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To cite this article: Mary E. Haskett, Sarah C. Neal & Kate E. Norwalk (2021): Exploring Variability in Social and Behavioral Adjustment Among Children in Head Start Experiencing Homelessness, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2020.1869554

Published online: 07 Jan 2021.
Exploring Variability in Social and Behavioral Adjustment Among Children in Head Start Experiencing Homelessness

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ABSTRACT
A large body of literature demonstrates that children who experience unstable housing and homelessness are at risk for developmental delays and social–emotional challenges. However, there is also evidence of variability in the functioning of these children. Our primary aims were to identify unique profiles among preschool-aged children who were unstably housed and determine whether family-level and classroom-level factors predicted children’s profiles. Participants, drawn from the national Head Start CARES study, were 314 4-year-old children in one of 107 Head Start centers. Teachers’ reports of children’s behavior and social skills were entered into a latent profile analysis that revealed a four-profile structure with four subgroups of unstably housed children that were distinct in their functioning. Potential predictors of profiles included parent self-reports of their own psychological distress and education, teacher reports of the quality of relationships with the children, and observed teacher emotional support of students. Multinomial regression analyses revealed that the quality of the student–teacher relationship was a significant predictor of children’s profile membership. We provide practice and policy implications, study limitations, and suggestions for future investigations.

KEYWORDS
Prekindergarten; poverty; academic risk; housing instability; teacher–student relationships; head start

According to the National Center on Homeless Education (2020), over 1.5 million U.S. children and youth in PreKindergarten through grade 12 were documented by schools as having experienced homelessness during the 2017–2018 school year. This is likely an underestimation, as many families do not acknowledge the loss of their housing to school personnel. In addition, it is estimated that one in 19 children under the age of 6 experienced homelessness in 2015–2016, and very few children in this age range are included in the formal counts by school personnel (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Young children who face homelessness and high mobility tend to experience poverty-related adverse conditions beyond the loss of their homes, including inadequate health care and chronic illness (Cutuli, Herbers, Rinaldi, Masten, & Oberg, 2010), family separation and child maltreatment (Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2013), exposure to partner violence (Bassuk et al., 1996), and instability in early education due to systemic barriers and mobility (Perlman, Shaw, Kieffer, Whitney, & Bires, 2017).
Such adversity places children who are homeless at risk for a host of challenges, including developmental delays (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Brumley, & Perlman, 2013; Haskett, Armstrong, & Tisdale, 2016), low academic achievement (Masten et al., 2014; Murphy, 2011) and mental health challenges (Bassuk, Richard, & Tsvertsvadze, 2015; Gultekin, Brush, Ginier, Cordom, & Dowdell, 2020; Yu, North, Lavesser, Osborne, & Spitznagel, 2008). Because high-quality early childhood education can promote development and school readiness (Morrissey, Hutchison, & Burgess, 2014), children who meet the definition of homeless in the education subtitle of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act are categorically eligible for Head Start. Families that are temporarily living with others (i.e., “doubled up”) because they lack resources to obtain their own housing meet that definition. Although the majority (approximately 75%) of homeless families are in doubled-up situations (Child Trends, 2015), knowledge about this subpopulation of children is quite limited. The current study focused on children in these precariously housed families. We use the term “unstably housed” rather than “homeless” because the definition of homelessness does not include situations of shared housing in which rent is paid, and some children in our sample (described below) might have been in families that did pay rent for their shared housing.

Despite experiencing a high degree of cumulative risk, adjustment among children who experience unstable housing or homelessness is variable, with many demonstrating resilient functioning (Cutuli et al., 2013; Obradovic, 2010). For example, Huntington, Buckner, and Bassuk (2008) utilized a person-centered approach to analyze individual differences among 122 young children who had experienced homelessness. Using cluster analysis, they found two distinct groups: one group of children was doing well in terms of social–emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning and a second group was doing poorly across all domains. From a strengths-based framework, person-centered (or person-oriented) analyses are considered central to identifying such individual differences among groups of children at risk for maladaptation due to adversity and psychosocial disadvantage (Cairns & Magnusson, 1996); after subgroups are identified, complementary variable-oriented analyses are recommended to uncover factors associated with positive adaptation (e.g., Guyon-Harris et al., 2018).

