



## Young Children Experiencing Homelessness: An Overview December 2017

### Many Young Children Experience Homelessness.

- Infancy is the age at which a person is most likely to live in a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) shelter.<sup>i</sup>
- An estimated 1.2 million children under age six experience homelessness, representing one of every 18 children under age six.<sup>ii</sup>
- This number includes children whose families are unable to stay in shelters because shelters do not exist in their communities; shelters are full; or shelters have rules that restrict who can stay there. These families often stay temporarily in motels, or with other people due to lack of adequate options. They meet the legal definition of homeless for public schools under the McKinney-Vento Act; Head Start and Early Head Start programs; Child Care and Development Fund programs; and Early Intervention (IDEA Part C) programs.
- Approximately half of children staying in HUD homeless shelters are under age six.<sup>iii</sup>

### Public Schools and Head Start Programs Have Enrolled More Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Recent Years.

- In the 2015-2016 school year, public schools enrolled 43,559 homeless children ages 3-5 in preschool programs run by school districts.<sup>iv</sup> This is a 9% increase over the previous year.
- In the 2015 program year, Head Start and Early Head Start programs served 52,708 children experiencing homelessness, which represents 4.9% of all children served.<sup>v</sup> This is a 5% increase over the previous year.

### Many Parents Who Experience Homelessness are Youth and Young Adults.

- Thirty-nine percent of unmarried homeless young women ages 18-25 are pregnant or parenting.<sup>vi</sup>
- Youth who are parenting are three times more likely to experience homelessness than non-parenting youth.<sup>vii</sup>
- Over 27% of families in HUD shelters are headed by someone under the age of 25.<sup>viii</sup>
- Homeless teens are at particularly high risk for pregnancy, with as many as 20% becoming pregnant.<sup>ix</sup>

## Homelessness During Pregnancy is Harmful to Child Development.

- Pregnant women experiencing homelessness are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care, and their children are at increased risk for low birth weight, which can harm cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development.<sup>x</sup>

## Homelessness Hurts the Health, Development, and Education of Young Children.

- Experiences of homelessness and housing instability in early childhood are associated with delays in children's language, literacy, and social-emotional development.<sup>xi</sup>
- Homeless children begin Head Start behind their low-income peers in cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development.<sup>xii</sup>
- The longer a young child experiences homelessness, the more that negative health outcomes are magnified, causing lifelong effects on the child, and in turn, the family and community.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Twenty months after staying in an emergency shelter, children scored worse in pre-reading skills and had higher rates of overall behavior problems and early development delays compared to national averages for children their age.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Homelessness in early childhood is correlated with poor classroom

engagement and social skills in early elementary school.<sup>xv</sup>

- The achievement gap between homeless children and their low-income peers in elementary school tends to persist, and may widen.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Homeless infants and toddlers are more likely to experience later child welfare involvement and early school failure.<sup>xvii, xviii</sup>

