or a real choice". Other typical factors why individuals are very reticent to move include the self-identity and attachment that one has with their home (Arrigoitia et al., 2018) and the fear of the 'dreaded social imaginary' of care and institutionalised homes (Higgs and Gilleard, 2015).

2.10 Age Friendly Accommodation

The Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (2013) state that the preference of older people across Ireland is to live independently in their homes for as long as possible. Coleman et al. (2016) asserts that having well designed homes with appropriate supports in place can positively impact the quality of life and promote independence for older people. With emerging health trends and predictive modelling, it is expected that the population of the over 65s will be at around 1.4 million in Ireland by 2040, which will account for almost a quarter of the population (Hearne, 2020). It is also predicted that there will be a need for 150,000 age friendly accommodations constructed by 2031 (Hearne, 2017). Cleary and McAvoy (2015) speak about the importance of developing age friendly communities as it can lead to a reduction in social exclusion and isolation for older people while also modifying dementia risk.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the research process and the theoretical foundations that were applied throughout the research. This research was part of the UCC CARL initiative which will be discussed and highlight the community based participatory research (CBPR) elements of the project. The epistemological and theoretical perspectives which informed the study will also be addressed. This chapter will then provide a comprehensive overview of the chosen methods that were applied to the research. The research methodology and methods will be explained as well as the challenges and limitations of this research. The chapter will conclude with addressing the ethical considerations and reflexive positioning that was considered for the research.

3.2 Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological positioning of the research is rooted in social constructionism. Social constructionism concerns itself with the idea that individuals create their social reality from individual and collective actions (Charmaz, 2006). Social constructionism is underpinned by the idea that an individual's views and beliefs of the world are intrinsically linked with their actions. This perspective studies "what people at a particular time and place take as real, how they construct their views and actions, when different constructions arise, whose constructions become taken as definitive, and how that process ensues" (Charmaz, 2006 p. 189). The social constructionism viewpoint argues that our understanding of the social world is historically and culturally specific (Houston, 2001). Ritchie et al. (2014) assert there is an interrelatedness between the social, political, and psychological aspects of society that all influence and play a significant role in shaping our understanding of the world. This becomes the backdrop and essentially "the premise that we create our sense of, and meanings about, our social surroundings and ourselves in our conversations and interactions with those around us" (Cunliffe, 2008 p. 129).

This approach allowed the research to value each participant's individual perception of their experience of referring clients and working with S.H.A.R.E. In the study there are significant variances in each referring agent's views, actions and experiences of the referral process and

applying a social constructionist perspective allowed for each of their subjective reality to be reflected.

3.3 Theoretical Perspectives

The primary theoretical framework that shaped this project stemmed from an interpretivist perspective. The research is underpinned by an interpretivist approach as the research was interested in participants experiences of working and referring clients to S.H.A.R.E. The researcher applied an interpretivist lens in the study as the participants derive different meanings and understandings from working closely and advocating for clients in accessing suitable and supported housing (Creswell, 2013). For Carey (2009, p. 53) an interpretivist perspective is underpinned by the idea that "the researcher endeavours to understand the opinions, emotional responses and attitudes articulated by participants and then link these to people's behaviours and actions and, finally contextualize the views and conduct of participants". This lens is the foundation and the main focal point for the research as it valued the individual experiences of the participants.

The data was collected through interviewing professionals working within the housing and homeless sector who had direct experience referring clients to S.H.A.R.E. The research questions were developed through preliminary meetings and discussions with the S.H.A.R.E representative. This information and data were then interpreted in the final findings and recommendations.

3.4 Community Based Participatory Research

The dissertation was carried out in conjunction with the UCC CARL (Community Action Research Links) initiative which involved using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach. The ethos underpinning a CBPR approach is "to bring together researchers and communities to establish trust, share power, foster co-learning, enhance strengths and resources, build capacity, and examine and address community-identified needs and health problems" (Lesser and Oscós-Sánchez, 2007, p. 17). A central tenet of CBPR is for researchers to work collaboratively with community organisations to disseminate seminal knowledge for

the purpose of achieving social justice and community development (Bates and Burns, 2012). The community-based research and production of knowledge "has an explicit goal of translating the findings and research process into action for change at community and/or national level" (Mcllrath et al., 2014 p. 5).

The CBPR philosophy strives to achieve purposeful change within a community through the research process and civil engagement (Wilson et al., 2020). The identity and 'flavour' of CBPR is often derived "from the local culture, disciplinary background of the participants, policy frameworks and available resources" (Mcllrath et al., 2014, p. 3). This research was carried out with the housing charity S.H.A.R.E and the researcher worked in collaboration with the head of services in order to shape and scaffold the research. The working relationship and regular communication between researcher and the organisation was an integral part for the research. This was in order to ensure that the study was focussed, and that the direction of the project would be of benefit for the organisation.

3.5 Research Methodology

Qualitative research can be defined as "a method of study that seeks to represent the complex worlds of respondents in a holistic on the ground manner" (Padgett, 2016, p. 15). For Punch (1998, p. 4) qualitative research is typically descriptive and a form of "empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers". To its core qualitative research concerns itself with the study of the natural environment, attempting to make sense and interpret phenomena in terms of the lives people live and how they derive meaning from them (Creswell 2013). Neutens (2014) compliments this by asserting that qualitative researchers are interested by the environment as behaviours and actions are frequently influenced by the natural setting. For Carey (2009, p. 90) a "methodology influenced by interpretivism will emphasize the importance of meaning, identity and personal experience to research participants". Therefore, qualitative research was considered the most appropriate method for the research.