Following this tradition, we sought to distinguish subgroups of children experiencing unstable housing based on latent profiles of adjustment and to identify (primarily) malleable risk and protective factors that differentiated the subgroups. Specifically, we explored the degree to which family and classroom contextual factors predicted subgroup membership. Selection of these factors was based on relevance for families experiencing unstable or precarious housing, evidence linking these factors to social and behavioral adaptation in young children, and availability in the extant Head Start CARES data set. Given the limited research on children experiencing unstable housing, we chose variables that were commonly faced by families experiencing homelessness and/or predicted maladjustment among children experiencing homelessness.

**Family-level factors**

We investigated the degree to which parental distress was associated with differential functioning among the children. Mothers who experience homelessness are more likely to report symptoms of depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms compared to parents
who are low-income but stably housed (Lee et al., 2010). Support for including this factor also comes from the literature on links between maternal depression and child adjustment (Goodman et al., 2011). Findings from those correlational studies are robust and reinforced by intervention studies, which demonstrate that decreases in maternal depression are followed by improved child behavior (e.g., Pilowsky et al., 2008). The second family-level factor was parent educational attainment. Buckner (2014) reported that 35 to 61% of mothers experiencing homelessness had completed high school or received a GED, compared to about 75% of adults in the general U.S. population. Although rates of completion were low, there was variability in education of these mothers. Children of mothers with lower education tend to be rated higher in disruptive behaviors and lower in academic achievement (Hughes & Ensor, 2009). A study of children in Head Start showed that increases in maternal education predicted subsequent increases in children’s cognitive functioning (Harding, 2015).

Classroom-level variables
We were interested in the degree to which relationships with teachers and the classroom emotional climate would be associated with social and emotional functioning of children who were unstably housed. Little is known about relations between teachers and preschool children who are homeless. Homeless children report social and psychological isolation in school and feelings of isolation predict poorer educational outcomes, especially for those who experience long periods of homelessness (Anooshian, 2003). Positive teacher–child interactions can mitigate effects of various childhood risks for maladjustment. For example, a meta-analysis indicated that the effects of teacher-child relationships on academic functioning and engagement were particularly strong for children who were academically at risk and/or economically disadvantaged (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Further, emotionally supportive classrooms can be protective for children with behavioral and self-regulatory challenges (Cadima, Verschueren, Leal, & Guedes, 2016).

Current study
With a few notable exceptions (Huntington et al., 2008), there has been scant attention to individual differences in adjustment of young children experiencing homelessness or unstable housing and limited attention to children who are living in doubled-up situations. There has been even less focus on factors that differentiate those who demonstrate resilient functioning from those who struggle with adjustment problems. Understanding individual differences can contribute to intervention planning and policy; therefore, using a person-centered data analytic approach, we sought to first identify subgroups of children in unstable housing who had common patterns of adjustment based on teacher reports of children’s behavior. Then, using a variable-oriented framework, we examined the degree to which subgroup membership was predicted by family- and classroom-level factors. Our data analytic approach was exploratory so we did not establish hypotheses related to number of unique profiles that would emerge. We did, however, expect that profiles comprised of children who were relatively well-adjusted...
would be characterized by lower parental distress, higher parent educational attainment, more positive classroom climate, and higher quality relationships with teachers.

**Method**

**Participants**

Data were drawn from the Head Start CARES demonstration, a national randomized study designed to test the effectiveness of three intervention strategies to promote children’s social-emotional development. The original study included approximately 3900 children across 307 Head Start classrooms from 107 Head Start Centers. At the start of the school year, prior to any intervention, parent surveys were completed for 1846 4-year old children. Our study includes data from a subset of the children (\( n = 1832 \)) whose parents responded to a survey item that asked “Which of the following best describes your housing arrangement last month.” Specifically, our sample was 321 children (49.8% female) whose parents endorsed that they were living with friends or relatives and were either paying or not paying rent. The majority were Hispanic (46.3%), Black (32.7%), or White (12.5%), and 5.9% identified as another race.

**Procedure**

On average, data were collected for seven randomly selected children in each participating classroom via classroom observations, parent surveys, teacher surveys, and direct child assessments. For this study, we used data collected at the start of the school year. Classroom observations were completed during the spring prior to that academic year. Informed consent was obtained from parents and assent was obtained from children. Our university IRB determined the investigation to be exempt because the extant data were de-identified.

