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Social Entrepreneurship, Empowerment of Women Experiencing Homelessness and Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between social entrepreneurship and social change continues to generate interest among researchers. We apply Kabeer's conceptualisation of empowerment intersectionality, and additionally explore the paradox of empowerment and role of change agents for gender equality, to consider the practices of a social enterprise supporting the empowerment of women experiencing homelessness in the UK. We reflect on the motivations and drivers behind its work, the extent to which the women were able to access and control resources, and the change agents enabling this transformation. While the practices of the social enterprise in our case study positively affected women's empowerment, they also bring to the fore several areas for reflection for social entrepreneurship research; the incorporation of intersectionality into advocacy for marginalised women such as those in our study, the role of male leaders in advancing gender empowerment and the need to find the delicate balance between empowerment on the one hand, and paternalism and suppression on the other.

KEYWORDS

Gender empowerment; gender equality; social entrepreneurship; homelessness

they've seen the flower in the mud but knowing that it can grow, having a bit of hope in me ... it was the first time I have been praised for anything, I've been encouraged, and the first time there was a belonging, you know, I felt welcome (Claire)

Introduction

Social enterprises are organisations whose primary purpose is tackling a social need rather than maximising profit for their owners or shareholders (Thompson and Doherty 2006). Since the late 1990s, they have been regarded as an innovative policy

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tool for changing the lives of disadvantaged peoples and are favoured for their ability to ease state burden in meeting welfare needs (Cabinet Office 2016).

The social enterprise sector in the UK is heavily feminised. It is estimated that 59% of social enterprise leadership teams are majority-led by women, compared to just 18% of small business as a whole. Almost three in five social enterprises have a majority female workforce, and for 15%, women are their entire workforce (Social Enterprise UK 2023). There is significant social enterprise activity and efforts to tackle gender inequality in the UK (British Council 2017). Nonetheless, it has been argued that the employment of a gender perspective in conceptualisation and analysis in social entrepreneurship research is lacking (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan 2016, 222). Elsewhere, in identifying the normative assumptions in social entrepreneurship scholarship, Ranville and Barros (2021) noted that mainstream political theories have overlooked women's interests. Social entrepreneurship research itself, remains rooted in male-centric assumptions, with men being presumed as standard when starting and running a social enterprise and social entrepreneurs presumed to bear the normative characteristics of a masculine Schumpeterian heroic genius (Kravets, Preece, and Maclaran 2020). Lewis and Henry (2019) called for research in the domain of social entrepreneurship to be 'gendered in its foundations' and to draw upon feminist critiques (125).

The British Council Report (Activist to Entrepreneur) (2017) applauded the way social enterprises are empowering women and contributing to gender equality in the UK. However, it also argued that social enterprises reflected gender inequalities in the wider society by, for example, women earning less than their male counterparts or creating jobs that reinforced gender stereotypes (in traditionally female areas of work, such as education, retail and social and healthcare) (British Council 2017, 7, 15). Paradoxically, therefore, social enterprises both challenge and reflect gender inequality. Meanwhile, despite 'empowerment' being heavily utilised by social enterprises to explain their goals (Chandra 2017), *how* the process of empowerment unfolds is not clear. While we know what social enterprises *do* to achieve change, e.g. adopting innovative strategies (Luke and Chu 2013) or offering various types of capital (Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018) we know less about *the effect* of these actions on their beneficiaries (De Bruin and Lewis 2015; Pareja-Cano, Valor, and Benito 2020). We address these two gaps in this paper by (i) employing a gender lens to study social entrepreneurship, and (ii) documenting the practices of social enterprises *and* their effects on their beneficiaries. We report the practices of a UK social enterprise reaching out to women experiencing homelessness, following a case study approach supported by interviews, document analysis and observations. We ask: What entrepreneurial practices empower women experiencing homelessness? The next section describes the theoretical lenses we draw upon to guide our enquiry.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 expounds the theories and frameworks we draw upon to guide our enquiry. Section 3 describes our method and approach. Findings of interviews with women experiencing homelessness and representatives of the social enterprise in our case study are presented in Section 4. We discuss the implications of our findings and conclusions in Section 5.

Theory

Women's Empowerment

Empowerment is an appropriate mediating framework to explore the relationship between entrepreneurship practice and social change, as it allows us to understand the impact of social enterprise practice on women's lives (Haugh and Talwar 2016; Pareja-Cano, Valor, and Benito 2020). Empowerment is variously defined but is centrally concerned with removing barriers which prevent women from making choices. We draw on Kabeer's conceptualisation of empowerment to guide analysis of the extent to which social enterprises influence women's empowerment. Kabeer (1999) proposed empowerment as the processes through which women who 'have been denied the ability to make strategic choices acquire such ability' (437). Exercising choice involves *resources* (which offer the conditions under which choices can be made); *agency* (concerns the freedom to define choices and act upon them); and *achievements* (the outcomes of choices). Direct evidence of empowerment rests on the extent to which resources and agency have altered existing inequalities (Kabeer 1999).

Kabeer's model has inspired a body of literature on the extent to which social entrepreneurship has shaped women's empowerment. Haugh and Talwar (2016) documented how through the introduction of income generation opportunities, the social enterprise in their study enabled women in the Okhamandal region of Saurashtra India, to market their handicrafts. The combination of resources and agency led to an increase in household income and better education for children. Conversely, Sahrakorpi and Bandi (2021) showed that where social enterprises did not reform social inequalities, women's empowerment cannot be sustained. Where local traditions in Bihar India encouraged women to marry, they were prevented from participating in training or using the resources supplied by the social enterprise to earn an income (women lacked agency). Pareja-Cano, Valor, and Benito (2020) described the employment, access to banking and healthcare and training opportunities (resources) made available by the social enterprise in their case study to women in South Africa. Through employment, women built their self-esteem, earned an income and gained greater control over decision making (agency and achievement). Kabeer's definition of empowerment is widely reflected in NGOs objectives (see The UN Commission on the Status of Women 2002). It is also adopted in the British Council Report as a reference point to explore the relationship between social enterprises and women's empowerment (British Council 2017).

