Understanding Youth Homelessness in Canada

The first national survey

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National Survey Results 2016

WITHOUT A HOME: THE NATIONAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY

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Part 1

RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY

1138 YOUTH PARTICIPANTS
57 PARTICIPATING AGENCIES FROM 42 COMMUNITIES ACROSS CANADA
Defining youth homelessness

DEFINITION

“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.
Diversity!
Key Finding

29.5% identified as LGBTQ2S
30.6% identified as Indigenous
28.2% identified as members of racialized communities

1.8% identified as transgender
1.8% identified as two-spirit
2.5% identified as gender non-binary
10.1% were born outside Canada
Age of first experience of homelessness
Age of first experience of homelessness

Many homeless youth became homeless before they were 16, and youth who leave home at a younger age experience greater adversity on the streets.

40.1% were younger than 16 when they first experienced homelessness

THOSE WHO LEAVE HOME AT AN EARLY AGE ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

- Experience multiple episodes of homelessness
- Be involved with child protection services
- Be tested for ADHD
- Experience bullying
- Be victims of crime once homeless, including sexual assault
- Have greater mental health and addictions symptoms
- Experience poorer quality of life
- Attempt suicide
- Become chronically homeless
Number of experiences of homelessness

- Once: 24.1%
- 2 times: 9.8%
- 3-5 times: 25.0%
- More than 5 times: 20.4%
- More than once, but not specified: 14.4%
- Not sure: 6.3%

24.1% reported being homeless only once

75.9% had experienced multiple episodes of homelessness
Conflict with Parents

- Couldn’t get along with parents
- Thrown out
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Other abuse or violence
- Abuse (all of the above)
- Removed by child protection agency
- Parental mental health problems
- Parental drug or alcohol problems

[Bar chart showing percentages for different age groups (15 & under, 16-18, 19-24) and total]
Youth who are homeless with previous involvement with Child Protection Services

57.8% indicated some kind of involvement with child protection services in the past

47.2% had a history of placements in foster care and/or group homes

30.9% were in group homes
Findings indicated that a total of 85.4% (942) of the youth fell in the ‘high’ symptom/distress category. This is indicative, in the general Canadian population, of youth midway between inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care levels.

- 85.4% of youth fell in the ‘high’ symptom/distress category
- 42% reported at least one suicide attempt
- 35.2% reported at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization
# Learning Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tested for a learning disability</th>
<th>% (NUMBER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever tested at school for a learning disability?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50% (502)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>43% (430)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>8% (80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tested for ADHD</th>
<th>% (NUMBER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever tested at school for ADHD?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41% (397)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>49% (481)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>10% (101)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Being bullied

When growing up were you ever bullied at school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(NUMBER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>(172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>(363)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>(453)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2

Life on the Streets

The experience of being homeless
When we let young people become homeless ...
When we let young people become homeless ...

• Health worsens
  • Mental health declines
  • Dropping out of school
• Exploitation
• Involvement with the law
• Trauma and criminal victimization
• Greater risk of addictions
• Entrenchment in live on the streets
Findings indicated that a total of 85.4% (942) of the youth fell in the ‘high’ symptom/distress category. This is indicative, in the general Canadian population, of youth midway between inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care levels.
Dropping Out?

53.2% of youth experiencing homelessness drop out of school

< 9% of Canadian youth drop out of school
### NOT in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% (NUMBER)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>8.0% (82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed AND Training/Education</td>
<td>12.0% (123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training or Education</td>
<td>29.4% (300)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Employment, Training or Education</td>
<td>50.5% (516)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50.5% of homeless youth are Not in Employment, Education or Training.

12-14% of Canadian youth are NEET.
Exposure to street violence makes the impact of pre-street adversity much less relevant. This suggests that whether prior to becoming homeless young people were exposed to adversity or not, experiencing violence while homeless has a ‘leveling’ effect on youth mental health risk.

