Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Self-report at school and homelessness

J. J. Cutuli, Rutgers University – Camden
Joe Willard, People’s Emergency Center
Sarah Slautterback, MA Dept. of Education
Mary Haskett, North Carolina State University

With:
Jenna M. Armstrong, NC State University
Dan Treglia, Univ. of Pennsylvania
Statement of problem

• Youth homelessness is hard to gauge by its nature
  • Developmental differences
    • Not little adults / Not big children
  • Less likely to want to be found
  • More likely to be sofa surfing, not connected to shelter or any targeted services

• Ending Youth Homelessness Requires Good Data
  • Representative sample
  • Consistent definition
  • Actionable intelligence
Shelter use by age group

Differing Methods of Counting

**Approaches**

• Education – Youth Identified Under McKinney Vento Act
  • Count over a year
  • Students identified by school personnel / district liaisons
  • Collaboration with City shelter providers
  • Broader definition; Includes doubled-up youth

• HUD - Point-In-Time (PIT) Count
  • Momentary count: One night in January...
  • Sheltered & Unsheltered
How do we tell how many youth are homeless?

What if we asked?

**The Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

- Biennial, usually during the spring
- Administered in high schools nationwide
- Population weighting
- Asks about an array of youth risk behaviors
- Anonymous and checked for quality
- Only includes questions about homelessness through special effort
8 States and New York City
5 different homelessness questions
During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep?

- In my parent's or guardian's home
- With friends, family, or other people because my parents or I lost our home or cannot afford housing
- In a motel or hotel
- In a shelter or emergency housing
- In a car, park, campground, or other public place
- I moved from place to place
- Somewhere else
During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep at night?

- In my parent's or guardian's home
- In a friend's or relative's home
- In a foster home or group facility
- In a shelter or emergency housing
- In a hotel or motel
- In a car, park, campground, or other public place
- I moved from place to place
- Somewhere else
Homeless Rate

- Illinois: 2.77%
- NYC: 4.64%
- Connecticut: 4.99%
- Alaska: 6.13%
- New Mexico: 3.98%
- Massachusetts: 0.00%
- Delaware: 1.00%
- Maryland: 2.00%
- North Carolina: 3.00%
- Other states: 4.00%
Where do you usually sleep?

- In my parent's or guardian's home
- With friends, family, or other people because my parents or I lost our home or cannot afford housing
- In a motel or hotel
- In a shelter or emergency housing
- In a car, park, campground, or other public place
- I move from place to place
- Somewhere else
Where do you typically sleep at night?

- At home with your parents or guardians
- At a friend's or relative's home with your parent(s) or guardian(s)
- At a friend's or relative's home without your parent(s) or guardian(s)
- Somewhere else (shelter, transitional housing, public place, hotel, car) with your parent(s) or guardian(s)
- Somewhere else (shelter, group home, foster care home, public place, car, hotel) without your parent(s) or guardian(s)
During the past 12 months, where did you usually sleep at night?

- At home
- In a friend's, relative's, or stranger's home
- In a foster home or group facility
- In a supervised shelter or time-limited housing program
- In a hotel or motel
- In a car, park, campground, or other public place
- Somewhere else
BONUS QUESTION!

During the past 12 months, did you ever live away from your parents or guardians because you were kicked out, ran away, or were abandoned?

- Yes
- No
Homelessness
Run/Throw away

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Homelessness</th>
<th>Run/Throw away</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>2.77%</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
<td>4.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>6.13%</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>3.98%</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>4.64%</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
<td>1.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>3.26%</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual High Schoolers

- Subpopulation of youth experiencing homelessness
- May represent a distinct pathway to homelessness ...
- ... and distinct needs
- Prevalence unclear
  - Past estimates give a range: 20 to 40% of all youth homeless
  - Calls for better counts
LGB Identification Rates

- **Illinois**
  - LGB % General Population: 19.0%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 9.0%

- **NYC**
  - LGB % General Population: 13.2%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 9.6%

- **Connecticut**
  - LGB % General Population: 16.9%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 8.6%

- **Alaska**
  - LGB % General Population: 23.4%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 11.0%

- **New Mexico**
  - LGB % General Population: 25.6%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 10.6%

- **Massachusetts**
  - LGB % General Population: 25.6%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 8.0%

- **Delaware**
  - LGB % General Population: 25.6%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 7.6%

- **Maryland**
  - LGB % General Population: 25.6%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 8.5%

- **North Carolina**
  - LGB % General Population: 25.6%
  - LGB % Homeless Population: 17.2%
Key Points (1)

• Rates of homelessness in high school: ~2 to ~6%
  • Differing questions make direct comparisons difficult!
  • More students endorsed question about being kicked out, running away, or abandoned

• Homeless students who identify as LGB: 10 to 26%
  • LGB students are overrepresented among homeless

• Next steps:
  More of the same question in more places
Optional questions for 2017 survey:

1. During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep?
   a. In my parent’s or guardian’s home
   b. With friends, family, or other people because I lost my home
   c. In a shelter or emergency housing
   d. In a motel or hotel
   e. In a car, park, campground, or other public place
   f. I moved from place to place
   g. Somewhere else