Relatedly, researchers caution that social enterprises may themselves replicate harmful gender norms and stereotypes (Fotheringham and Saunders 2014). There is a risk that women's engagement with social entrepreneurship continues to be tied to a gendered 'caring and sharing' rationale (Gray, Healy, and Crofts 2003; Phillips 2005; Teasdale et al. 2011). It is argued that in empowering women, social enterprises must recognise the broader structural inequalities which marginalise women (Hayhurst 2014) and tackle the causes, rather than the effects, of gender inequality (Garrow and Hasenfeld 2014). Haugh and Talwar (2016) regarded 'emancipatory social entrepreneurship' as social enterprises enabling women to increase their agency, and at the same time opening opportunities for changing the social order in which women are

embedded (643). Pareja-Cano, Valor, and Benito (2020) documented how the social enterprise in their study nurtured positive self-beliefs among the women so that these beliefs undermined the patriarchal role attributed to women in the community.

Our case study concerns a social enterprise seeking to empower a highly vulnerable group of women. Kabeer's definition of empowerment offers a valuable starting point. However, we consider the utility of other theories and perspectives for the following reasons. Firstly, women experiencing homelessness do not come from similar backgrounds and exhibit multiple needs which are not always easy to discern. Secondly, in many situations, the power relations between vulnerable women and the social enterprise reaching out to them can be extremely unequal, with implications for how decisions are made by the social enterprise. Meanwhile, the question of how male leaders can become change makers for gender equality is pertinent in our case study, given that many who assume high-level management positions within the social enterprise are men. To enhance our analysis concerning the types of practices which empower women such as those in our study, we draw upon *three further theoretical resources* closely related to gender equality and empowerment.

Paradox of Empowerment

Social enterprises can experience a paradox of empowerment. There is a risk that practice to empower women can, in fact, be disempowering and costly for the latter (Weidenstedt 2016). This occurs when one party is in the position of being able to decide whether and how to empower the other. Eylon (1998) argued that 'The very fact that one group is in the position to judge if others are disempowered and then to decide what to "give" so that they will become "empowered" indicates that true empowerment is not occurring' (21). It is important to think about empowerment not in terms of dichotomies and hierarchies (e.g. leaders and followers, empowerer and empoweree). It is only when everyone views each other equally will empowerment occur. This, in turn, requires the empowerer to be sensitive to the empoweree's goals, values and preferences rather than making assumptions about who they are (Kelly 2020). Weidenstedt (2016) urged us to take into account the 'delicate balance between empowerment and paternalism, substantial support, and suppression' and instead of playing the role of 'grand benefactor'; include empowerees in decisions concerning their needs and wishes (8). In the area of social entrepreneurship, Pirson (2017) cautioned against paternalistic approaches on the part of social innovators, which, despite the best of intentions, can deprive people 'of their self-determination, liberty, and dignity' (11). An alternative approach is dignity promotion, which emphasises agency and autonomy, and individuals being able to make judgments and voice their opinions (Pirson et al. 2019). Lorenzo-Afable, Lips-Wiersma, and Singh (2020) asserted that social enterprises can heed carefully, the voice of beneficiaries, rather than relying on paternalistic views of what may be important and meaningful to the latter. In describing how the social enterprise in their case study adopted platform technologies to reduce 'informational gaps' in the provision of disability services, McLoughlin et al. (2019) noted that the organisation did not regard disability as a deficit which was best addressed in a paternalistic manner, where service providers made

choices for and on behalf of service users. On the contrary it favoured a collaborative approach between service providers and service users where the latter were regarded as consumers; defined by their use of services rather than by any physical or intellectual or other deficit.

Intersectionality

Meanwhile, the contexts in which women find themselves must be considered. This requires advocates to consider women's social characteristics, to identify the unique set of disadvantages they contend with, and how and what resources can be offered to support these needs. Intersectionality starts with the premise that people possess multiple and layered identities, determined by their history, geographical locations and social relations (Crenshaw 1991). Gender inequalities intersect with other sources of disadvantage (e.g. inequalities based on migrant status, race, class, disability, age, religion). The effects of multiple identities are not additive or cumulative; rather, they give rise to distinct experiences (Collins 2015). Single ground advocacy (gender, or race, or age) does not recognise the multiple identities of disadvantaged peoples or reflect their complete experience. It is only through understanding how the intersection of people's multiple identities (gender, *and* race, *and* age) gives rise to multiple forms of disadvantages that advocates can respond fully to their difficulties (Matsuda 1991; Squires 2008). Applying intersectionality acknowledges the complexity of the experiences of women facing homelessness and links these to the institutional environment within which they are embedded.

Change Agents for Gender Equality

While traditionally, gender equality interventions have focused on women, organisations or government policy, this has shifted to involving men in challenging patriarchy (de Vries 2015; Subašić et al. 2018). The support of male allies increases anticipation of respect, support and gender equality norms and decreases negative effects of underrepresentation and perceptions of identity threat on the part of women in male-dominated environments (Moser and Branscombe 2021). In their study among CEOs, Kelan and Wratil (2018) noted that macro change agents, such as senior leaders, lead by example, initiate and drive culture change. They are seen as heroic leaders. The authors, however, also advocate for these leaders to draw on elements of post-heroic leadership (Fletcher 2004) and tempered radicalism. Post-heroic leadership is concerned less with the importance of the leader; and more on 'sharedness', collective achievement and learning (Fletcher 2004, 648–650). Tempered radicals are radical insofar as they aim to challenge the status quo; they are tempered, insofar as they draw on passion and the feeling of being treated unfairly due to being in the minority. If senior leaders drew on post-heroic leadership and tempered radicalism, they would share their personal support for gender equality in a passionate manner, engage the organisation in change towards gender equality and adopt a leadership style which was collaborative and engaging. Humbert, Kelan, and van den Brink (2019) saw that men in leadership positions can shape organisational culture to promote gender