**Measures**

**Measures used to identify latent profiles**

We used measures of social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment to identify subgroups of children. Children’s externalizing, internalizing, and hyperactive behaviors were measured using the Behavior Problems Index (BPI; Zill, 1990). Teachers rated children on 28 behaviors over the past three months on a scale from 1 (“Often true”) to 3 (“Not true”). Examples of items on the BPI include: “has sudden changes in mood,” “argues too much,” and “has trouble getting along with other children.” The Head Start CARES demonstration researchers identified three factors using exploratory factor analysis: (1) externalizing behaviors (11 items), (2) internalizing behaviors (10 items), and (3) hyperactivity (5 items). Items were rescaled to a scale of 0–2 and then reversed (where 2 = often true, 1 = sometimes true, and 0 = not true). Higher scores on each subscale reflected greater behavior problems. To identify latent profiles, we used raw scores on internalizing behaviors (range 0–20), externalizing behaviors (range 0–22), and hyperactivity (range 0–10) subscales. The BPI subscale scores have good test–retest reliability, ranging from 0.77 to 0.88 (Parcel & Menaghan, 1988), but data demonstrating evidence
of validity are limited. In this study, Cronbach’s alpha reliability estimates were 0.97 for the Externalizing scale, 0.97 for the Internalizing Scale and 0.95 for the Hyperactivity scale.

Children’s social competence was measured using the Cooper-Farran Behavior Rating Scale: Interpersonal Skills subscale (CFBRS-IPS; Cooper & Farran, 1991). The CFBRS-IPS scale consists of 21 items that measure how well children get along with the teacher and peers. For each item, teachers rate children on a 7-point scale. Each point on the scale corresponds with a behavior description. For example, teachers are directed to note the behavior that best describes the child’s “response to helpful criticism from teacher.” A score of 1 is described as “accepts criticism easily, uses it to improve performance” and a score of 7 is described as “angrily rejects teacher’s attempts to help.” Select items (such as the example) are reverse coded, so that higher scores indicate higher competency. Total scores are the average ratings across all 21 items. Within the Head Start CARES demonstration, the CFBRS-IPS scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$; Morris et al., 2014).

Children’s social competence was also measured using the Social Skills Rating System, Social Skills scale (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The SSRS Social Skills scale includes 30 items. Teachers rate the frequency with which a child demonstrates social behaviors across three dimensions: cooperation, assertion with peers, and self-control in social situations. Ratings range from 0 (“Never”) to 2 (“Very Often”), for a total possible raw score ranging from 0 to 60. The scale is psychometrically sound, with high internal consistency (alpha = 0.90–0.94) and test–retest reliability ($r = 0.85$; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). It has not been validated for preschoolers, but there is evidence of validity with elementary school-aged children (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Within the Head Start CARES demonstration, the raw SSRS Social Skills scale scores were internally consistent (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.95–0.96$; Morris et al., 2014).

**Measures of predictor variables**

Parental distress was measured using the Kessler six-item Psychological Distress Scale (K6; Kessler et al., 2003). The K6 is a nonspecific screener for symptoms of psychological distress including depressed mood, motor agitation, fatigue, worthlessness, guilt, and anxiety. Parents rate the frequency with which they experienced each item over the last 30 days on a scale from 0 (“None of the time”) to 4 (“All of the time”). Examples of questions on this scale include: “during the past 30 days, about how often did you feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up” and “that everything was an effort.” A composite score is the sum of ratings on all items, with a possible range of 0-24. The developers recommend using a cut score of 13 or higher to denote serious psychological distress and the potential for mental illness. The K6 has demonstrated validity through correlations with the Comprehensive International Diagnostic Interview-Short Form and the WHO Disability Assessment Schedule (Kessler et al., 2003).

Parents reported the highest level of school completed. Original response options included “Less than 12th grade,” “G.E.D. or high school diploma,” “Some college,” “Associates Degree,” and “Bachelors degree, graduate degree or some graduate school.” Given the relatively small number of participants across each of the latter three categories, these response options were collapsed into one category. Thus, the final variable
included three categories of “less than 12th grade” (34.1%), “GED or High School Diploma” (36.6%) or “higher education degree” (28.7%).