3.6 Research Methods

The research method that was employed were semi-structured interviews. The study concerned itself with understanding and interpreting referring agent's experience of working directly with S.H.A.R.E and the meanings they derived from working in the housing sphere. The researcher decided that semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate research method for the study. The initial plan was to construct surveys in conjunction with the interviews; however, it was decided that this research instrument would not accurately reflect the data and experiences of the participants.

3.6.1 Sampling

The participants were recruited through the CARL initiative and the working partnership with S.H.A.R.E. Purposive sampling was applied during the research. Neutens (2014) opine that this type of sampling allows for the participants to be selected on the basis that they meet specific criteria and have certain features that will potentially align with the themes of the research. Bryman (2012) asserts that purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling approach with a strategic element as the participants involved will usually be relevant to the research questions posed. The S.H.A.R.E link worker connected the researcher with a 'gatekeeper' to a number of different organisations and through these channels the participants were identified and recruited (Creswell, 2013).

3.6.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The results of the qualitative data were analysed through a process called thematic analysis. Themes were developed which can provide a "highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.3). For Braun and Clarke (2006) a rigorous use of thematic analysis can provide a trustworthiness and insightfulness to the findings and is a foundational method for qualitative research. Four main themes were developed, interpreted, and examined in conjunction with the literature which are presented in the findings.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As this study involved carrying out primary research by conducting semi-structured interviews it was essential that the research was approved by the MSW Research Ethics Committee (REC) before commencing. Upon initial application the researcher needed to resubmit on two occasions to ensure greater detail and attention was adhered to in the study. Further clarity around the 'gatekeeper' protocols, storage of information and details in relation to the proposed surveys were required by the ethics committee before approval. The Research Ethics Committee granted approval for the research to proceed on the 16th of February 2021. Given the nature of the project there were other ethical elements that needed to be considered closely. These were:

Voluntary Participation: This is a CARL project so each participant was made aware that this research will be carried out on behalf of S.H.A.R.E. Every participant taking part was doing so on a voluntary basis

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained in writing and each participant was aware of the details of the research. An information sheet was sent to each participant, so there was clarity and certainty around their participation and that they were aware of the protocols that the researcher undertook.

Confidentiality: Strict protocols were followed to ensure all participants were kept anonymous. Any extracts from participants that are quoted in the text were entirely anonymous with no personal identifiers being used and pseudonyms being used in the transcript.

Withdrawal: All participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews were aware of their rights as participants in the research. It was the researcher's responsibility to let each participant know about their research rights and right to withdraw. Each interview participant had the right to withdraw up to two weeks after an interview had taken place and could request to have their data destroyed.

3.8 Reflexive Positioning

For Charmaz (2006, p.188) reflexivity is considered "the researcher's scrutiny of his or her research experience, decisions, and interpretations in ways that bring the researcher into the process and allow the reader to assess how to and to what extent the researcher's interests, positions, and assumptions influenced inquiry". A reflexive stance informs how the researcher conducts and connects to the research and the participants in the study. If the researcher is clear and conveys the context and intersecting nature of the study there is potential to increase the credibility of the research (Berger, 2015) while also deepening the understanding of the research (Dodgson, 2019). This researcher was drawn to this particular research topic due to previous work experiences. This researcher has worked in the homeless sector both in Ireland and abroad and gravitated towards the opportunity to work closely with a housing charity. This research actively incorporated reflexivity throughout the research process and acknowledged and tuned into the researcher's own biases, experiences, and preconceived notions around the subject matter.

3.9 Challenges and Limitations

In the initial stages the researcher envisioned the primary research would be carried out through semi-structured interviews and surveys. The researcher made the decision to focus exclusively on the semi-structured interviews and remove the survey aspect to the research. On reflection, the researcher was satisfied with the decision to not conduct surveys. However, it did lead to a loss of time with the construction of a number of draft surveys and seeking approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC).

The global pandemic brought its own challenge to the research. Though the researcher was able to contact most participants over email and conducted interviews successfully on the GDPR approved Microsoft Teams two participants who initially did declare an interest in taking part had to withdraw before interviews commenced. Both individuals stated the extra strain of working during a global pandemic and within a housing crisis as a reason in not being able to take part.

Also due to the pandemic the research was not able to visit any of the S.H.A.R.E buildings or sites to get a richer understanding and stronger depth of knowledge of the organisation as a whole.

3.10 Conclusion:

This chapter demonstrated an overview of the methodology and approaches taken throughout the various stages of the research. The epistemological and theoretical perspectives of social constructionism and interpretivism were outlined as the framework of the dissertation. The chapter also highlighted the role of CBPR in detail which informs and scaffolds the research. The chapter illustrated the research methodology and methods that was applied throughout the research process. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the reflexive positioning, ethical considerations and also the challenges and limitations of the research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter will outline and discuss the findings from the data collection outlined in chapter three in conjunction with the literature. The qualitative data was thematically analysed and grouped into the following categories:

1. **Referral Pathway**
2. **S.H.A.R.E Housing Model**
3. **S.H.A.R.E Criteria**
4. **Additional Complexities**

The themes were developed from the participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were divided into two sections. The first half of the interview asked S.H.A.R.E specific questions in an effort to glean relevant information from referring agents of their direct experience of working with S.H.A.R.E. The second half looked at asking general housing questions relating to the challenges faced by referring agents in accessing suitable accommodation for their clients.

Throughout this chapter the analysis of the findings will take place in an effort to consider if there is a need for S.H.A.R.E to look at their current housing model in relation to the referral pathway and their criteria for accepting clients.

4.2 Theme 1: Referral Pathway

Participants were directly asked about their experience of referring and connecting their clients to S.H.A.R.E.