equality. However, simply inviting men to be change agents for gender inequality is ineffective, if underlying (essentialist) gender beliefs (e.g. men and women as 'naturally' different in traits and preferences) are not first contested (1144). Meanwhile, stereotyping (e.g. men are natural leaders; men are predominant in particular work settings) reduces women's sense of belonging and motivations to pursue opportunities (Walton, Murphy, and Ryan 2015). Nonetheless, engaging men in advancing gender inequality is not a straightforward issue. Whilst there is virtue in engaging men to advance gender equality, there is resistance (Flood 2018; Flood, Dragiewicz, and Pease 2021). Resistance comes more often from members of the privileged group (men) who wish to preserve the status quo, than the disadvantaged group (women).

Drawing on these four theoretical resources, we turn to explore how social entrepreneurship contributes to gender equality and social change. We study the practices of a social enterprise supporting the empowerment of women experiencing homelessness. By linking these theoretical resources to the practices of the social enterprise supporting homeless women's empowerment, we develop a holistic and integrated understanding of how their empowerment process unfolds. We first present the case study and the methodology.

Research Context and Design

The experiences and needs of women experiencing homelessness remain under-researched, with the existing evidence-base focusing on the experiences of men (Bretherton 2020). Due to the way homelessness is calculated (i.e. numbers of individuals 'sleeping rough' on the streets), women experiencing homelessness do not show up on official statistics (Bretherton and Pleace 2021). Methodological errors in data collection overlook the fact that women often resort to other measures to avoid sleeping rough (e.g. temporarily sharing accommodation with friends and family, sleeping in bed and breakfast hostels, or even entering relationships with partners who can offer accommodation). In the last 10 years, the number of women in England experiencing homelessness has doubled (75,410 by 2021) (Schofield 2021, 4). Homelessness is inherently gendered, yet rarely recognised as such (Bretherton and Pleace 2021; McCormack, Fedorowicz, and Hine 2022). Additionally, when they are homeless, women experience a higher risk of exploitation and violence. They report threats, verbal and sexual abuse, robbery and sexual harassment and described themselves as living with a constant fear of violence (Steele and Wong 2021). They also feel unsafe in mixed-sex homelessness accommodation. Nonetheless, 'few generic homelessness services are truly gender-informed and thereby equipped to provide sensitive and appropriate housing and support to women' (Bimpson, Green, and Reeve 2021).

Our case study involves a social enterprise based in the UK (Feminae Magnae), whose mission is to empower women experiencing homelessness. How social enterprises empower *women* experiencing homelessness in the UK has not been researched adequately. Although there are studies exploring the relationship between social entrepreneurship and homelessness (Barton et al. 2022; Cook and Willetts 2019; Tanekenov, Fitzpatrick, and Johnsen 2018), we draw attention to the effect of their actions to empower *women*. Although a single case study cannot prove a theory on

its own, it can indicate to us the next steps to solving a problem (Siggelkow 2007). As suggested by Yin (2017), a single case study allows an in-depth, detailed exploration of a specific phenomenon. It allows us to delve into unique patterns and complex interactions, such as those between the social enterprise and the women beneficiaries. It enables us to disentangle the factors which contribute to specific outcomes (such as gender empowerment), providing valuable insights into individual experiences and informing the development of theoretical frameworks. Our qualitative approach allows us to understand the broader perspectives that can be captured through interaction with key informants from the social enterprise and observations of them in their normal settings (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011; Marshall and Rossman 2011).

Feminae Magnae has been supporting women experiencing homelessness for many years. It offers a gender specific response to these women's needs, with the objective of supporting them into independent living. Many women experiencing homelessness struggle with mental health issues and substance abuse. Others are victims of violence. Feminae Magnae offers the women an environment within which they can make choices and have a voice in determining their life course. As a work integration social enterprise (WISE) in the hospitality industry, Feminae Magnae introduces a range of activities through which women can integrate back into the labour market. It prioritises training and upskilling the women, even linking women to prospective employers. Within its business, it engages women in food production and delivery of its service to its client base.

Three sources of data were used in our study. First, we drew on documentary evidence which included email correspondences with Feminae Magnae, impact and annual reports, media and press releases to gain an understanding of its work. Second, two visits (3 May and 14 June 2022) enabled us to observe women in their natural settings. We viewed the location of its hostel accommodation, classes where activities took place and communal spaces where women interacted with each other and with the leadership team. We talked to volunteers at Feminae Magnae. We were informed how security staff often had to intervene in altercations among the women and the risks this entailed for staff and the women. Many of the women we saw avoided eye contact with us and did not engage with conversation. We recorded information the women relayed to us, and our impressions of what we observed, in a diary. Thirdly, to capture the practices and processes leading to empowerment, we conducted 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews of between 45 and 90 min each, with five managers (4 women and 1 man) and five women service users (Table 1). Interviews were conducted between February 2021 and May 2022. COVID-19 posed significant challenges to data collection in 2021, although by early 2022 restrictions had been significantly relaxed. We interviewed managers and through these managers, extended our invitation to women to speak with us. Only a small number of women were willing to talk about their experiences. Some women felt more reassured if they had a support worker from Feminae Magnae present, and this was arranged. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Nine were conducted on-line and one face-to-face. Further requests for interviews were not granted due to the unwillingness of women to be interviewed and the constraints of time on the part of the social enterprise, which did not allow for a larger sample size. The three data collection methods allowed for data triangulation, to validate the process

Table 1. Participant information.