To assess teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with child participants, Head Start CARES demonstration researchers drew select items from the conflict and closeness subscales of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS, Pianta, 2001). The Conflict subscale (7 items) represents teacher-perceived negativity and discordance with the child. The Closeness subscale (8 items) reflects teachers’ perceived warmth and open communication with the child. Teachers rate each item on a scale ranging from 1 (“Definitely does not apply”) to 5 (“Definitely applies”). Examples of items from the STRS include: “I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child” and “this child easily becomes angry with me.” A total score was calculated by reverse coding negatively worded items and then calculating the mean of all 15 items. This is a widely-used measure with reliability and validity for use with children from minority and low-income backgrounds (e.g., Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Classroom emotional climate was assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System—Preschool Version (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), an observational measure of the quality of several dimensions of teacher–child interaction. For this study, only the Emotional Support scale was used, which contains four dimensions—positive climate, negative climate (reverse-coded), teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives. Each dimension was rated by trained observers in four observations on a scale ranging from 1 to 7. Scores were averaged across the four observations to create an Emotional Support composite score with a range of 1–7; higher scores indicate a more positive and supportive emotional climate. The CLASS has been deemed valid and reliable for early childhood classrooms, including in Head Start (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007). Within the Head Start CARES demonstration, the CLASS Emotional Support scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.87; Morris et al., 2014).

Analytic approach

Patterns of adjustment were explored via latent profile analysis (LPA) using Mplus version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén 1998). LPA is a special type of latent class analysis that identifies unobservable subgroups, or latent profiles, based on correlations among a set of observable scores from continuous, rather than categorical, variables. LPA was performed on teacher ratings on internalizing, externalizing, and hyperactivity BPI scales; Social Skills scale from the SSRS; and Interpersonal Skills scale from the CFBRS. Models with an increasing number of profiles were tested and compared using (1) Akaike’s information criteria (AIC; Akaike, 1987); (2) Bayesian information criteria (BIC; Schwarz, 1978); (3) entropy values, and (4) the bootstrap likelihood ratio test (BLRT). Smaller AIC and BIC values indicated a more optimal balance between fit and parsimony (Collins & Lanza, 2010), while entropy values closer to 1 reflected greater certainty by which each individual case was designated to a particular latent profile. Finally, the BLRT compares a model with K profiles to a model with K–1 profiles, using bootstrap samples to estimate the distribution of the log likelihood difference test statistic (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). A statistically significant BLRT
indicates that the model with K profiles provides a better fit than a model with 
K + 1 profiles.

After identifying the best fitting latent profile solution, we examined the degree to 
which profile membership was predicted by family-level and classroom-level predictors. 
This was accomplished via the three-step approach for auxiliary variables in mixture 
modeling available in Mplus (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). With this approach, a 
latent profile model is estimated in the first step using only latent class indicators. In 
the second step, participants are assigned to their most likely class membership based 
on the posterior probabilities produced from the first step, taking into account the clas-
sification uncertainty rate (i.e., measurement error). Finally, this variable is regressed on 
covariates (i.e., auxiliary variables) in a separate multinomial logistic regression model.

Results

Patterns of social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment

A total of seven children had missing data on all of the indicators used to identify latent 
profiles, and were thus excluded from analyses. For the remaining participants 
(n = 314), missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood 
(FIML) estimation, which is the default in Mplus. Table 1 presents fit statistics for two, 
three, four, and five profile LPA solutions. Although the BLRT supported a 5-profile 
solution, the other fit statistics supported a four-profile solution while also producing 
the highest latent class probabilities and the most interpretable latent profiles. 
Descriptive statistics for the full sample and each of the four identified profiles are rep-
resented in Table 2. The first profile included the largest percent of children (68.7%) 
and reflected a High Functioning subgroup (n = 216) characterized by the highest levels 
of interpersonal and social skills and the lowest levels of problem behaviors. The second 
profile, labeled Moderate Risk, comprised 15.9% of children (n = 50) and was character-
ized by slightly elevated levels of externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and 
hyperactivity. Additionally, these children exhibited slightly better social skills than 
those of children in Profiles 3 and 4. Children in the third profile, labeled At Risk, com-
prised 12.1% of the children (n = 38) and demonstrated elevated levels of hyperactivity 
and externalizing and internalizing behavior problems, and the poorest social function-
ing as measured by the SSRS when compared to the other profiles. Finally, the remain-
ing children (n = 10; 3.2%) were classified as Struggling. These children demonstrated 
high levels of externalizing behavior problems, and moderate levels of internalizing behaviors and hyperactivity. These children also demonstrated difficulties with social 
skills, as evidenced by low scores on the CFBRS-IPS and SSRS.
Predictors of latent profile membership

