Risk and Resilience:
Differences in Risk Factors and Health Outcomes Between Homeless and Non–Homeless Students in 2017 YRBS Data

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About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and technical assistance in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

- Website:

  http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org

- Federal and state policy advocacy

- Q&A from our inbox

- Webinars and implementation tools

- Youth leadership and scholarships

Education Leads Home: A National Campaign Building Stronger Futures for Homeless Students

- Young children will participate in quality early childhood programs at the same rate as their housed peers by 2026.
- High school students will reach a 90 percent graduation rate by 2030.
- Postsecondary students will reach a 60 percent postsecondary attainment rate by 2034.

www.educationleadshome.org

EDUCATION LEADS HOME

What is Student Homelessness?

MORE THAN

1.3 MILLION

Challenge of under-identification: lack of awareness, training, and adequate dedicated staff time, coupled with stigma/shame and pervasive misunderstanding.

As defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, these children lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

The number of students experiencing homelessness reported by public schools has increased by 70% since the 2007-2008 school year.

Why are Students Homeless?

Persistent poverty: 41% of all children under 18 in the United States are low-income, and 19% are poor.

Shortage of affordable housing: a worker earning the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour would need to work approximately three full time jobs, or approximately 112 hours per week for all 52 weeks of the year, in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment at HUD's Fair Market Rent.

Unemployment, low education levels, domestic violence, physical and mental health problems, addiction disorders, and natural disasters also contribute to family homelessness: housing alone cannot address the lasting repercussions of these traumas.

What are the Effects of Homelessness on Students?

Homelessness can harm children before they are even born.

Homelessness in early childhood has been found to be associated with delays in language, literacy, and social-emotional development, putting children at risk for later academic problems.

Once school age, children and youth experiencing homelessness frequently encounter unique and significant barriers to educational success.

87% more likely to drop out than housed students.

Without an education, youth are 4.5 times as likely to experience homelessness as young adults.

About the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to assess health risk behaviors, including those pertaining to physical and sexual violence; sexual health; alcohol, tobacco, and drug use; dietary habits; and physical activity.

2017 YRBS optional question list included two questions pertaining to homelessness:
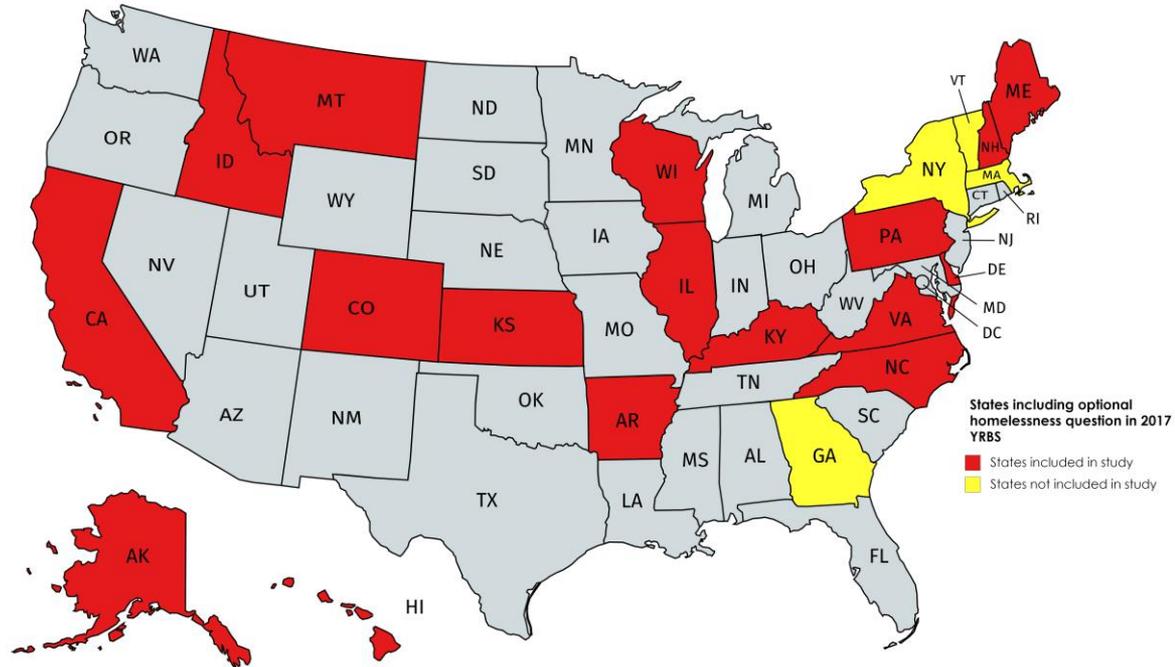
- reveals prevalence of youth homelessness and the variable experiences of homeless youth across the full spectrum of youth homelessness, inclusive of youth staying with others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons.
- exposes disproportionate health and mental health risks of youth experiencing homelessness.

Quantitative Data Analysis: YRBS Questionnaire Method

Representative sample of 9th through 12th grade students in the United States.

For the purposes of this study, we only included data from states that (1) included one of the optional questions pertaining to homelessness and (2) granted blanket permission to share their YRBS data.

States including optional homelessness question in 2017 YRBS

- States included in study
- States not included in study

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Quantitative Data Analysis:
YRBS Questionnaire Method, cont'd.