No.	Name ^a (pseudonyms)	Role	Description
1	Molly	Business Manager	Chef
2	Rachael	Women's Support Officer	Offers day-to-day care to vulnerable women
3	Reanna	Centre Manager	Oversees day-to-day operation
4	Susannah	Senior Manager	Responsible for strategic planning to further organisational goals
5	Peter	Director of Operations of the parent organisation Board member at Feminae Magnae	Oversees and supports Feminae Magnae in his position as director of operations of its parent organisation
6	Claire	Service user	English, survivor of domestic violence, with Feminae Magnae since 2016
7	Marina	Service user	Eretrian, on the streets for 2 months prior to arriving at Feminae Magnae, now 1 year 5 months at Feminae Magnae
8	Brenda	Service user	Portuguese, visits day centre at Feminae Magnae, although does not stay in hostel accommodation
9	Delilah	Service user	Eretrian, service user before 2006, but left UK to care for her sister's children in Sudan. Returned to UK and arrived at Feminae Magnae in 2014 – was in emergency accommodation at Feminae Magnae for 2 weeks before it found her a place at a hostel.
10	Alice	Service user	English, with Feminae Magnae since 2020, arrived at a time when she was suffering ill health due to homelessness

^aTo protect the confidentiality of participants and organisation, their names have been changed.

of information generation. Ethical approval was obtained from the researchers' university research ethics committee (ETH2021-0712).

In terms of sampling, there is no numerical minimum in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006). Most qualitative studies are organised around small samples (Sandelowski 1995, 179) and it is argued that research with samples of 10 are usual (Lichtman 2010, 142). A small sample can allow for the deep, contextual analysis which is the *raison-d'être* of qualitative inquiry (Boddy 2016; Sandelowski 1995).

Transcriptions and observation notes were analysed using a deductive and inductive approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). Deductive themes include the specific elements of women's empowerment informed by Kabeer's model, which are resources, agency and achievements. We identified inductive key themes (Eisenhardt 1989) and compared these with relevant literature (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2019) on paradox of empowerment, intersectionality and change agents for gender equality.

Findings

We organise and present our findings through Kabeer's definition of empowerment, intersectionality, paradox of empowerment and change agents for gender equality to provide a deeper analysis of social enterprise practices and outcomes for the women in our case study. We present our findings from a participant-centric approach (Creswell and Poth 2018; Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2019), placing the experiences and narratives of the participants at the forefront and delaying the integration of findings with theory to the discussion section. This approach allows us to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices, avoiding potential biases that theoretical preconceptions might introduce.

Kabeer's Conceptualisation of Empowerment

Kabeer emphasised that empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices, where this ability was previously denied to them and is based on three interrelated elements – resources, agency, and achievements. We consider the resources the women have access to, their ability to define goals and act upon them, and outcomes of their choices.

Material Resources: Basic Necessities and Safe Spaces

Peter asserted that a key resource was the provision of accommodation to bring women in from the streets. Within this safe space, women received support in the journey towards independent living. Susannah (senior manager) explained that women experiencing homelessness first and foremost, needed material support.

This woman might be homeless, she's got nowhere to go, she's got nowhere to turn. She needs food, shelter and warmth... is the main thing that she needs... so we provide their basic needs

A variety of other resources are made available to help the women rebuild confidence and self-belief. Women can sign up for e.g. English language classes, sewing and craft, photography and art therapy classes. Where English is not the women's first language, an interpreter service is offered. Art therapy enabled the women to express, in a confidential setting, their feelings without using words. Women could make their voices heard 'whereas before, they might not have felt their voice was being heard ... art has given them that confidence to understand that their voices are important' (Susannah, senior manager).

However, despite every effort, the risk of women disengaging altogether was never far away, at times for reasons which were not obvious. Reanna (centre manager) conveyed to us how disheartening this can be.

... Women want to be involved in all of the activities... and then suddenly they disappear... and then, it's trying to engage them back again to the service and that can be quite hard. It may just be dependent on what's going on for them personally, but we just won't push it. It's challenging engaging our complex clients, it's really, really difficult to engage our complex clients like those with alcohol or drug misuse.

Susannah (senior manager) emphasised the time-consuming nature of work to empower women, and the importance of *perseverance* '... women ... can go through breakdowns or ... health issues which might push us five or six steps back, and then we need to work again to try and get back up again ... it takes time ...'

Human and Social Resources (Skills, Knowledge and Networks)

Feminae Magnae makes available vocational training to equip women with the skills needed for employment. Women can work with staff in its kitchens and gain accreditation. This provided opportunities for women to meet new people, learn new skills and work in teams. Learning to re-establish relationships was an important part of their recovery, and compensates for the trauma and isolation women experienced during homeless periods. Molly (Business Manager), a chef at Feminae Magnae, described how she provided training for the women so that they could learn basic skills in food

preparation. To foster a sense of ownership over their training, she encouraged them to co-create the recipes '... So their ideas will go on the menus ... so the ladies have got involved and put some of their recipes on there as well'. In preparation for employment, women are informed of their legal rights in the workplace:

... we have partnered with a law school, and the pro bono students will deliver sessions around a range of topics to empower the women... we've got one this week about having your voice heard and your employment rights are (Reanna, centre manager)

Opportunities for women to enter employment are secured through partnering with local businesses, important social resources. Reanna (centre manager) explained how:

...we try and get them jobs... maybe local hotels or cafes or anywhere they [the women] feel that they have an interest in, we would contact certain companies and hotels some of the ladies went on to work part-time in a bank. The bank provided a hospitality facility there

...seven women just recently completed a hospitality course, and two of the two of those seven have acquired paid work in hotels... so that they can go on to see their new skills ... utilized and be recognized with the salary that comes in every single month (Peter, Director of Operations)

Challenging gender norms was an important part of Feminae Magnae's work to empower women. Women wishing to access 'male occupations' such as construction and security, are positively encouraged to do so. 'One woman had just recently training to become a security worker, again, roles that would not normally attract women'. As Rachael (Women's Support Officer) shared:

we had a company that approached us and were training women in construction ... so [our work with the women] is not really limited to things that are seen as women's jobs or careers. So, if they [women] want to be an engineer or something else e.g. they want to fly a plane, we'll figure a way!