The degree to which profile membership among children was predicted by family-level and classroom-level predictors was next explored using the 3-step procedure for auxiliary variables in mixture modeling in Mplus (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). The four-profile solution was estimated in the first step, and the High Functioning profile served as the reference category in the multinomial logistic regression analysis in the third step. Table 3 presents means and standard deviations for predictors, by profile. Results of multinomial logistic regression indicated that teacher reports of the quality of their student–teacher relationships increased, children were 0.24 times (95% CI = 0.16–0.61, \( p = .001 \); OR = 0.31) less likely to be classified as Moderate Risk, 0.11 times (95% CI = 0.06–0.25, \( p < .001 \); OR = 0.12) less likely to be classified as At-Risk, and 0.03 times (95% CI = 0.003–0.24, \( p = .001 \); OR = 0.03) less likely to be classified as Struggling than to be classified as High Functioning. A table with the full results of multinomial logistic regression can be made available upon request to the corresponding author.

Discussion

Preschool and school-aged children who experience unstable housing are at risk for a host of behavioral and social challenges in school, but there is growing evidence of variability in functioning among these students. Latent profile analysis revealed four subgroups of unstably housed children with unique patterns of adjustment in the classroom. A promising finding was that the largest group of children, representing more than one-half of the sample, were functioning well. They demonstrated the highest levels of interpersonal and social skills, and the lowest levels of problem behaviors. Only 15% of the children (At Risk and Struggling, combined) demonstrated clear behavioral maladjustment and social problems. Children in these profiles did not differ in terms of internalizing behaviors or social skills, but those in the Struggling group demonstrated significantly lower levels of interpersonal skills and higher levels of externalizing and hyperactive behaviors. Another 15.9% showed some difficulties relative to the high functioning group, but their teachers did not view them as having serious behavioral or social challenges.

This sample of children was unique in that they were living in doubled-up circumstances and were enrolled in Head Start, a high-quality early childhood education program. Relative to other families facing homelessness, they were in families that were...
sufficiently stable to enroll them in Head Start and were willing to participate in the research project. It is possible this sample represented a group of homeless children that were at relatively lower risk compared to other children experiencing homelessness. Perhaps Head Start served a protective role for these children. Recent results of a large-scale national study indicated that homeless children who were enrolled in Head Start or other early education center-based care displayed stronger school readiness skills than those who had not been enrolled in center-based care (Brown, Shinn, & Khadduri, 2017). Future studies should determine whether patterns of adjustment of children experiencing homelessness or precarious housing and not enrolled in high-quality early childhood programs are similar to the profiles identified in this study.

**Predictors of membership**

Contrary to expectations, family-level factors did not predict profile subgroup membership. Parent education has typically been used as a proxy for SES, but emerging research suggests that other family-level factors such as household chaos and parenting behavior are more robust predictors of outcomes in early childhood than SES alone (Brown, Ackerman, & Moore, 2013; Mills-Koonce et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the extant dataset did not include data for those variables. In terms of parental distress, research points to the need to consider the effects of severity and chronicity of symptoms on children’s developmental outcomes (Petterson & Albers, 2001). Our measure was a screening tool to identify current risk for a mental health disorder, thus limiting our ability to assess the severity of parents’ symptoms or the course of symptoms over time. In terms of classroom-level factors, teachers’ views of the degree of conflict and closeness in their relationships with the children predicted subgroup membership in expected directions. Specifically, children of teachers who reported that their relationships were close and low in conflict were more likely to be members of the subgroup without behavior problems or deficits in social skills. Because we explored variability in adjustment among children at a single point in time, we cannot determine directionality of these effects. Longitudinal studies will be necessary to understand how teacher–child relationships and classroom adjustment of unstably housed children interact and unfold over time.