2. During the past 30 days, did you ever live away from your parents or guardians because you were kicked out, ran away, or were abandoned?
   a. Yes
   b. No
Using the YRBS to Understand Challenges of Youth Homelessness

Mary E. Haskett & Jenna M. Armstrong
North Carolina State University

Presented at the 2016 meeting of the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Orlando
Overview

- YRBS in NC: Process
- Characteristics of our sample
- Links between homelessness & mental health functioning
- Potential moderators: teacher support, victimization
- Q&A
Process in NC

Recruit Partners (spring 2014)

- Community agencies that support homeless families
- Leading agency serving homeless youth
- United Way
- NC Homeless Education Program
- NC Coalition to End Homelessness
- National Consortium members

Identify contact at NC Dept. of Public Instruction
Process in NC

Prepare & submit proposal (May-June 2014)

• Rationale for the request
• Questions to add
• Background (results in other states)
• Analysis and dissemination plan
• Letters of support
  • NAEHCY
  • Coalition, Co-founders
  • North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness
Process in NC

- Presented proposal to YRBS committee at Questionnaire Development Meeting, DPI. (July 2014)
  - Four other groups were present to advocate for adding questions.
  - DPI must balance requests to add questions with CDC requirements and the 99-item limit.
  - No charge for added questions.
- Informed of decision to add one question (September 2014)
- Received 2015 data!
Our (single) Question:

During the past 12 months, where did you *usually* sleep at night?  
A. At home  
B. In a friend's, relative's, or stranger’s home  
C. In a foster home or group facility  
D. In a supervised shelter or time limited housing program  
E. In a hotel or motel  
F. In a car, park, campground, or other public place  
G. Somewhere else
Our (single) Question:

During the past 12 months, where did you usually sleep at night?

A. At home
B. In a friend's, relative's, or stranger’s home
C. In a foster home or group facility
D. In a supervised shelter or time limited housing program
E. In a hotel or motel
F. In a car, park, campground, or other public place
G. Somewhere else*
Research Questions

• What is the rate of homelessness among NC youth enrolled in high school? How do the rates compare to other samples using the YRBS?

• Are there differences between homeless & housed students on indicators of mental health issues (Merscham et al., 2009; Perlman et al., 2014)?

• Is the link between homelessness & mental health moderated by:
  • victimization experiences (Bender et al., 2015; Bender et al., 2014; Rattlelade et al., 2014)
  • students’ support from teachers (Elledge et al., 2016; Yeung & Leadbetter, 2010)
Characteristics of the Sample

Caveat: Findings are preliminary!
Characteristics of the Sample  
\((N=6,178)\)

- 49.6% female
- 31% Freshmen, 26% Sophomores, 22% Juniors, 20% Seniors
- 38% White, 29% Black/AA, 9% Hispanic, 20% Other
- 10% 14 years old or younger, 26% 15 years old, 27% 16 years old, 22% 17 years old, 15% 18 years old or older
# Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At Home</td>
<td>5077</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a friend's, relative's, or stranger’s home</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a foster home or group facility</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a supervised shelter or time limited housing program</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a hotel or motel</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a car, park, campground, or other public place</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere else</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HOMELESS</strong></td>
<td>343</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>% homeless</th>
<th>% Somewhere else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NC 2015</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT 2011 (Cutuli et al., 2015)</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE 2011 (Cutuli et al., 2015)</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia 2011 (Cutuli et al., 2015)</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Mental Health Functioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Full Sample (N = 5635-6052)</th>
<th>Housed (N = 5048-5095)</th>
<th>Homeless (N = 302-326)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt sad or hopeless</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered suicide</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made suicide plan</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Don’t) feel good about self</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel alone in life</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Full Sample (N = 5746-6110)</td>
<td>Housed (N = 4847-5148)</td>
<td>Homeless (N = 286-337)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped school because felt unsafe</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened or injured with weapon at school</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was in physical fight*</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was injured in physical fight*</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was in physical fight at school*</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to have sexual intercourse</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced physical dating violence</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced sexual dating violence</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was bullied at school</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic bullying</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was teased because labeled GLB</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Support

Do you agree or disagree that your teachers really care about you and give you a lot of encouragement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entire Sample (N = 5381)</th>
<th>Housed (N = 4612)</th>
<th>Homeless (N = 228)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(agree, strongly agree)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(disagree, strongly disagree, not sure)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do groups differ on primary variables?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Victimization</th>
<th>p &lt; .001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>1.98 (1.44)</td>
<td>2.50 (2.79)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housed</strong></td>
<td>1.04 (1.42)</td>
<td>.93 (1.40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher Support</th>
<th>No Teacher Support</th>
<th>p &lt; .01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless</strong></td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housed</strong></td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are victimization and/or teacher support moderators?