Collaborations with other organisations increased resources, enabling Feminae Magnae to reach greater numbers of women experiencing homelessness. Recently, through collaborating with the media and financial institutions, Feminae Magnae secured funds to extend the opening hours at their drop-in centre for women experiencing homelessness. Susannah (Senior Manager) explained:

I don't think there was a provision in [this region] that was open X hours a day specifically just for women, the drop-in services that they've got in [this region] are all for mixed genders...so we're seeing the numbers grow and grow and we are supporting these women to try and access emergency accommodation or more stable accommodation.

Women Exercising Agency and Achieving Positive Outcomes

The women explained how support from Feminae Magnae triggered in them a new confidence, a sense of control over their life and increased feelings of self-efficacy. They began to define goals and make choices. They recognised a 'power-within' themselves. Even mundane actions built self-belief. For example, letting women '... have scissors for trimming the plants' meant a lot to Marina (Service user) who felt that this trust made her feel that she could be trusted.

Taking advantage of education and training opportunities enabled women to develop new skills and choose a vocation. Delilah (Service user) took advantage of cookery classes offered at Feminae Magnae and grew to love baking. She gained a qualification in hospitality. She explained that whilst previously, she never thought about baking, gaining a qualification now made her question '...what is my future ...like how can I do that thing [baking]? How can I sell it? How can I talk with the people? [to market her products]?'. Similarly, after gaining a certificate in food hygiene, Alice (Service user) secured an apprenticeship. She begun to envision a future and was confident that with her experience as an apprentice, she would be able to continue working in a restaurant environment, even opening her own business.

Delilah (Service user) was invited to attend job interviews. She returned to Feminae Magnae to study English as she was informed by the employer that she would need to demonstrate a sufficient level of language skills (level 2 English certificate) before she could start her employment. She developed a sense of purpose. Whilst studying English, she worked as a cleaner. She even spoke of going to college. Most importantly, as a result of being able to work, she was able to send funds home to her country of origin to support her sister's children.

Marina (Service user) completed an on-line business course whilst at Feminae Magnae and gained a certificate. She shared how she was excited at the prospect of imminently leaving Feminae Magnae and getting a job. She had a long term plan for her life:

Once I have a flat, I want to have a part-time job ...when my health is better, I will get a full time job. I would like to have my own business – a flower shop and, if I have the money, wedding dress design and making cakes.

The women also utilised what they had achieved to improve the position of other women. Brenda (Service user) said:

I've been inspired to wish gender equality ... what I hope is ... use this experience and, who knows, to help another group, another organisation, individual people who come to me ... I believe with this experience I've got strong tools, and one thing I would like to do is to extend the help I get to others ...

Finally, some of the women even formed a group to speak to the local Member of Parliament and increase awareness of the plight of homeless women, and advocate action to support them.

However, it should be noted that many women at Feminae Magnae remain vulnerable. Many women arrived as 'emergencies', with extensive needs. A section of the accommodation was reserved for particularly vulnerable women. Marina (Service user) explained:

...here [women] are checked every 40 minutes. They [staff] check things like the ovens being off, that women have taken their medications. They, like, knock on the doors. Respecting people's privacy but also checking on safety ... sometimes the women can be very aggressive, like if they are coming off drugs.

Reanna (Centre Manager) explained earlier that some women severed contact with Feminae Magnae. Being at Feminae Magnae for over a year, Marina (Service user) was used to this phenomenon, and told us:

They might [escape from] a violent partner, but they have given up a nice house. Here you have to share a shower room. Here you have to wait your turn with everything. So maybe the man says he has changed, and the woman moves back ...

Identifying Intersectional Needs

Women experiencing homelessness exhibit multiple needs. The intersection of the varying characteristics of the women combine to create different types of disadvantage. Susannah (Senior Manager) described the range of women who come to Feminae Magnae:

we've had quite a few refugees ... people fleeing war from other countries and English is not their first language ... we've also got women that are substance misusers or have stopped using substances or are alcohol dependent. Or people who have suffered mental health like bipolar or schizophrenia. We have care leavers as well.. There's a lot of different women that come and enter our doors at, but homelessness is the main thing that they've all got in common.

Peter explained further ... some of the women come with disabilities, so there's accessibility issues ... some of them coming fleeing from abusive households.

For Molly (Business Manager), overcoming language barriers is very challenging ' ... in a kitchen environment, where I provide training ... [the ability to speak] the English language ... [language is] one of the biggest barriers'.

How best to manage the women's multiple needs was not always straightforward. Where possible, interpreters are offered to reduce challenges associated with language. Guidance, documents, material and paperwork are made available to the women in their languages. Susannah also explained that English classes were offered so that women whose first language is not English can learn how to speak it. Rachael's (Women's Support Officer) response is instructive as to how overlapping, concurrent forms of disadvantage can be identified and supported. As Women's Support Officer, she did this by getting to know the women personally.

" ... through the casual conversations with the women, you get a sense of who they are" and further " ... I will just chat to them [the women] ... and if I see them [the women], I casually drop it into the conversation ... [I say] hi how are you? You come and see me ... not committing [them] to a time or anything, but just that I'm here, whenever you want to see me ... "

Another way of identifying women's multiple needs is by encouraging them to relate these needs to resident representatives. Any woman can apply to be a resident representative. These are important conduits between women residents and management, feeding back to management which policies worked well and which did not and how they can be improved. Women are also invited to be on interview panels recruiting new staff to Feminae Magnae. Further, women could sit on the board of trustees, charged with organisational decision-making. These were all avenues where women's multiple needs can be identified and addressed. Indeed, Peter (Director of Operations) explained how having a woman resident as a member of the board was critical, because she ' ... knows what struggles the women go through within the project, and what anxiety they go through ... - speaking at that kind of level, and being an advocate for the women ... '.

Empowerment, or Paternalism?

