



BrainGain@PEC



Brought to you by the PEC Policy Department
For more information, email Policy Department.

Date: October, 2018

BrainGain@PEC provides brief summaries of research or publications on family homelessness and related issues. Previous issues of BrainGain@PEC can be found at <https://www.pec-cares.org/policy-publications.html>

Homelessness in High School: Population-Representative Rates of Self-Reported Homelessness, Resilience and Risk in Philadelphia

This summary spotlights a new report that uses data from the **Youth Risk Behavior Survey** (YRBS) conducted in Philadelphia to estimate the prevalence of youth homelessness and risk for problems in the areas of victimization, binge drinking, serious substance use, and poor mental health.

The report was written by **Dr. JJ Cutuli of Rutgers University**. Dr. Cutuli is a PEC Visiting Scholar and a researcher for PEC's Building Early Links for Learning. **Read the full report** at <http://bit.ly/2Aol5st>.

Key points:

- About **16% of high school students in Philadelphia** reported experiencing homelessness at some point. About 12% of high schoolers were currently or recently homeless.
 - 4.8% of all high school students typically slept in a homeless situation
 - 8.4% lived away from their parents because of running away, abandonment, or removal
 - 9.2% ever considered themselves to be homeless
- There are more homeless youth than previously reported by the Point in Time Count and the School District of Philadelphia's 'Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness.'
- Homelessness was **associated** with **higher levels of** victimization and higher likelihood of experiencing a behavioral health problem. Those behaviors include suicidality, self-injury, binge drinking, disordered eating, and substance abuse.

- About 25% of the youths who had experienced homelessness **did not show problems** and appeared to be **resilient**.
- The YRBS is an anonymous, self-report survey that produces population-representative estimates for all Philadelphia high school students.
- Findings generally confirm the presence of a risk gradient for each individual outcome wherein *never-homeless* students show the lowest level of risk, students who had been homeless *only in the past* an intermediate level of risk, and *currently or recently* homeless students the highest level of risk.
- Results are consistent with the view that homelessness represents a period of crisis or acute risk that challenges positive adaptation, often in the context of chronic risk.

PEC's suggestions on how Philadelphia can use information from this paper include:

- **Training:** Several groups in Philadelphia, including the Young Adult Leadership Committee and the Education Law Center, can use this paper to demonstrate to the School District's teachers, counselors, and administration a need for improving how District staff are trained to work with youth who experience homelessness. School staff are often unable to recognize students experiencing homelessness.
- **Support the use of peers and school-based approaches:** The paper cites that adolescents desire **autonomy, value peer relationships, and avoid the stigma** that is associated with homelessness, making engaging social services and adults **less likely**. This argues that the School District should **pilot** an approach in which **peers** are used as counselors and contacts.
- **Consider protective factors in an approach:** Efforts should consider protective factors rather than an 'adversity' or 'risk-only' approach. Examples include supporting positive relationships with competent adults and peers.
- **Influencing policy making:** The Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services and the Department of Human Services can use this document to inform its staff to consider a **youth developmental perspective** when designing housing and service programs.