4.2.1: Referral Form

The referral form was asked about, and all participants had experience in filling the referral form out. When asked specifically about the referral form one participant, who had recently referred someone to S.H.A.R.E stated:

"It's very straightforward because it is not long. I have done all sorts of referrals for all different services that have too many pages to fill out".

Feedback from all participants stated that the process of filling out the form was consistently positive. During one interview, when discussing the questions on the form, the participant asserted that the details and questions asked were deemed fair and appropriate:

"I mean all those (questions) *are relevant and needed, they're not a nursing home"*

4.2.2: References

On the referral form it is a requirement to have two references when putting someone forward to be considered for S.H.A.R.E. Two participants in the interviews highlighted that this is often a perceived barrier when referring a client to S.H.A.R.E, especially if there is a history of homelessness. The referral form asks for two referees/references. The criteria for this, is that S.H.A.R.E will accept a reference from a medical practitioner, a support worker or from a service user from where the person resides but that they will need two more references on top of that.

One practitioner noted that by having a history of being homeless, it can be difficult to obtain two references outside their normal support network:

"many of the clients who have been long term homeless or long time institutionalized or living a long time in services like this, sometimes they do not have references, sometimes they don't have the kind of friend who can be cool and give a reference"

Another participant echoed a similar sentiment as clients who are already in supported accommodation can sometimes have smaller social networks, reducing the options available for the potential of a positive reference:

"we have a lot of long-term guys who we are working with very hard at the moment, to try and get them into their own place… but, because they have been living here in [place removed] *so long, they can't get a reference, so you know that's a huge barrier".*

4.2.3: Communication

The participants acknowledged the importance of communication between S.H.A.R.E and other organisations. Participants highlighted experiencing both positive and negative experiences in relation to communication and discussing previous referrals which were made.

One participant drew from experiences where they felt that there was a long waiting time for information in relation to a referral made:

> *"communication could be a little bit better. And sometimes we are waiting a good few weeks as well for a yes and no at all from them* (S.H.A.R.E). *And that is kind of frustrating from the service and from the service users' point of view".*

It is important to highlight that this is not consistent as other participants stated positive experiences in relation to communication when working with S.H.A.R.E:

> *"There's no difficulties like they always let you know where things are at, communications really good with them".*

With another interviewee stating that:

> *"they* (S.H.A.R.E) *usually been on the ball that way, reporting back to us, whether they're going to accept the person or not. Or they are usually very good to turn up for appointments".*

One participant acknowledged that, within their own organisation, there may be a high turnover of staff and that communication could falter as a result:

> *"one person could have a lot of contact with S.H.A.R.E, think of them automatically, then a new person comes in and you get put onto a conveyor belt, which often housing is, and sometimes it takes them a while to figure out what is happening locally and what kind of options you have"*

In terms of the communication between S.H.A.R.E and potentially new clients, one participant put across that their own work would benefit with having some information sheets/leaflets/packs available to prospective tenants. The participant felt having something '*physical*' to represent S.H.A.R.E would help the process of having to '*sell it*' to their clients.

Discussion:

The referral pathway to S.H.A.R.E was a central theme in the research. All six participants had direct experience in putting forward clients to be considered for S.H.A.R.E. Overall the experience was considered positive and each participant felt that the referral form was easy to navigate with the requested information feeling relevant and necessary. The timeline and accepting of clients as a tenant were considered an issue and a source of frustration. However, the literature shows that on average 56% of those on a social housing waiting list wait longer than three years for accommodation (Hearne, 2020). The findings also demonstrate the importance of communication between the different organisations and S.H.A.R.E. An effective approach to strengthen communication between organisations is to introduce information packs which make clear reference to the referral pathway and potential timelines.

As demonstrated the references was considered a challenge at times for referring agents. S.H.A.R.E will accept a GP or a support worker reference, however, this is predicated on the nature and length of that relationship. This means that those references (GP or support worker etc) are not necessarily weighted the same compared to other references. It may be of benefit if there is a clear/suitable reference, or an omission list made available and communicated to referring agents going forward.

4.3 Theme 2: S.H.A.R.E Housing Model

The S.H.A.R.E housing model provides supported accommodation underpinned by an independent living ethos. There are 140 single units available providing a form of social housing meaning each tenant is required to be on the Cork City Council housing list. S.H.A.R.E is an approved housing body that provides sheltered accommodation while being underpinned by principles that promote autonomy, security, and independence.

4.3.1: Accommodation for Older People

All participants spoke positively and highlighted the importance of having a housing model specifically tailored for older people. All six participants stressed that this model was valuable and needed. Three participants made direct reference in wanting to see an expansion of S.H.A.R.E services with one participant stating for the need of more 'S.H.A.R.E like services' to be made available in Cork City and Cork County.

Participants stressed that the geography and location of the suitable housing was a very important factor for clients. Two participants made direct reference to where S.H.A.R.E was situated and put across the point that older people have significant identity and meaning with where they live.

4.3.2: Supported Accommodation

A participant in the interviews discussed that it was imperative that housing bodies espouse to the principle of ensuring there is a *'tenancy sustainment model'* within the organisation. One participant opined that housing providers should develop a housing model that allows the tenants to sustain and maintain their accommodation:

> *"it's pointless if people have to keep moving for one reason or another from provider to provider to area to area, you know… In general, if people have that* (S.H.A.R.E) *model that they will work with the tenant to make the tenancy stick, that's a big plus".*

Another interviewee alluded to the fact that clients sometimes want that level of support and feel comfortable knowing that there is someone checking in on them. One referring agent stated that there is *'a sense of security'* with this type of housing model. All interviews indicated very positively in relation to the supported accommodation:

> *"we particularly like the way S.H.A.R.E work".*

This participant expanded on this by stating that, from his experience, tenants of S.H.A.R.E have spoken positively about and have actively requested to be connected with them as:

> *"They're an organization that people like to be associated with it".*

In terms of the housing model, participants of the study spoke positively of the space that S.H.A.R.E fill in terms of the housing support. S.H.A.R.E provide supported accommodation while still promoting independence for their clients. S.H.A.R.E seemingly occupy a space where their clients are not private renting but also not at a level where they might require overnight/24-hour support. For one participant this is a needed area for development and expansion in housing and this space:

> *"S.H.A.R.E seem to fit that perfectly".*

Another participant stressed the importance of this model as there are older members of the population, living alone and in precarious positions financially:

> *"it* (S.H.A.R.E model) *is needed because there's some people who just live alone and are just not able to go home or aren't able to keep renting but just have to, they're not at the nursing home stage*".