Feminae Magnae does not regard there was a power differential between itself and the women. All the women were valued as individuals in their own right, with something to offer. As centre manager, this regard for women influenced the development of local strategy. Susannah (Senior Manager) remarked, '...it's not just their learning from us. We also learn a lot from them. Without them, we wouldn't be as experienced as we are in our fields'. Many women, despite having multiple needs, are not regarded as 'charity cases'. Feminae Magnae does not position itself as superior, as an organisation 'rescuing' the women. This was exemplified above (9 and 11), where we drew attention to how women are invited to co-create recipes and be involved as resident representatives and members of the board of trustees to shape organisational policy towards women experiencing homelessness.

Role of (Men as) Change Agents for Women's Empowerment

Feminae Magnae does not see gender equality and empowerment as a woman's issue. It recognises the value of men as champions for gender empowerment. Susannah (Senior Manager) clarified that middle managers within Feminae Magnae were women. '...we've got a lot of women managers in the middle... We the managers, our service users, are all women. We might have the majority of our executives and our leadership team up in head office in [the parent organisation] that are male, but they do have a few women. But we [middle managers] are the link, if that makes sense ...' Susannah (Senior Manager) believed that one of the reasons Feminae Magnae has been able to reach out to many women experiencing homelessness was because of the presence of women middle managers, on the front line, and who were the first point of contact for women.

Nevertheless she also explained that there were now more female leaders at (top) board level. '...it is progressive... when I first heard about [our parent organisation] they were predominantly male. There might have been the odd one that was a female, but it's much better now. We have got more women on our board'. Susannah (Senior Manager) also took time to explain that men in leadership positions within the parent organisation are now 'very culturally aware' of the stigma towards women experiencing homelessness. Through undergoing training, undertaking research, networking with women's rights organisations and meeting with women experiencing homelessness, male leaders understood homelessness from the women's perspectives. 'A lot of them have come down and actually met our women and spoken to our women and have understood it from their perspectives' (Susannah, Senior Manager).

Peter (Director of Operations), from senior management, emphasised that it was important for men to be advocates of gender equality:

...I think it's really, really important, that men are part of the answer for the empowerment of women... men nationally have been part of the problem... men to be part of the answer for the empowerment of vulnerable women within our service is vitally, vitally important... I've been an advocate for them, helping to shape what we do, helping to shape our programs, helping to shape our training opportunities and career opportunities for the women ...

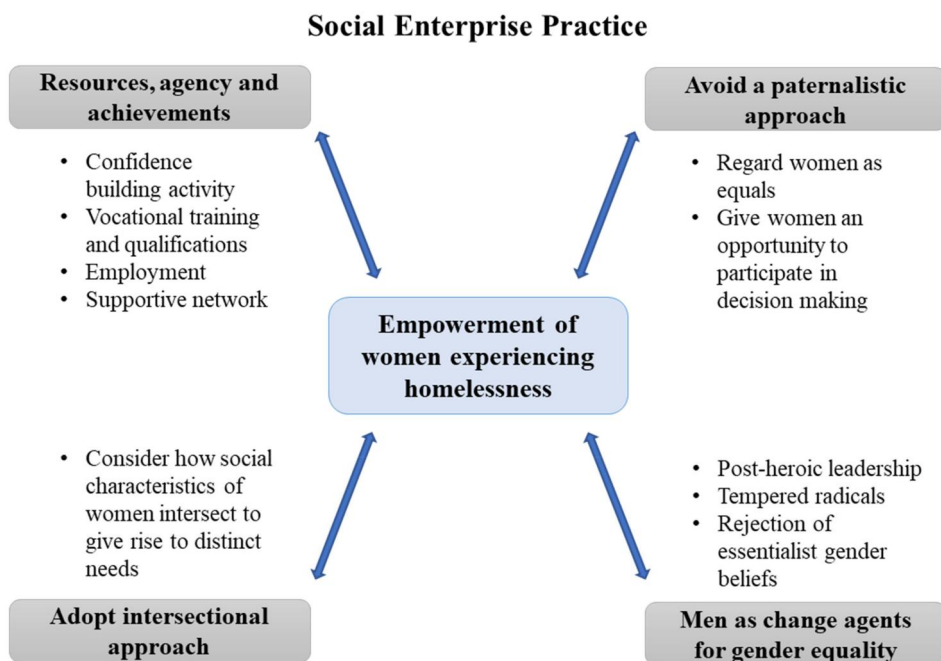


Figure 1. Gender empowerment framework for social enterprises reaching out to women experiencing homelessness.

For Peter, challenging gender inequality requires the collective effort of men and women; it is not the exclusive domain of female advocates. Peter's approach to gender empowerment was informed by his religious background '... I am a [religious faith identified] we believe that every individual has innate value... whatever their background... thus the empowerment of women and gender equality is vitally important...' Peter also explained that having a daughter motivated him to think about the importance of women's opportunity to progress in a gender unequal world 'I've got an 18 year old daughter she's studying at university, and just as I want to empower my daughter into an education and to opportunities and to future career, so also with the women within the project to see them empowered into opportunities and to career and to training ...'

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, our analysis of the relationship between social enterprise practice and the empowerment of a highly vulnerable group of women presented a positive account. Our study applied Kabeer's conceptualisation of empowerment (Kabeer 1999, 2005), demonstrating how *Feminae Magnae* empowered women and tracing their journey toward empowerment process. We drew on three further related theoretical resources (intersectionality, the paradox of employment and change agents for gender equality), to enhance and reinforce our analysis concerning the types of practices which empower women such as those in our study. The four elements are illustrated in Figure 1 for use by advocates reaching out to women experiencing homelessness.

Kabeer's Conceptualisation of Empowerment: Resources, Agency, Achievement

Following Kabeer (Kabeer 1999, 2005), our findings demonstrated that Feminae Magnae made available a range of resources to the women, such as basic necessities, safe spaces, skills development, and access to networks. These resources allowed the women to make choices and act upon them. They challenged gender norms, become role models for other women and took action to influence their surroundings. Women translated resources into achievements, resulting in positive outcomes such as personal development and employment.