Housing status variable was assessed using the following survey question:

During the past 30 days, where did you usually sleep?
A. In my parent's or guardian's home
B. In the home of a friend, family member, or other person because I had to leave my home or my parent or guardian cannot afford housing
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 do not have a usual place to sleep
G. Somewhere else

To determine the health risk behaviors most strongly associated with student homelessness, we assessed the responses to questions pertaining to missed school due to safety concerns, sexual dating violence, physical dating violence, suicide planning, attempted suicide, and prescription drug misuse.

Quantitative Data Analysis: YRBS Questionnaire Results

4.9% of students reported experiencing homelessness in the last 30 days. These students were:

5.23x more likely to miss school due to safety concerns

5.03x more likely to be victims of sexual dating violence

5.88x more likely to be victims of physical dating violence

4.63x more likely to misuse prescription pain medicine

3.21x more likely to make a suicide plan

7.19x more likely to attempt suicide

Qualitative Data Analysis:
Online Youth Survey Method and Results

SurveyMonkey data collected from 49 young people in SchoolHouse Connection's Youth Leadership and Scholarship Program and the National Network for Youth's National Youth Advisory Council. Of these youth, reflecting on their high school years:

85.71% reported living in the home or homes of other people; 53.06% reported living in a shelter or emergency housing; 34.69% reported living in a hotel or motel; and 32.65% of reported experiencing homelessness living in a car, park, campground, or other public place.

24.48% missed school due to safety concerns
18.36% misused prescription pain medicine
 36.74% experienced sexual dating violence
20.41% experienced physical dating violence
59.18% made a suicide plan
24.49% attempted suicide

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate that young people experience homelessness at an even higher rate than currently measured by the United States Department of Education: while the YRBS indicates that 4.9% of students surveyed experienced homelessness at some point during the 2016-2017 school year, public schools reported only 2.57% of their students as experiencing homelessness.

The significant under-identification indicated by the YRBS means as many as one million students experiencing homelessness are not receiving the services that are their right under federal law.

Additionally, young people who experience homelessness engage in a wide variety of health risk behaviors at significantly higher rates than their housed peers.

Discussion

" I felt that it was pointless to talk about the sexual violence I was experiencing because I didn't think I would be able to find the help I needed. I didn't have transportation to see a therapist, and there weren't any in my area that took my insurance. I needed to have a physical exam done following the sexual violence, but didn't think there were any resources in my area that could help me. "

" I never worried about my safety because I became worthless to my own eyes. "

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Our recommendations draw on the survey responses to suggest policies and practices to improve implementation of the protections and supports provided to homeless children and youth by federal law, as well as to address and mitigate highly prevalent risk factors. Based on the value of YRBS survey data in demonstrating the prevalence of homelessness and the disproportionality of risk behaviors, the recommendations also suggest that every state and school district that participates in the YRBS include questions on homelessness.

Improve implementation of the protections and supports provided to homeless children and youth by federal law

Identification
- Adequate capacity
- Trauma-informed training

Engagement and participation in school
- Credit accrual
- Supporting parenting students
- Ensuring consistent, safe transportation to school

Access to mental health services
- Revise CPS reporting requirements
- Locate services on school campuses and ensure access
- Expand health education
- School office phone use
- School-based peer educational programs

" Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to seek and ask for help from those they trust. "

" I would emphasize confidential, non-reporting counseling options…I never sought the therapy that could have helped me cope or provided me with strategies to better my situation for fear of legal reporting requirements. "

Address and mitigate highly prevalent risk behaviors

Establish a culture of care

- Talk openly and often
- Open door policy
- Clear cultural norms
- Immediate response
- Trauma-informed practices that specifically include students experiencing homelessness

Empower self-advocacy

- Equip students with language
- Respect youth autonomy
- Create targeted resources
- Make resources and reporting mechanisms easily available

Create physical safe spaces

- Before- and after-school use of classrooms
- Affirming messages and resources
- Clear anti-bullying and anti-violence policies

"Destigmatizing depression, anxiety, and mental illness in general would be a big step in the right direction.

"If people can't identify that they're in an abusive relationship, they won't leave it."

Include homelessness question(s) in state and local YRBS questionnaires

States and localities including homelessness questions in YRBS have found two important uses for data: 1) improving identification of students experiencing homelessness (generating more accurate estimate of extent of student homelessness); and 2) exposing health risks associated with homelessness and designing targeted interventions to mitigate risks.

Example: MADESE used data to find discrepancy in number of students identified as experiencing homelessness; used discrepancy to improve school districts' identification of students experiencing homelessness across the state, achieving increase of 16% over three school years.

Increase translates to 16% more youth receiving referrals to health and mental health services, benefiting from on-site evaluation by school nurses, being automatically enrolled in free school meals, and receiving other services affecting health and well-being.

Conclusion

Importance of robust policies and practices to identify students experiencing homelessness.

Necessity of providing a wide variety of interventions for students experiencing homelessness.

Value of YRBS data in identifying students experiencing homelessness, revealing the practices and policies necessary for improving their physical and mental health, and supporting their path to high school graduation.

Obtaining a high school diploma is imperative to preventing continued homelessness into young adulthood.

Resources

- SchoolHouse Connection - https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/

- Education Leads Home - http://www.educationleadshome.org/

- National Center for Homeless Education - https://nche.ed.gov/

- Advocates for Richmond Youth - https://rampages.us/advocatesforrichmondyouth/