*Exposure to sexual and physical violence on the street made youth over three times as likely to be in the high mental health risk group.*
Exploitation and Sex Trafficking

Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) of interviewed youth were identified as victims of some form of human trafficking.
How *long* have people been homeless?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A typology of chronic homelessness</th>
<th>% (NUMBER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSITIONAL:</strong> Individuals and families who generally enter the shelter system for a short stay (less than a month) and usually for one stay only.</td>
<td>46.8% (508)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EPISODIC:</strong> This includes individuals who move into and out of homelessness several times over a three-year period (and some of these moves may include residence in corrections or hospital).</td>
<td>21.8% (237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHRONIC:</strong> Individuals and families who are homeless more than a year and typically include long-term shelter users and unsheltered ‘absolutely homeless’ populations.</td>
<td>31.4% (341)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assets: Relationships with Friends and Family, and Self Esteem
# People you can count on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have someone you can count on to:</th>
<th>Disagree (Strongly or Somewhat)</th>
<th>Neither Disagree nor Agree</th>
<th>Agree (Strongly or Somewhat)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide help in an emergency?</td>
<td>21.3% (227)</td>
<td>12.3% (131)</td>
<td>66.4% (708)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide you with emotional support?</td>
<td>22.2% (237)</td>
<td>15.9% (170)</td>
<td>61.8% (659)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check in to see how you are doing?</td>
<td>22.1% (234)</td>
<td>13.8% (146)</td>
<td>64.2% (680)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Friendship: Level of engagement and quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of friendship</th>
<th>Responses to Questions on Friendship</th>
<th>% (Number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Very engaged</strong> (respondents agreed ‘Strongly’ or ‘Somewhat’ with all 9 statements)</td>
<td>23.9% (264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with friends</td>
<td><strong>2. Engaged</strong> (respondents agreed with 5 to 8 statements)</td>
<td>27.3% (301)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate</strong></td>
<td><strong>3. Moderate</strong></td>
<td>24.3% (268)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Disengaged</strong> (respondents disagreed with 5 to 8 statements)</td>
<td>13.2% (146)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with friends</td>
<td><strong>5. Very disengaged</strong> (respondents disagreed ‘Strongly’ or ‘Somewhat’ with all 9 statements)</td>
<td>8.2% (90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Relationships

77.3% of youth surveyed would like to improve relationships with family

71.6% of youth surveyed were in contact with a family member at least once per month
Part 3

DISCUSSION

Implications for policy and practice
Sooooooo...

If we know the following:

• Many young people experience homelessness at a very young age
• Many demonstrate high rates of housing instability
• Many have a history of involvement child protection
• High rates of adverse childhood experiences
We need to consider prevention:

Develop a system that more aggressively addresses the needs of young people 16 and under

1. Family First approaches
2. Early intervention strategies
3. School-Community partnerships
4. Transitional supports for young people leaving care
How do we help young people make rapid exits from homelessness?
The data from our Finding Home study confirm:

- Ongoing housing instability
- Nutritional Vulnerability
- Declining mental health
- Lower rates of school participation
- Higher unemployment
- Greater risk of criminal victimization
- Higher levels of chronicity
Part 4

Implications for Housing First for Youth
A framework for Housing First for Youth
(2014)
First and foremost, a youth-focused approach to housing first must go beyond assisting young people merely to become independent, but rather, to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood.
CORE PRINCIPLES

1. A right to housing with no preconditions.

2. Youth choice, youth voice and self determination.

3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation.

4. Individualized and client-driven supports with no time limits.

5. Social inclusion and community integration.
Housing First Framework

It is both a PROGRAM and a PHILOSOPHY?
The Application of Housing First

**Philosophy**

- Integrated Systems Approach
- Program Models
- Team Interventions
  - Case Management
What kind of **HOUSING** is needed?
Youth need different Housing Options

HOMELESS YOUTH
or ‘at risk youth’

- Return Home (Family Reconnect)
- Supportive Housing
- Transitional Housing
  - Stage 1 Congregate
  - Stage 2 Separate Units
- Independent Living (Scattered Site)
SUPPORTS

1. HOUSING

2. HEALTH & WELL-BEING

3. ACCESS TO INCOME & EDUCATION

4. COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORTS

5. SOCIAL INCUSION