Significant resources were channelled into supporting women transition from homelessness into independence. Being a women's only organisation, Feminae Magnae understood the vulnerabilities the women faced due to their gender and the structures which overlook their needs (Garrow and Hasenfeld 2014; Hayhurst 2014). In providing women-only accommodation, it recognised that physical and emotional safety were a priority for women experiencing homelessness. In helping women rebuild their lives, it not only focused on increasing resources available to them (Agarwal 2018; Datta and Gailey 2012; Duflo 2012) but sought to transform the way women thought about themselves, develop skills to improve their life-chances and influence their surroundings. Women had the opportunity to share their experiences with each other. This enhanced their empowerment and self-esteem. In a study with homeless women residing in a shelter in Israel, Haj-Yahia and Cohen (2009) found that, in a collective setting, women derived encouragement and strength from each other to overcome their problems, and developed skills and strategies for dealing with new situations. Rather than associating women with feminine 'caring and sharing' careers (Dimitriadis et al. 2017; Fotheringham and Saunders 2014; Levie and Hart 2011; Phillips 2005), such as hospitality, Feminae Magnae facilitated opportunities for women to work in male-dominated sectors, including construction and security. In turn, women gained confidence, new qualifications, employment and in some cases, transitioned into independent living.

The process of empowerment, however, is time consuming. '[R]eal empowerment' implies a long-term process as it takes time to nurture positive qualities and act on deep-rooted social inequalities (Sahrakorpi and Bandi 2021). Working with highly marginalised and vulnerable women with intersecting identities and multiple needs to think differently about themselves and work towards a future, requires immense perseverance, as indicated by Rachael and Susannah. The process of empowerment can also be very resource intensive, as reported by Peter, with no guaranteed positive outcomes for women. Many social enterprises deliver high impact work yet cannot expand their activities because they lack funding (British Council 2017, 22, 28, 41). The literature indicates how Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) are typically characterised by budget constraints, lack of capacity and fragmentation of efforts (Farmer et al. 2021), resulting in recurring dilemmas to balance their social mission with financial sustainability. This not only raises questions about how social enterprises need to be more innovative in their financing strategies but importantly, how public policy and social investment lenders can introduce subsidised finance to help social enterprises supporting work integration for a highly vulnerable social group to scale up their social impact (British Council 2017, 17, 55; Lyon and Owen 2019).

Last but not least, women experiencing homelessness often risk resuming addictive or destructive behaviours which they are trying to control. They face unpredictable and volatile situations. They may drift and out of homelessness, especially if available and supportive housing units are in short supply. If they returned to being homeless, the cycle resumes. Racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by homelessness (Phipps et al. 2021). There is a need for organisations to work collaboratively to provide holistic, integrated services to reduce the barriers preventing the women from accessing support. Services need to be driven by a trauma-informed, person-centred, empathetic and compassionate approach, to help women recover from their experiences, regain control over their lives and become resilient (Bretherton and Pleace 2021; Moore 2016; Reeve and Sheffield Hallam University 2018).

The Paradox of Empowerment: Empowerment, or Paternalism?

Feminae Magnae carefully determined the resources to be transferred to the women to achieve a particular outcome, assessed whether the transfer achieved the desired outcomes and the extent to which allocation can be made more efficient (Weidenstedt 2016, 2).

However, if the power lies in the empowerer to decide what to transfer, the type and size of the resource, this may have negative consequences for the empoweree, who in accepting the resource under such circumstances, may feel inferior and effectively disempowered (see also Eylon 1998). Where a powerful party dominates a less powerful party by adopting a paternalistic approach, the implied message is that the empoweree is not only less powerful but also less competent to determine her own future. An example offered by Hoffman (2021) is instructive. She noted that despite intentions to strengthen local systems of governance in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, narratives by 'white' organisations about empowerment appeared to propagate an anti-dependency stance. Probing deeper however, the way empowerment was presented in fact, undermined it. Against a long history of aid and intervention by 'white' foreigners, discourses about empowerment validated white emotions and were a tool for their own continued role as masters of the narrative, imposed on Haitians (101). Kabeer (1999) too, cautioned that the terms on which people gained access to resources are as important as the resources themselves when women's empowerment is being considered. Those in control of resources have power to determine how others (e.g. women beneficiaries) can access them. Important questions include whether access to resources is made conditional on how dependent the beneficiaries are, or whether resources are offered in ways which affirm dignity and self-worth.

Feminae Magnae rejects a paternalistic approach and instead, regards the women as equals, and individuals from whom it can learn (Lorenzo-Afable, Lips-Wiersma, and Singh 2020; McLoughlin et al. 2019). It consults the women as to their preferences, for example, in co-creating recipes and menus, where women worked alongside staff in its kitchens. It invites women to shape organisational policy and practice through being a resident representative, a member of the recruitment panel and even a member of the board of trustees. In this respect, a study conducted by Shahvand, Omid

Najafabadi, and Hosseini (2021) explored the development of social entrepreneurship among rural women in Varamin, concluding that participation in policy-making and decision-making processes, significantly promoted the rural economy and facilitate empowerment, poverty reduction, and intellectual growth. Instead of making assumptions about they are, Feminae Magnae was attentive to what women's goals, values and preferences were, never putting pressure on them (Kelly 2020; Pirson 2017). It determined what was in the women's best interest by actively listening to them, rather than relying on paternalistic notions of what was important and meaningful to them.

