

Whitaker Ideas Forum: Margaret Brehony, Deconstructing Homelessness: Individual Pathologies versus Austerity and Structural Exclusion

Date: March 14 @ 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm

Location: [CA110 \(SAC Room\), Cairnes Building, NUI Galway](#), Ireland

Speaker(s): Margaret Brehony

Affiliation: Population and Migration

The Irish government's response to homelessness, set out in an ambitious housing policy *Rebuilding Ireland* (Department of Housing, 2016), has failed to stem the rising numbers of people becoming homeless. Now a major social problem, the number of people who are counted as homeless in the state has risen steadily since 2014. The profile of people who find themselves without a home is changing from the stereotypical homeless male to family and child homelessness. The number of women who are experiencing homelessness rose to 42% in 2017, a figure that is way above the European norm of 20% – 23%. Recent work on the feminization of homelessness by Paula Mayock challenges traditional definitions that lack gender sensitivity and privilege individual pathologies and mental health over structural exclusions and the absence of legal rights to housing. Such narrow constructions of homelessness reduce the problem to what Geographer Joe Doherty calls 'a numbers game' and a narrow "compassionate" or local response.

This paper introduces research underway at the Geography Department, NUI Galway that interrogates the relationship between the Irish state and its more vulnerable homeless citizens as they are mediated through local authorities and a range of NGOs involved in the provision of services. The project takes a multi-stakeholder approach engaging with public policy, NGO campaign perspectives, community and social worker experiences, and the view point of people who have experience of being homeless. Drawing on these different perspectives in two regional responses in Galway and Limerick, the paper argues that the disconnect between official understandings of homelessness and the realities for homeless people in negotiating local authority housing services contributes to the scale of the problem today.

Dr. Margaret Brehony is a postdoctoral researcher in the School of Geography and Archaeology working on the Irish Research Council project "Deconstructing Homelessness: Is there a place for Geography?" led by Dr. Kathy Reilly