Discussion:

It should be noted that older people in Ireland, living in social housing are "more vulnerable than their counterparts in the general population [as they] they have poorer economic, social, and physical wellbeing and are at risk of experiencing poorer health and lower life expectancy" (Fox et al., 2017 p.2). With an increasing population size, it is imperative that social housing models are constructed in a way that are conducive to the needs of the older population (Van Hoof and Boerenfijn, 2018) while also being cost-effective (Fox et al., 2017). Having a supported independent living model brings with it a level of security and also introduces the possibility for older people to 'age in place'. The research highlighted how geography and location was considered of high importance for clients. Sun et al. (2020) highlight that older people develop 'emotional links' and an identity with where they live. Going forward it is imperative to consider geography when developing age friendly accommodation to ensure that older people can remain in their communities and age positively.

One of the core goals of the National Positive Ageing Strategy highlights the importance for older people to age with dignity, security and crucially within their own community

(Department of Health, 2013). The Cork City Council and Cork County Joint Housing Strategy stress the importance of introducing "home and community-based services aimed at allowing older people to stay in their own homes, particularly for those older people who fall into the low to medium dependency categories" (Joint Housing Strategy, 2014). The research demonstrates that there is relevancy and value to the S.H.A.R.E housing model, as they seem fill that needed space. The interviews have highlighted that the organisation espouse to principles of independent living while also providing a 'sustainment model' and safety net for their tenants. Housing bodies like S.H.A.R.E provide stable accommodation for individuals who are not at the level of care to be in a nursing home. It is assumed that if there was an absence of independent living accommodations available in Ireland there would be an increase of 5% of older people being placed in nursing homes (Mulholland and Molloy, 2020).

4.4 Theme 3: S.H.A.R.E criteria

The criteria to be considered for S.H.A.R.E is the following: the individual must be over the age of 60, must be on the Cork City Council social housing list while also not currently owning any property. The properties are single units meaning that couples are not accepted or permitted to stay overnight.

4.4.1: Age

The minimum age criteria did arise frequently in the interviews and there was an acknowledgement that S.H.A.R. E's specific age criteria can be a challenging aspect. One referring agent did note that:

> *"the very specific age threshold can be a barrier to us in finding candidates".*

Conversely to this, another participant was clear that they were very content and felt that age of 60 and above was deemed very satisfactory:

> "*Oh, the age is perfect. I like that about them* (S.H.A.R.E)".

While another participant, who did speak very highly of the organisation, did state that:

> *""If it came down five years it would be a help".*

Certain participants acknowledged that there was an understanding of the age criteria and that each organisation have their own parameters and it is about working within those criteria when referring clients:

> *"They have their own criteria and according to that criteria, they do assessments based on the criteria if the client is suitable for the service or not. I am very clear for example with the criteria that S.H.A.R.E has about age and specific kind of aspects and like that, sure we have our own criteria as well".*

All six participants in the interviews stated that there is a dearth of accommodation available to the over 60s in Cork City and in Cork County. One participant making a particular reference to the complicated nature of finding suitable accommodation for older members of the population:

> *"The issue with over 60s is that a lot of the time, they're coming to us due to a family breakup are something along those lines and they can be more complicated to deal with, then we say somebody of 25 who was applying for a house".*

4.4.2: Single Units

S.H.A.R.E accommodation offers single units for individuals over the age of 60 and a specific aspect is that S.H.A.R.E stipulates that tenants cannot have family members or partners staying overnight.

A participant in the interview highlighted that couples, aged 60 and above, struggle with accessing supported accommodation:

> *"like you'd wonder could there be accommodation made available for couples because, like we do know, we see it in our work here. We know that there are couples who are living in substandard housing as well".*

The same participant went on and noted that if there was scope to accommodate couples in the S.H.A.R.E complexes it would be considered very welcome. The recommendation put forward was to introduce a certain number of units for couples only within the complexes.

4.4.3: Owning Property

Another item that was brought up for discussion was the issue of owning property. A criteria to be considered for social housing in Cork City (and a tenant of S.H.A.R.E) is that an individual cannot currently own property. This includes property, under one's name, even if the person is not currently residing there and even if the person has been out of the accommodation for a number of years.

There is a complexity involved when trying to find an individual suitable accommodation when there is a previous ownership of a property:

> *"you might have somebody who owns property, and the property might be in terrible condition and they might not have the money to change the terrible condition of the property or whatever and they might say, 'I want S.H.A.R.E'. And it's not going to be possible".*

Another participant when asked about barriers faced when trying to refer someone to suitable housing made note of the challenge of working with someone when they own property:

> *"It could be in really bad condition, but it could be in their name, and it could cost thousands and thousands to make it habitable for them and they don't have the funding. It's just very complex sometimes".*

It was noted by one participant that this was often a source of frustration for their work as there appeared to be no clear solution to this issue.