- **Victimization** is a significant moderator of the association between housing status and mental health.
  \[ F(1, 4613) = 12.32, \ p < .001 \] (partial eta squared = .003)

- Teacher support is **not** a significant moderator of the association between housing status and mental health.
  \[ F(1, 5058) = 0.59, \ p > .05 \] (partial eta squared = .000)
Mental Health Issues for Victimized & Non-Victimized Youth, by Homeless Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Victimized</th>
<th>Not Victimized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HOMELESS</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOUSED</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health Issues for Students with & without Teacher Support, by Housing Status

- **HOMELESS**
  - No Support: 2.25
  - Teacher Support: 1.71

- **HOUSED**
  - No Support: 1.3
  - Teacher Support: 0.83
Conclusions, based on initial analyses

• Rates are similar to those in other states, in spite of differences in housing questions.
• Findings replicate other studies indicating high mental health concerns, but there are individual differences.
• Victimization appears to exacerbate mental health issues for homeless youth.
• Teacher support could be buffer for homeless and housed youth.
• Remember, these data are cross-sectional. Sample includes only youth enrolled in school.
What’s next?

- Inclusion of 2 standard housing questions on 2017 YRSB – request has been filed.
- Continue analyses and share with state orgs.
- Collaborate on multi-state analyses to (a) gain understanding of risks and protective factors associated with homelessness and (b) inform policy.
YRBS in Massachusetts
Massachusetts YRBS

2005 Massachusetts asked a nighttime residence question. Responses mirrored the McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness.

2007 released a report on homelessness in MA public schools.
- Looked at protective factors and risk behaviors
- Compared to annual enrollment data

10. Where do you typically sleep at night?
A. At home with my parents or guardians
B. At a friend’s or relative’s home with my parents or guardians
C. At a friend’s or relative’s home without my parents or guardians
D. In a supervised shelter with my parents or guardians
E. In a supervised shelter without my parents or guardians
F. In a hotel or motel, car, park, campground, or other public place with my parents or guardians
G. In a hotel or motel, car, park, campground, or other public place without my parents or guardians
H. Somewhere else
Homelessness in Massachusetts Public Schools

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control, biannually administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in randomly selected high schools across the Commonwealth. Since 2005 the survey has included a housing status question. The eight possible responses include being permanently housed and seven other responses that reflect the definition of homelessness* under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 2002, Title X, Part C, NCLB.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
<th>% of Homeless Students</th>
<th>% of Housed Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe teachers care</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn good grades (A, B, or C)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate on a sports team in the past year</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat breakfast each morning</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Risk Behaviors                                         |                        |                      |
| Members of a gang                                      | 28                     | 6                    |
| Had alcohol in the past 30 days                        | 53                     | 35                   |
| Used marijuana in the past month                       | 49                     | 24                   |
| Ever used heroin                                       | 9                      | 1                    |
| Felt sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks               | 35                     | 21                   |
| Made a suicide attempt that resulted in injury         | 8                      | 2                    |
| Had sexual contact against their will                  | 19                     | 8                    |
| Ever been or gotten someone pregnant                   | 19                     | 2                    |

* ESE has adopted Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 2002 (Title X, Part C, No Child Left Behind) regarding the definition of homeless children and youth.
Using YRBS Data to build awareness...

• YRBS data is used in trainings and outreach
  • Different risks and protective factors engage different stakeholders
  • CDC collaboration supports the validity of the data
  • Provides a broader picture of homeless students’ experiences

• YRBS date is used when collaborating with other stakeholders
  • encouraged state nutrition staff to work with USDA on summer feeding programs in hotels used for shelters.
Using YRBS data for state policy

- **2010** advocates start working with the legislature to build awareness of unaccompanied homeless youth

- **2011** first youth homelessness bill filed

- **2012** Unaccompanied homeless youth and young adult special commission established

- **2013** Special commission funded at $150,000
Using YRBS data for state policy

2014 First Youth Count! statewide

2015 Second Youth Count!, Report included education and YRBS data definition adopted, commission written into legislation, $2 million budgeted for housing and services

2016 Third Youth Count!

2017 Fourth Youth Count!

For many years the number of unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) was thought to be small; particularly for those that are school age. However, the experience of youth service providers has suggested unaccompanied homelessness is a growing issue for youth under eighteen as well as older youth. In 2005 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) added housing status question to the bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in an effort to better understand the impact of homelessness on children and youth, their risk behaviors and protective factors. Responses allowed for living arrangements that met the definition of homelessness when students were living with their parents and when they were unaccompanied. Results have over the years indicated as many as four to five thousand children and youth may be unaccompanied and homeless during any school year or approximately 1.7 - 2.1% of the high school student population.
Massachusetts YRBS

- **2015** MA used two new questions to separate homelessness and being unaccompanied but with different timeframes.

- **2016** YRBS Report of the 2015 data will include a page dedicated to homeless students.

- **2017** MA will use the two CDC recommended questions with consistent timeframes.
YRBS Recap

• High schoolers who experienced homelessness
  • Discerning local rates through self-report
  • Subpopulations of interest
  • Identifying needs and planning services
  • Advocacy

• Add housing questions to your local YRBS!
  • Use the ‘optional’ question wording from the CDC