**Limitations and future directions**

We acknowledge several limitations that should be considered in interpretation of findings. First, all child outcome variables were measured by teachers’ reports. It would
have been optimal to use a multi-method multi-informant approach to measuring outcomes. Teacher reports of relationships with children in their classes was the only factor that was significantly associated with latent profile membership; likewise, subgroups were formed on the basis of variables measured exclusively by teacher report. Thus, shared method variance might have led to overestimation of the association between teacher–child relationships and child behavior. Second, children in our sample were experiencing homelessness as defined by being doubled-up with other families. This is the most common living situation for families that face homelessness (Child Trends, 2015), which supports the external validity of the study. However, findings might not be reproducible for children experiencing less common forms of homelessness, such as living in shelters or in motels. Finally, we examined functioning of children at single point in time. Stability of subgroup classifications and predictors of differential trajectories in adjustment of children who are unstably housed should be explored.

**Implications**

Although results from this cross-sectional study are preliminary and replication is warranted, our findings do suggest that promoting warm relationships with early childhood teachers could lead to improved behavioral adjustment and social competence of young children experiencing unstable housing or homelessness. This is consistent with a cross-case analysis of the observed and self-reported teaching practices of effective teachers who emphasized the affective needs—as well as instructional needs—of highly mobile students in their classes (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011). Brief in-class interventions such as banking time (Driscoll, Wang, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2011) to promote positive relationships between teachers and their students could prove to be useful. For these interventions to have intended results, however, preschool teachers might need additional guidance to work effectively with children who are unstably housed. Teachers could be susceptible to stereotyped beliefs about homeless students and their families and those beliefs might impact their relationships with the children. Indeed, Kim (2013) found that pre-service early childhood teachers held stereotypical and negative views of children who were homeless and described them in negative terms (e.g., “messy”, “dysfunctional”). In a qualitative study of teachers who worked with homeless families, teachers discussed challenges such as difficult communication with parents and frequent changes related to students moving in and out of their classroom (Chow, Mistry, & Melchor, 2015). Some of the teachers felt overwhelmed and lacked necessary supports to handle the stress of working in a school with homeless students.

Findings of variability in adjustment highlight the importance of longitudinal and multifaceted assessments to identify strengths and needs of children experiencing unstable housing (see DeCandia, Bassuk, & Richard, 2017). Although unstable housing is a significant risk factor by itself, studies show that many children experiencing homelessness fare quite well. In addition to teacher-student relationships, more nuanced indices of family adversity such as parenting practices and household chaos can help identify children experiencing unstable housing that are most at risk for maladjustment. Similarly, it is paramount to assess residential stability over time, rather than only one
point in time (Ackerman, Brown, & Izard, 2003). Over time, these factors can represent cumulative risk for academic failure upon entry to kindergarten (Kriebal & Brown, 2018).

We did not have the option of comparing our sample to unstably housed children not enrolled in Head Start, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that enrollment promoted the fairly high functioning of our sample. If this is the case, identifying doubled-up children and reducing barriers to enrolling them in high-quality early childhood education programs as soon as possible should be a high priority, as recommended by many experts on the early childhood needs of homeless children (e.g., Perlman et al., 2017). However, as demonstrated by variability in functioning among the children in our sample, simply enrolling children in early childhood education programs will not sufficiently buffer all children who are doubled-up from the potential negative effects of precarious housing. Systematic training and coaching for early childhood education teachers specific to the needs of homeless families might be needed. In fact, online training materials for the early childhood education sector were released recently by the U.S. DHHS Administration for Children and Families. If such professional development materials show positive results, required completion of the training modules should be considered.

In closing, this study is one of few investigations to use a strengths-based approach to understanding adjustment of unstably housed children by focusing on within-group variability rather than between-group differences. Identifying factors associated with differences in adjustment during early childhood is critical because the earlier in life a child experiences unstable housing or homelessness, the more severe and chronic their struggles in school tend to be (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2013). Our findings, which show that there are unique subgroups of young unstably housed children—with the largest group showing evidence of resilient functioning—have relevance for early childhood education of children whose families are under resourced and overburdened.

**Disclosure statement**

The authors have no financial interest and have received no benefit from the direct applications of this research.

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**Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available via Morris, Pamela. Head Start CARES Demonstration: National Evaluation of Three Approaches to Improving Preschoolers’ Social and Emotional Competence, 2009-2015. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2017-03-06. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR35510.v3
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