

Socheolas

Limerick Student Journal of Sociology

Volume 5, Issue 1

***Cliona Barnes: Exploring Community Safety in Limerick Regeneration
Communities.***

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September 2013

**University of Limerick
Department of Sociology**

Available at <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/socheolas/vol5/1>

ISSN 2009-3144

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Cliona Barnes:
Exploring Community Safety in Limerick Regeneration Communities.

Review by Julianne Fogarty
MA in Sociology (Youth, Community and Social Regeneration)

This research is focused on the auditing of experiences and concerns related to community safety in and around a number of economically and socially disadvantaged residential areas in Limerick City.

In doing so, this study aims to uncover the most pressing concerns related to community safety infrastructure and frameworks as expressed by those both living and/or working in these communities. The feeling of fear experienced by the residents in everyday life is found to be a core concern. Fear surrounding the prevalence of anti-social behaviour and crime and the issue of the youth population of these estates engaging in these activities is paramount. The failure to address the anti-social behaviour of youth and the inadequacy of the Juvenile Justice system in dealing with this issue effectively is also addressed by residents. The lack of progress surrounding the recommendations outlined within *The Fitzgerald Report* namely the need for a higher Garda presence in these areas was another concern expressed. These findings allow the researcher to explore the topic of responsibility and question who is responsible for community safety. In doing so, the assignation of blame and ‘deservingness’ are strategies found to be deployed by those within the community. Tensions were found to emerge between different groups of residents, between residents and regeneration officials and between residents and Gardai around who was responsible for creating change and who was enabling these problems to continue. These tensions were found to shift focus from where it is needed and to hinder the necessary processes for successful and inclusive regeneration.

Barnes addresses the current discourse surrounding the assignation of blame and ‘deservingness’ and how this position can be also viewed from a broader sociological context. The work of Skeggs is acknowledged as contributing to current understanding of the relationship between class and the notion of respectability. How those labelled as being working class often negotiate their position within society by devaluing others in order to separate themselves from those viewed ‘without respect’ and to position themselves as of higher value (Skeggs 2004). Lister (2004) suggests that this ‘othering’ makes it easier for people to blame ‘others’ for their own and society’s problems. The research conducted by Barnes further validates this position as many of this study’s participants felt the need to blame ‘bad parents’ as the cause of the problems within their estates. Also, the labelling of certain youth as ‘bad kids’, arguing that recourses and supports are limited for the young people of these areas only available to those who are ‘causing trouble’. The significance of the media is facilitating the general public to view a certain group as ‘undeserving’ is another factor which is considered. The negative media portrays of ‘the poor’ focus on an individualized model, insisting that those within this group are responsible for their own welfare (McKendrick, 2008).

The research process carried out in order to inform this study was designed to be primarily informed by respondents living in these areas. Using a purposive selection strategy, five focus groups consisting of men and women aged between 19-30 were carried out. In addition, a focus group consisting of elderly residents, a focus group held with parents of the estate and a focus group with Gardai were also carried out. Interviews were conducted alongside these groups in order to generate a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. Interviews with residents and with community organisations took place and using a grounded

theory approach each interview was adapted as emerging themes were identified. In all sixty five participants took place in this study.

It was stated that in order to gain valuable insight into experiences surrounding communities concerns/fears, it was essential to seek participation from those living within these communities to generate valid findings. Barnes refers to those interviewed as been from areas where ‘the disadvantaged of the disadvantaged live’. Therefore, the implications of this chosen form of data collection must be acknowledged. Many of these participants may be those whom are ‘high risk’ as they may be recognised as being part of a vulnerable group. Therefore, each participant’s comprehension and their ability to understand the research process and its implications must be assessed to reduce any incidence of causing harm to the individual. This study gathers, documents, and analyses the most pressing concerns related to community safety. This topic has to potential to be delicate and therefore the safety of each individual throughout this process must be made a priority. Boundaries must be put in place which clarifies the importance of confidentiality, especially in focus groups where participants are likely to know each other from the community. Barnes suggests that the research aims to set out recommendations which can in turn aid the people of these estates. Therefore, positive impact can be found by those taking part in this research. However, concerns surrounding the research of vulnerable groups can be found to be the ‘over researching’ of minority groups and the consequence that no change may occur from the research taking place.