Intersectionality

A diverse range of women approach Feminae Magnae on a daily basis. They are not a homogenous social group with similar needs but come from a variety of backgrounds and contend with multiple struggles. The combination of their social identities give rise to different forms of disadvantage and disempowerment (Crenshaw 1991). An important question is the extent to which organisations 'homogenise' women or organise their advocacy along single-ground identities (Squires 2008), instead of recognising the interconnectedness of multiple social identities which create overlapping and interdependent disadvantage (Collins 2015). Whilst Feminae Magnae's objective is to empower women experiencing homelessness, it recognises that women come from diverse backgrounds (e.g. ethnicities, nationalities) and are of different ages, socio-economic classes and ability. These social characteristics combine to create distinct needs. Rachael's approach to getting to know women personally and engaging with their key workers enables the organisation to identify the kinds of disadvantage women contend with, due to their multiple social characteristics.

Despite its relevance, intersectionality as an advocacy approach among social enterprises has not been studied much. In adopting an intersectional lens, Sahrakorpi and Bandi (2021) described how the social enterprise in their case study sought to empower women in Bihar, India, by creating employment opportunities. Yet these women's illiteracy, lack of formal education, and patrilocality all prevented the social enterprise from hiring women into empowering roles. Caste, class and gender all shaped women's self-actualisation and utilisation of the resources at their disposal. More recently Qureshi et al. (2023) investigated the role intersectionality played in shaping social enterprise efforts to reduce the harmful effects of women's exclusion in rural India, but recognised that we still do not know enough of how social enterprises understand the effects of intersectionality on marginalised social groups.

Operationalising intersectionality is complex. The inclination is to organise advocacy around identity dimensions we are most comfortable with. Intersectionality however requires that we identify ways in which an individual's social identities (e.g. race, class, age, gender) combine to give rise to unique experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. How social enterprises respond to women's intersectional identities, the extent to which they give priority to one identity dimension in preference to others (Marchetti 2014) and the constraints (e.g. resources) which impact the extent to which they integrate intersectionality into their practice are all subjects worthy of research in

evidencing the link between social entrepreneurship and gender empowerment. We hope our paper offers useful reflections.

Role of Change Agents for Women's Empowerment

While part of the successful work of *Feminae Magnae* can be attributed to the layer of female middle managers, Peter also provided an eminent example of how, instead of delegating responsibility for gender equality to others through their chain of command, senior managers can try to empathise with some of the issues on gender equality. Although Peter engaged in a high-level management role, he demonstrated the collaborative approach that post-heroic leaders display to support gender equality and empowerment (Kelan and Wratil 2018). Peter emphasised 'sharedness'. His belief that it was important for 'followers' not to be passive agents, but to share in leadership was evident in his leverage of others within the organisation, namely the very women *Feminae Magnae* reaches out to, in decision-making. He personally created connections with other organisations with similar values, and objectives, to raise awareness of the impact of homelessness on women. Having a daughter and a strong faith constituted a strong internal motivation for him to commit to advance gender equality. He talked passionately about his support for gender equality. This passion is integral to his post-heroic leadership approach to support gender equality (Kelan and Wratil 2018). Humbert, Kelan, and van den Brink (2019) argued that greater gender balance in leadership cannot be achieved without tackling underlying gender beliefs, particularly among men leaders since they are called upon to enact change. A strong theme from our findings was *Feminae Magnae's* rejection of essentialist gender beliefs (women are more suited for nurturing roles; leadership remains the preserve of men; men leaders act as agents of change). We see from Susannah's response that within *Feminae Magnae's* parent organisation, that top male leaders endorse and support initiatives around gender and seek to be agents of change for gender equality. This was clearly evidenced not only in the organisation being more progressive and forward looking; in its recruiting higher numbers of women into leadership positions and openly offering women service users the opportunity to participate in high level decision-making.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

Research where gender intersects with social entrepreneurship is a niche and emergent area of focus (Lewis and Henry 2019). We make three theoretical contributions to this domain of research. First, we take gender as our central focus. We ground our analysis of the empowerment of a highly vulnerable group of women using a feminist perspectives (Kabeer), additionally drawing on *other theoretical resources* closely related to gender equality and empowerment (intersectionality, paradox of empowerment and change agents for equality). We thus meet the call for research in the domain of social entrepreneurship to be 'gendered in its foundations' and to draw upon feminist critiques (Clark Muntean and Ozkazanc-Pan 2016; de Bruin and Teasdale 2019; Lewis and Henry 2019).

Secondly, how social enterprises achieve social change is still not well understood (De Bruin and Lewis 2015). We attend to this gap in knowledge by offering a detailed analysis of the *processes* of empowerment; documenting not only entrepreneurial practices (Luke and Chu 2013; Lumpkin, Bacq, and Pidduck 2018) but also their effects on the women (Pareja-Cano, Valor, and Benito 2020). By tracing the link between what social enterprises *do*, and their *effects*, we offer a much needed *processual* explanation of social change. We draw attention to the importance of context (e.g. institutional context, organisational history and culture and the specific characteristics of women), and trace the unfolding processes of change.

Thirdly, our approach to investigating what entrepreneurial practices empower women experiencing homelessness is innovative. We employed four distinct theoretical resources to enhance our analysis of the types of practices which empower women such as those in our case study. We believe that together, they offered explanatory power for how the women in our particular setting experienced empowerment (Framework 1). We encourage researchers who are curious about how social enterprises effect social change to be sensitive to the needs and characteristics of their women and social enterprises, and to explore the utility of combining different but relevant theoretical resources through which their women's journey towards empowerment can be sensitively and thoughtfully explored.

Our framework is multi-faceted and integrates different yet important elements of empowerment. It is demanding, necessitating social enterprise to have comprehensive knowledge not only of the experiences of women who are homeless, and also familiarity with the different elements of empowerment in the framework, in order to operationalise it. This may require training. Adoption of the framework may also have resource implications for social enterprises, especially those which already contend with limited time, budget, staff and technology. Collaboration with other social enterprises, researchers and businesses who have the required expertise and experience in operationalising the elements of empowerment in the framework would increase the potential for social enterprises to undertake the necessary work to empower women experiencing homelessness.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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