## Homeless Children Are Less Likely to Access Early Education Programs.

- Families experiencing homelessness confront more barriers to accessing child care and other early childhood education programs than impoverished families who have stable housing.<sup>xix</sup>
- Mothers who have experienced homelessness are less likely to access subsidized child care than those at-risk of homelessness or those with stable housing.<sup>xx</sup>
- Documented barriers include lack of documentation, mobility, lack of transportation, waiting lists, and lack of awareness and outreach by providers.<sup>xxi</sup>
- Homeless families who are staying with other people (i.e. not in shelters) face additional barriers. They are often isolated, and they are not as well connected to school resources and opportunities as families who are staying in homeless shelters.<sup>xxii, xxiii</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> Gubits, D., Shinn M., Bell S., Wood M., Dstrup S., Solari, C. (2015). *Family options study: Short-term impacts of housing and services interventions for homeless families*. Washington, D.C.: Prepared for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research by Abt. Associates and Vanderbilt University. Retrieved from [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/system/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy\\_final.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/portal/system/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudy_final.pdf)
- <sup>ii</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2017). *Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile*. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/epfp\\_50\\_state\\_profiles\\_6\\_15\\_17\\_508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/eecd/epfp_50_state_profiles_6_15_17_508.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2015). *Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR): Volume 2*. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/onecpd/assets/File/2015-AHAR-Part-2.pdf>. Many families with young children who experience homelessness do not stay in shelters because shelters don't exist in their community; shelters are full; or shelters have prohibitive rules about who can stay there. As a result, many homeless children and their families are forced to stay temporarily with other people, or in motels. HUD does not count these children as homeless, but they do meet the definition of homelessness for public schools, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund program, Early Intervention programs under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Child Nutrition Act.
- <sup>iv</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2017). *Preliminary Numbers*. Retrieved from <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-elements.cfm>.
- <sup>v</sup> Office of Head Start (2016). *Services Snapshot. National All Programs (2015-2016)*. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/service-snapshot-all-programs-2015-2016.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Morton, M.H., Dworsky, A., & Samuels, G.M. (2017). *Missed opportunities: Youth homelessness in America. National estimates*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>viii</sup> Gubits, D., Spellman, B., Dunton, L., Brown, S., & Wood, M. (2013). *Interim Report – Family Options Study*. Washington, DC: Prepared for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved from [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/HUD\\_503\\_Family\\_Options\\_Study\\_Interim\\_Report\\_v2.pdf](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/HUD_503_Family_Options_Study_Interim_Report_v2.pdf)
- <sup>ix</sup> Thompson, S., Bender, K., Lewis, C., Watkins, R. (2008). *Runaway and Pregnant: Risk Factors Associated with Pregnancy in a National Sample of Runaway/Homeless Female Adolescents*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2742657/>
- <sup>x</sup> Richards, R., Merrill, R. M., Baksh, L., & McGarry, J. (2011). "Maternal health behaviors and infant health outcomes among homeless mothers: US Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) 2000–2007". *Preventive Medicine*, 52(1), 87-94.
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- <sup>xi</sup> Ziol Guest, K. M., & McKenna, C. C. (2014). "Early childhood housing instability and school readiness". *Child Development*, 85(1), 103–113.
- <sup>xii</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (2013). *Head Start and Housing (In)stability: Examining the School Readiness of Children Experiencing Homelessness*.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Sandel, M; Sheward, R; and Sturtevant, L. (2015) *Compounding Stress: The Timing and Duration Effects of Homelessness on Children's Health*. Center for Housing Policy and Children's HealthWatch. Retrieved from [http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Compounding-Stress\\_2015.pdf](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Compounding-Stress_2015.pdf)
- <sup>xiv</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017). *Well-being of Young Children after Experiencing Homelessness*. OPRE Report No. 2017-06. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/opre\\_homefam\\_brief3\\_hhs\\_children\\_02\\_24\\_2017\\_b508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/opre_homefam_brief3_hhs_children_02_24_2017_b508.pdf)
- <sup>xv</sup> Fantuzzo, J., LeBoeuf, W., Brumley, B., Perlman, S. (2013). "A population-based inquiry of homeless episode characteristics and early educational well-being". *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(6), 966-972.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Obradovic, J., Long, J.D., Cutuli, J.J., Chan, C.K., Hinz, E., Heistad, D., Maston, A.S. (2009). "Academic Achievement of homeless and highly mobile children in an urban school district: Longitudinal evidence on risk, growth, and resilience". *Development and Psychopathology*, 21(2), 493-518.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Perlman, S. & Fantuzzo, J. (2013). "Predicting to placement: A population-based study of out-of-home placement, child maltreatment, and emergency housing". *Journal of the Society for Social Work Research*, 4. Retrieved from <http://www.jsswr.org/rt/printerFriendly/10701/0>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Perlman, S. & Fantuzzo, J. (2010). "Timing and influence of early experiences of child maltreatment and homelessness on children's educational well-being". *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 874-883.
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- <sup>xx</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness (2012). *Profiles of Risk, No. 7: Child Care*. Retrieved from <http://www.icphusa.org/index.asp?page=16&report=94&pg=54>
- <sup>xxi</sup> National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (2013). *National Survey on Early Childhood Education and Homelessness, Preliminary Findings*.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2016). *Access to Early Childhood Development Services for Homeless Families with Young Children: An Exploratory Project*.
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