Discussion:

Cleary and McAvoy (2015) denote that age friendly accommodation are very important as they can reduce social isolation, increase social inclusion and be a positive mitigating factor against the development of dementia for older people. The research has demonstrated that there is a significant lack of suitable accommodation available for older people in Ireland. The reality is that age friendly accommodation and 'rightsizing' is not a profitable endeavour, as the private market forces tend to not adjust and accommodate to this social need. Housing

policies underpinned by a neoliberalist ideology do not prioritise affordable and accessible housing for older people (Dukelow and Kennet, 2018). The argument could be made that there is an overreliance on the non-profit and charity sectors to provide suitable housing for older people and vulnerable members of the population.

S.H.A.R.E provides a unique form of supported social housing for the over 60 population in Cork City. There are 140 units in Cork City and the research conveys that S.H.A.R.E provide an important resource and support for individuals who may find themselves in a vulnerable housing situation and this is valued very highly by referring agents. However, owning property is a constant issue faced by practitioners trying to access suitable accommodation for their clients. Four participants made direct reference to the challenge of finding older people suitable accommodation when they still own property. It should be acknowledged there is an inherent complexity involved when owning property and the literature does not provide a clear solution to this. The legislation states that adults in Ireland are not eligible for social housing (therefore supported or sheltered accommodation) if they own land or property as it is considered reasonable that individuals could reside in those properties (Social Housing Assessment Regulations Act, 2011). There is not a clear pathway to local authority housing unless individuals sell their property or take part in 'downsizing' initiatives. The literature has stressed that knowledge of housing options is consistently low with older people (Fox et al., 2017) while also the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in conjunction with The Irish Longitudinal Study on Aging (TILDA) have asserted that is rare for older people to move home and mobility remains consistently low (Barrett and Kelly, 2016).

Cork City Council do allow for individuals to go onto HAP (Housing Assistance Payment) if an individual still owns property if their home is deemed uninhabitable and certain conditions are met. As discussed, HAP is a form of social housing and this could be considered a positive alternative. However, the literature has demonstrated that by accessing HAP individuals are effectively entering the private sector and potentially being placed in a different precarious housing situation. The researcher contends that this is not deemed a positive solution for older people. This approach is effectively placing vulnerable individuals into a new vulnerable position preventing the '*tenancy sustainment model*' that referring agents have advocated for.

4.5 Theme 4: Additional Complexities

Throughout the interviews it became apparent there were also additional complexities and challenges faced when supporting and advocating for clients to access supported accommodation.

4.5.1: Addiction

The interviews highlighted that for referring agents, a constant barrier faced is finding suitable accommodation for those actively drinking alcohol or have had addiction issues in the past. One participant advocated for more housing organisations and included S.H.A.R.E, to accommodate more older people who are actively drinking.

Another participant drew from their experience of working with S.H.A.R.E and felt that there could be some scope to be more flexible when assessing individuals as suitable if there are addiction concerns:

> *"We have a lot of dealings with S.H.A.R.E, but we do find that if somebody has a history of alcohol use and S.H.A.R.E aren't inclined to take them, even though like we might be advocating that the service user that he's drinking, he does drink but it's very manageable".*

A participant identified a history of addiction as a barrier for their clients in accessing accommodation. This participant had experiences of referring clients, who they felt were stable and functioning well, however due the history of their addiction felt that S.H.A.R.E:

> *"have a very high criteria in relation to addiction history and from what I can see for example, is they will be looking into someone that is pretty much stable on the addiction, basically like not even having an addiction will be best".*

One participant understood that addiction can bring challenges but advocated for housing providers, like S.H.A.R.E, to potentially consider these individuals as future clients:

> *"if we understand addiction, and if we understand that many of our clients have addiction but many of them could be functional. Maybe just considering that a little bit, and maybe just giving the chance to these people".*

This participant did emphasis that it did not fall exclusively on S.H.A.R.E to support these individuals and promoted a multi-agency approach to allow for any potential clients with S.H.A.R.E to be supported and effectively sustain their tenancy.

4.5.3: Homelessness

The issue of supporting clients with a history of homelessness arose throughout the interviews. A referring agent advocated for the need of housing providers and services to accommodate more for clients with a history of homelessness. One participant felt that this is a constant battle for her work, and it is imperative that individuals and agencies strive:

> *"to break down the barriers to people who are homeless trying to access housing because there is a stigma attached to people who are homeless".*

4.5.2: Mental Health

It was discussed during the interviews that trying to access suitable accommodation for individuals with mental health issues is a perennial challenge for referring agents. Participants asserted that there is often a lack of available housing services available to individuals with mental health challenges:

> *"For people who have mental health difficulties, or intellectual disabilities, it is always a grey area that people need extra support in housing".*

A participant alluded to the need to increase the number of housing options available with mental health issues:

> *"S.H.A.R.E or any housing association or somebody should provide more housing options for people with mental health difficulties"*.

A significant theme present within the qualitative data is that the '*grey area'* that can exist in supporting an individual with complex needs. A person might be struggling to live independently, however there are:

"people with mental health struggles or people who have care needs aren't necessarily meeting the threshold for nursing home care, they're not quite there but they end up going to nursing home care as there isn't any other options for them in the city or county".

Discussion:

It is important to highlight that providing housing for individuals with addiction and substance misuse is a constant challenge in society. In terms of housing models Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Housing First, and recovery housing are specialised approaches to providing housing options for those with addiction struggles or with a history of addiction. A Housing First model has been rolled out in under the *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (2016) and although the numbers are small comparatively, the results yielded have been very positive. Allen and O'Sullivan (2020) denote that by the end of 2018 there were 232 individuals being supported by Housing First with there being an 86 per cent housing sustainment rate. The National Implementation Plan for Housing First 2018 -2021 was an expansion on this progress as an approach to reduce homelessness and increase housing supports for individuals with mental health and addiction struggles.

