Homeless Youth in Philadelphia: An innovative method for identifying youth experiencing homelessness

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People’s Emergency Center

Growing Up Homeless Workshop
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Focus for Today

• National Overview
• Study Findings
• Implications & Conclusions
Percent of Homeless Individuals who were Unaccompanied Youth

Estimates from HUD Point in Time Count Data
Studies Demonstrate that Youth Experiencing Homelessness...

• Report high rates of physical and sexual abuse
• Are more likely to have experienced foster care
• Report high rates of substance use
• Evidence worse academic achievement and engagement than their peers
Homeless Youth in the National Spotlight

Opening Doors Report
- Better understanding of the number of youth experiencing homelessness
- Build the evidence base
- Support access to services for specific populations

First Youth Point in Time Count
• Debate nationally and locally on the definition of who is considered homeless

• Current methods of identifying homeless children and youth miss or ignore significant numbers

• Contributes to debate over who are considered to be the most vulnerable homeless - and who should be targeted for limited resources
Study Purpose

Develop a better understanding of youth homelessness in Philadelphia and strategies for addressing the needs of these youth
Mixed Methods Study

Using publicly available data:

– What is the prevalence of youth homelessness in Philadelphia?
– To what extent is youth homelessness associated with physical safety, mental health, substance use and sexual risk behaviors?

Through stakeholder interviews:

– What are strategies for supporting youth experiencing homelessness?
Part 1:
Philadelphia Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

• Largest survey of youth risk behaviors in the U.S.

• Conducted biennially - usually during the spring

• Completed in one class period (45 minutes)

• Anonymous, no “skip-patterns”
## Risk Behaviors

### Physical Safety
- Carried a weapon
- Missed school due to feeling unsafe
- Threatened at school
- Hit by significant other
- Bullied
- Forced to have sex

### Substance Use
- Ever smoked
- Smoked < 13 years of age
- Smoked daily for the last 30 days
- Ever drank alcohol
- Alcohol < 13 years of age
- Ever used marijuana
- Used marijuana < 13 years of age
- Tried cocaine

### Mental Health
- Sad for two or more weeks
- Considered suicide
- Attempted suicide
- Self-injury

### Sexual Risk Behaviors
- Ever had sex
- Had sex < 13 years of age
- Had sex with multiple people
- Used a condom
- Did not use birth control
- Got pregnant
Philadelphia YRBS

• Conducted since 1991

• Includes questions on an array of youth risk behaviors

• In 2009 and 2011, Philadelphia included three questions on housing status – making it one of few locations in the country to do so...
Where do you typically sleep at night?

- At home with my parents or guardians
- At a friend's or relative's home with my parents or guardians
- In a supervised shelter with my parents or guardians
- In a hotel or motel, car, park, campground, or other public place with my parents or guardians

Housed

Homeless with Family

Homeless Without Family (Unaccompanied Youth)
During the past 30 days, did you live away from your parents because you were kicked out, ran away, were abandoned, or removed from your parents?

Have you ever considered yourself to be homeless?
YRBS Sampling Strategy

• Two stage cluster method
  – Schools
  – Classrooms within schools

• The response rate in 2011 exceeded 60% - These data are considered representative of SDP population

• 2011: N = 1,539
  – Representative of 43,735 youth enrolled in public high schools in Philadelphia
YRBS 2011 Sample

Gender (%)

- Male: 46
- Female: 54

Race (%)

- Caucasian: 12
- African American: 52
- Hispanic: 7
- Biracial: 14
- Asian: 12
- Other: 3
Snapshot of Findings: Homeless with Family & Unaccompanied Youth
Questions 1 & 2:

What is the prevalence of youth homelessness in Philadelphia?

What is the prevalence of risk behaviors among youth experiencing homelessness?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Status</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever Homeless</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 2,606)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slept Away From Home With a Parent</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 1,215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slept Away From Home Without a Parent (Unaccompanied Youth)</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 948)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicked out, Thrown Out, Ran Away, or Abandoned (in the last 30 days)</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 3,834)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Sleeping at Night</td>
<td>Homeless with Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At a relative’s or friend’s</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a shelter</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a hotel/motel/campground or other public place</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health Indicators:
Homeless Parent/Unaccompanied Youth

- Sad for at least two weeks
  - Housed: 31.3%
  - Homeless with Parents: 32.2%
  - Unaccompanied Youth: 45.4%

- Considered suicide
  - Housed: 14.4%
  - Homeless with Parents: 21.7%
  - Unaccompanied Youth: 17.4%

- Attempted suicide
  - Housed: 9.7%
  - Homeless with Parents: 24.3%
  - Unaccompanied Youth: 17.6%