Orr et al. (2016) assert that poor housing conditions in a home can lead in a decline in the physical and mental health for older Irish adults. To safeguard against this *The Thinking Ahead: The Financial Benefits of Investing in Supported Housing for Older People* (2020), *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population* (2019) and *The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (2016) were all put forward to implement positive supports and strategies to ensure that housing conditions for older people were conducive to their mental and physical health. These polices are deemed very positive in nature; however, the argument should be made in terms of actual numbers and acquisition of housing that support older people and that incorporate older people's mental health and addiction struggles remains very low throughout Ireland.

The researcher contends that it cannot fall exclusively on housing providers like S.H.A.R.E to fill in the gap and the '*grey area'* in housing as there is such an inherent complexity involved when addressing and supporting individuals with mental health and addiction issues.

However, that does not preclude S.H.A.R.E from potentially being involved in housing-led progressive polices and playing a part in ensuring that the most vulnerable gain access to housing. The researcher puts forward the introduction of a pilot scheme, on a very small scale, a Housing First approach to support older people with addiction and mental health struggles. The researcher does not underestimate the work that this would involve. However, the research does contend that with emerging legislation and national policies it is something that should be worth considering. This potential pilot scheme would need to be underpinned by a significant multi-agency approach and buy in from many organisations, including S.H.A.R.E, Cork City Council, Galtan CLG and Cork Simon Community.

Conclusion:

This chapter has discussed the findings and analysis of the interviews that took place in the research. The qualitative findings were divided into four main themes following thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The chapter discussed these findings within the context of the literature. The final chapter of the study will now put forward a number of recommendations and conclusions based on the findings of the research.

Chapter Five: Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The final chapter will provide an overall conclusion to the research based on the aims and findings as set out throughout the research. A number of recommendations will then be put forward based on the research undertaken and from the qualitative analysis of the interviews. The chapter will conclude by identifying areas of further research followed by a reflective piece on the experience of taking part in a CARL initiative with U.C.C and S.H.A.R.E.

5.2 Concluding Comments

The primary research was completed through conducting six semi-structured interviews with referring agents who worked for different housing organisations. The aim of the research was to explore the trends of applications to S.H.A.R.E and look into the overall relevancy of the housing model of S.H.A.R.E. It should be noted that the qualitative research undertaken highlighted that the prevailing view of S.H.A.R.E as an organisation was very positive. The research demonstrated that the participants valued S.H.A.R.E highly as an organisation. S.H.A.R. E's housing model provides supported accommodation for the over 60s population which is underpinned by an independent living ethos. The research asserts that this is viewed as a very needed and pertinent type of housing and deemed not just relevant but also very essential. Having accommodation of this nature also allows for older people to remain in their communities and to successfully 'age in place'. All participants in the research advocated for more services similar to S.H.A.R.E to be made available and there was a clear appetite for this type of housing mode to be made available in Cork City and Cork County.

A goal was to look into the referral pathway for clients when connecting clients to the organisation. Participants found that the referral process was deemed positive and that referring clients to S.H.A.R.E was typically straightforward with minimal issues. There were times that communication could be improved upon and the references piece could benefit from introducing more clarity around the issue. Within the referral process an objective of the research was to ascertain if the criteria for accepting clients was deemed satisfactory by referring agents. The results demonstrated that S.H.A.R.E were meeting the needs of different

housing agent's clients. However, certain participants did put forward suggestions and a desire to see the age to be reduced by five years of age. Participants also put across ideas for S.H.A.R.E to be more open in taking on clients with a history of addiction and also to the possibility of being able to support clients who currently own land or property.

The literature has shown the housing sector is in a precarious position, so it is crucial that all housing providers adapt to the current climate in order to support and protect the most vulnerable. This is especially true when addressing the housing needs of older people in Ireland. There is a need for policies to be progressive, allow for choice and also conducive to the ageing population of Ireland. Approaches going froward need to positively reflect the increasing population size and longer lives of the people of Ireland. There is a need for structures and frameworks to be introduced to increase accommodation options for older people which will also allow individuals to 'age in place', age positively and to remain connected to their communities. It is a constant challenge and one that will be remain within society until housing stock and social housing options are increased dramatically and placed central to housing policies.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1- Information pack/Communication

A recommendation being put forward, based on the primary research, is the need to ensure that there is strong communication between S.H.A.R.E and other organisations. There could be significant value in developing a S.H.A.R.E information pack that could benefit both referring agents and prospective clients. There is a need to have something '*physical*' developed which could take the form of posters, leaflets, brochures, and information packs. This could be a helpful way to ensure that professionals are aware of the organisation and the specific details could be easily passed onto clients who may have some queries or concerns. Also, it would potentially help reduce any issues with a high turnover of staff, which was highlighted as an issue in the housing sector, as it would strengthen communication and ensure that practitioners are frequently aware of S.H.A.R.E.

5.3.2-Accommodation for Couples

Another recommendation for S.H.A.R.E is being able to provide supported accommodation for couples in the future. The researcher is not putting forward a significant overhaul of the S.H.A.R.E model in terms of supported accommodation as the majority of units within S.H.A.R.E are single units. However, having a specific number of units in the S.H.A.R.E complexes available to couples would be of significant value. The participants in the research advocated for more couple units available in Cork City and the research would demonstrate that there is a dearth of this type of accommodation available. In terms of future planning and development the research is putting forward a recommendation of prioritising complexes, buildings, units etc that incorporate couples need for housing. Having a certain number of units available for couples would be of significant benefit for older couples while also suiting the social need.

5.3.3- References

S.H.A.R.E require typically two references when making referrals to the organisation. The list of references includes “an employer, previous employer, member of the clergy, member of An Garda Siochána, medical practitioner, landlord, or previous landlord or other professional person. The referee must not be a family member”. They will accept a GP or a support worker reference; however, this is often predicated on the nature and length of that relationship. S.H.A.R.E are willing to accept referrals even if the two references are not filled out as this is not seen as a preventative aspect to be considered for S.H.A.R.E. This is not clearly stated and referring agents appeared to be unclear on this and asserted that the references felt like a barrier to connecting clients to S.H.A.R.E. A suggestion to be put forward is to construct clear guidelines or a pro forma list made available to referring agents in relation to the references criteria so they aware of the details and information relating to the referral process.

5.3.4- Housing First

It became apparent during the interviews of the need for housing supports for individuals with mental health struggles and a history of addiction. It should be noted there is a

complexity involved when supporting individuals with a history of addiction, mental health, and homelessness. However, a recommendation would be to introduce a pilot project on a very small scale underpinned by a multi-agency and cross partnership support. The recommendation being put forward is making a very select number of units within the S.H.A.R.E complexes embrace a Housing First Model, which is currently in place in Cork City. By introducing a clear and comprehensively planned memorandum of understanding, there is the potential for a very small number of units (or unit) to trial the project. Drawing from the example of Galtan CLG housing as an example could be beneficial for S.H.A.R.E to scaffold future policies and planning.

5.4 Policy/ Legislation

The researcher recommends that policies in the future urgently address the challenges faced by individuals who need supported accommodation but are unable to access social housing due to ownership of property. The researcher recommends that policies are introduced on a national level that incorporate and acknowledge the complexities of individuals who are seeking to access supported accommodation while also owning land and their property is deemed inhabitable. There is a need for expansive and detailed housing policies and legislation that allow for effective 'downsizing' or 'rightsizing' schemes for older people.

5.5 Reflective Piece

When the journey began, and I undertook a CARL research project, it was a very exciting prospect. Partnering with a community organisation felt like an excellent opportunity to expand and develop my skills as a prospective practitioner. I was very cognisant of the fact that there was the possibility that I could produce some worthwhile research for a highly respected organisation. I found this reality a very stimulating, humbling but also daunting experience.

I feel confident in saying that I was able embrace this project with a level of diligence, professionalism, and enthusiasm. There were plenty of challenges along the way with

frequent moments of frustration and feeling totally drained of energy. However, I always found a way recalibrate things and remain determined.

Looking back, the process of having my research approved by the REC (research ethics committee) was a particular source of stress. It was a sense of relief when my research was approved as I needed three applications to ensure that I was adhering to the research protocols. There were times I had a sense of fear (maybe irrationally) that it was never going to be approved. A positive that emerged from the approval process though was that once I got the official go ahead, I felt galvanised and excited as my research went from being an abstract concept to something more tangible and real.

As mentioned, the dissertation did affect my general well-being at times. I frequently come back to the analogy of the heart rate monitor in a hospital as a pictorial representation of my thoughts, feelings, and emotions during the dissertation process. There were days where the progress felt positive, and my heart rate readings were steady. However, then quite suddenly the machine lines would spike, moving rapidly up and down when I was experiencing moments of panic or doubt. I would be candid in saying I was too influenced by hearing the progress of my peers. Hearing other students who were significantly ahead of myself and who were working on concluding chapters, when I was still drafting and formulating ideas, was too often a contributing factor in viewing my progress through a negative lens. I was able to successfully prevent this though from becoming a habit. Through mindfulness, reflection and acknowledging the wins I realised I was making steady positive progress.

Also, it is important to also acknowledge the backdrop of Covid-19 while doing my dissertation. In my very first semester of the MSW back in the times where handshakes and high fives were commonplace, pubs were open and being huddled together in small room for a gig was considered acceptable, I fantasised about having a lifestyle were there were no distractions. I dreamt of a way of life that meant that I could focus solely on my college work. Low and behold this became my reality and to be honest, it is not something I would wish or promote for others to experience. Having a calendar so consistently empty and lacking in meaningful experiences with my friends and family was honestly quite difficult. It often stuttered my academic progress and impacted my mental health. Having only but a plethora of time often led to overthinking which led to rumination which manifested itself in frequent moments of self-doubt. It became a life skill to eschew this mode of thinking as I had to

actively practice self-compassion and self-care in order to ameliorate these moments of stress and worry. I am ferociously lucky in that I have an excellent support network around me, and they remained close to me and constantly by my side throughout the process. The research process during covid offered me a profound understanding of the importance of relationships, communication and taking time to be kind to yourself. Also, it is imperative to acknowledge the wins and not allow yourself to be overly critical. We are all human at the end of the day.

Overall, I found the experience of completing this dissertation as very beneficial to my learning and helped develop nascent skills I had as a researcher. At the end of the journey, I am very happy and proud of the time and energy I put into the project and feel I am able to stand over the work confidently. It was a privilege in getting to work closely with an organisation like S.H.A.R.E and I hope that I was able to provide them with some worthwhile information that they could utilise for future planning and development. Though my journey as a professional practitioner is just beginning, I feel completing a CARL project has allowed me to allay any doubts I may have had about my abilities and embrace the next chapter with confidence.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: INFORMATION SHEET



Purpose of the Study. As part of the requirements for the Masters of Social Work at UCC, I am carrying out a research study. The study is concerned with the establishing of the current trends of applications/referrals to S.H.A.R. E.'s services and the overall relevancy of the organisation/housing model. An objective is to look into the referral pathway for potential clients of S.H.A.R.E and access its viability. Is there is a need to change, alter or restructure its criteria for accepting clients? The findings of this research will be used by S.H.A.R.E when planning and reviewing the referral pathway for prospective clients. The research will look to explore the viability of the model as it currently stands, and with future planning in mind, it may include a need for the S.H.A.R.E model to change and/or adapt.