- Self-injury
  - Housed: 14.1%
  - Homeless with Parents: 19.7%
  - Unaccompanied Youth: 39.1%
Sexual Risk Behaviors:
Homeless With Parent/Unaccompanied Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Housed</th>
<th>Homeless with Parents</th>
<th>Unaccompanied Youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had sex</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>84.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had sex before age 13</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had sex with more than one person</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>72.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used a condom</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used birth control</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant/Gotten someone pregnant</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 3:

Controlling for gender, age, and race/ethnicity, what is the association between homeless experience and physical safety, mental health, substance use, and sexual risk behaviors?
Multiple Logistic Regression

Youth Demographics
  Gender
  Ethnicity
  Age

Housing Status
  (With Family or Unaccompanied compared to Housed Youth)

Physical Safety

Mental Health

Sexual Risk Behaviors

Substance Use
Physical Safety Risks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carried a weapon</th>
<th>Missed School</th>
<th>Threatened at School</th>
<th>Hit by Significant Other</th>
<th>Bullied at School</th>
<th>Forced to Have Sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless with Family</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied Youth</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accounting for gender, race/ethnicity, and age...

Controlling for the influence of age, race/ethnicity, and gender, youth who were homeless with family were 2.3 times more likely than housed youth to have carried a weapon to school.

Controlling for the influence of age, race/ethnicity, and gender, unaccompanied youth were 3.9 times more likely than housed youth to have carried a weapon to school.
## Poor Mental Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sad for Two or More Weeks</th>
<th>Considered Suicide</th>
<th>Attempted Suicide</th>
<th>Self-Injury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless with Family</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied Youth</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accounting for gender, race/ethnicity, and age...
## Substance Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ever Smoked</th>
<th>Smoked &lt;13 Years Old</th>
<th>Ever Tried Alcohol</th>
<th>Tried Alcohol &lt;13 Years Old</th>
<th>Tried Marijuana</th>
<th>Tried Marijuana &lt;13 Years Old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless with Family</strong></td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unaccompanied Youth</strong></td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>7.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accounting for gender, race/ethnicity, and age...
### Sexual Risk Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Had Sex Ever</th>
<th>Had Sex &lt;13 Years Old</th>
<th>Used a Condom</th>
<th>Did Not Use Birth Control</th>
<th>Got Pregnant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless with Family</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaccompanied Youth</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accounting for gender, race/ethnicity, and age...
Summary of YRBS Findings

Prevalence of Youth Homelessness

At least one out of twenty youth experienced homelessness

Prevalence of Risks

Youth experiencing homelessness more likely than their peers to experience risks

Homeless with Family Compared to Unaccompanied Youth

Across most indicators, unaccompanied youth evidenced the highest prevalence of risk
Limitations of YRBS Data

• Only includes youth enrolled and present the day of the survey

• Self Selecting: extent of underreporting or over-reporting of behaviors cannot be determined

• Secondary data – limited to questions in the YRBS
Part 2: Stakeholder Interviews

Based on the YRBS data, what are strategies for addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness?
Stakeholder Feedback

Thirty semi-structured interviews with an array of stakeholders were conducted between November 2012-February 2013.
Policy Suggestions: 10 Broad Themes

1. School-community partnerships
2. Information/training
3. Schools & mental health
4. Safe schools
5. Peer support
6. Integrated services/interagency collaborations
7. Housing
8. Community
9. Legal/Implementation of McKinney-Vento
10. Access to services
Specific Suggestions

1. Schools as community gathering places
2. Access to behavioral and mental health services
3. Ensure educational rights of youth
4. Increase service access
5. Emphasis on safety
### Study Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovative Methods That are Youth Centered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“It is powerful and important that the government wants to know more about youth homelessness. [...] Youth homelessness is a lot of house hopping, it is not a lot of sheltered youth or street homelessness. Some are – but not a lot. A lot of our youth are sleeping in someone’s house or on the floor somewhere or someone’s porch. That’s what our youth look like.”

- Provider
Study Implications

Complexity of Youth Homelessness

Addressing the Needs of Youth Experiencing Homelessness Requires More than Housing

“A key part of addressing youth homelessness is that it is not just a place to put your stuff and yourself.”

- Provider
Study Implications

“This speaks to the fact that for kids who are becoming disconnected, school might be the last place before everything falls apart. [...] If this is the one connection we have with them because they are unstably housed...this is the place that we should use to connect and try to address some of these issues.”

- Legal

Meeting Youth Where They Are At

Importance of schools as settings for connecting families and addressing needs
Future Areas of Inquiry

• Deeper analysis of existing YRBS data

• Geographic mapping of location of youth relative to location of services

• Use of YRBS in other locations to increase understanding of the prevalence of youth homelessness
Thank You!

We greatly appreciate the time and insight of the individuals who participated in the stakeholder interviews and who contributed to this study.