What will the study involve? The study will involve exploring current housing policies and trends and a look into services available to those aged 60 who are also on a housing list. By conducting primary research in the form of surveys and semi-structured interviews, it should benefit S.H.A.R.E and provide pertinent data for the organisation to plan effectively for the future. Participants will be asked to either participate in an interview or complete the survey. I hope to build a more in-depth understanding of the strengths and limitations of the referral process for S.H.A.R.E. and ascertain what might be needed to be done for the benefit of current and future clients.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because of your direct experience in relation to making housing referrals, while also working for a professional housing body. This is an opportunity for you to provide some very valuable insights into the referral process and identify some pertinent pieces of learning for the research.

Do you have to take part? No. All participation is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to take part. You have the option to keep the information sheet and you will be asked to sign a consent form to denote your willingness to take part.

All participants taking part in the semi-structured interviews have the right to withdraw even if they have previously signed the consent form and the data has begun being collected. Each interview participant has the right to withdraw up to two weeks after an interview has taken place and can request to have their data destroyed.

All participants who have completed the survey will be anonymized and no identifying information will be made available. However, it should be noted that once the participant has completed the survey and selected 'submit' it is not possible to withdraw the submitted information to the research.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes. Anonymity will be ensured throughout the process in so far as it is possible. No individual taking part will be identified during transcribing nor in referencing. The strictest protocols will be followed to ensure all participants will be kept anonymous. Any extracts from participants that are quoted in the text will be entirely anonymous and no personal identifiers will be used.

It should be noted, however, given that this is a small sample size for the research being undertaken there might be some limitations in terms of complete anonymity or identifying characteristics. As previously mentioned, no personal identifiers will be used, and anonymity will be ensured at every stage. However, given that you have a previous working relationship with the organisation of S.H.A.R.E there could be the possibility that your personal style/language/viewpoints/opinions may make you identifiable. Certain distinctive language might be associated with you and/or your role given your previous working relationship with S.H.A.R.E.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study, available only to me and my research supervisor. The information will not be directly passed onto S.H.A.R.E or any representative of S.H.A.R.E. I will be reviewing this information independently of S.H.A.R.E and they will not have access to it. The information will be securely stored on the UCC Microsoft OneDrive and there will be no contact information made available. Upon the

completion of this research all primary research will be transferred to the school of social work to be stored securely in line with GDPR regulations.

What will happen to the results? All results will be recorded and transcribed. This will be interpreted, and the results will be presented in my Master of Social Work thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis will be passed on to S.H.A.R.E one month before it is published. It may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal as the final part of a collaborative piece of research undertaken between S.H.A.R.E and UCC.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? While I do not predict any negative consequences or experiences by taking part, I am cognisant of the fact that you are speaking about an organisation that you have worked with and will continue to work with in the future. You are free to say what you like and I do acknowledge that it might be an uncomfortable process highlighting some negative aspects of the referral system and even the agency itself. (However, it is important to note that this is about constructive feedback).

What if there is a problem? No problems or harm is anticipated by taking part in the study. At the end of any interviews I will ask and see how you found the experience.

Who has reviewed this study? The Community Action Research Links (CARL) will have reviewed this study. Approval must be granted by the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) of UCC before study and any primary research can commence.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Liam O'Mahony: 087 2637857

111442472@umail.ucc.ie

Or my supervisor at:

caroline.burke@ucc.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf. [Over…

Appendix 2: CONSENT FORM



This consent form is designed with qualitative research in mind. Where quantitative methods are used, issues such as quotations and audio-recording do not arise.

I……agree to participate in Liam O'Mahony's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with Liam O'Mahony to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed: ……..…. Date: ……..

Print Name: …….

Appendix 3: Interview Questions

Questions for the Interview (Semi-Structured)

S.H.A.R.E questions

1) Have you referred anyone to S.H.A.R.E, yes or no?

   If yes, how did you find the experience? Anything stand out to you?
   If no, can you give a brief reason(s) why not?

2) Can you talk to me about the referral pathway to S.H.A.R.E. Have you found it clear? Is it easy or difficult to navigate? – do you recall how long it took?

3) Do you notice any gaps or blocks in the;
   a) referral process
   b) or the services that S.H.A.R.E provide?
   Is there anything you would like to see changed with the referral process?

4) Do you find that S.H.A.R.E meets the needs of your clients? Please expand on your answer.

5) Are there aspects of the S.H.A.R.E model/criteria that does not appeal to you as a referring agent?

   Please expand on this

General Housing Questions

6) What do you, as a referring agent, look for in a housing provider?

7) What would you like to see more of in terms of housing supports and services available to your clients?

8) Looking at Cork City, how would rate current housing options (gaps and blocks)
   a) in Cork city as a whole
   b) and if possible specifically available to the over 60 population?

9) What are the most common barriers do you face when trying to refer someone to suitable housing?

10) Is there anything you would like to say that you feel you haven't said yet?

Appendix 4: Research Ethics Committee Approval



12:13

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

MSW Research Ethics Committee

School of Applied Social Studies

Applicant:	Liam O'Mahony, MSW2, 2020/2021
Committee Date:	16th February 2021
Tutor(s):	Caroline Burke
Reference:	2020-6

Dear Liam

Thank you for your resubmission to the MSW research ethics committee.

The committee has **granted approval** for your study. Thank you for making the identified changes.

We wish you the best of luck with your study. If you have questions, please contact your MSW tutor.

Best wishes,