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Barriers in Educating Homeless Children and Youth

Gloria Elaine White Adams
University of Southern Mississippi

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BARRIERS IN EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

by

Gloria E. White Adams

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2008

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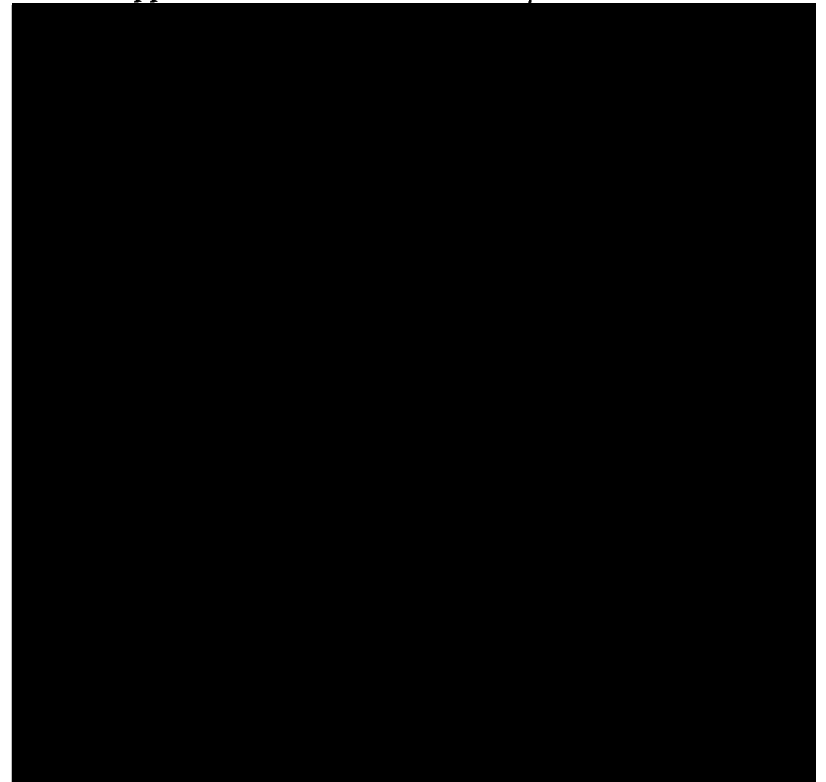BARRIERS IN EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

BARRIERS IN EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

by Gloria E. White Adams

December 2008

Across America, homeless students face a myriad of barriers that impede

education and school access and success of homeless children. The purpose of this study

was to determine the barriers to enrollment and school success for homeless students. The

ultimate goal was to provide information to parents, teachers, administrators, and school

districts that could serve as a vital resource tool in educating homeless students while

removing barriers.

The participants consisted of 215 certified teachers, school administrators, and

homeless liaisons in 23 school districts representing the populations that provide after-

school instruction to homeless students. The study was conducted in the spring of 2003

using a survey that consisted of demographic information, and questions were asked

concerning the educational barriers to enrollment for homeless students and barriers to

school success faced by homeless students.

Results of the data analysis revealed that 36.3% of respondents were at and over

41 years of age. A very large percentage were female (81.9%). Respondents were

experienced educators for the most part, with 31.2% having over 25 years of

teaching/administrative experience. Also, 43% had worked in the after-school program

for homeless students less than 4 years. The data indicated that a majority of the

respondents' highest educational level obtained was a bachelor's or master's degree.

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The findings of the study revealed that lack of transportation, lack of school records, and state guardianship/residency requirements were moderate barriers to school enrollment. Results also revealed that lack of parental involvement, frequent absenteeism, and frequent mobility were perceived as major barriers to school success.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in the United States is ignored by some and believed by others to be non-existent. Whatever the perspective of these individuals might be, there are thousands of homeless people across this nation living in shelters, cars, under bridges, and even with two or three families in one dwelling. The children of these families are the ones who are often the individuals who are most negatively impacted by the effects of homelessness. These detrimental effects can include malnutrition, impaired social skills, higher rates of disease and illnesses, and poor academic performance. Homeless children, trying to stay in school, often face barriers to enrolling in school.

The general purpose of this study was to determine the barriers to enrollment and school success for homeless students. The ultimate goal was to provide information to parents, teachers, administrators, and school districts that could serve as a vital resource tool in educating homeless students while removing barriers to their success in school. In Chapter I, the study is introduced and the background of homelessness is presented along with the definition of terms related to the topic. Chapter II presents the current literature related to homelessness as well as its effect on school enrollment for homeless children and youth.

Background

Try to imagine the trauma of being homeless. You may be sleeping in a car or living in one temporary shelter after the next. Perhaps you simply do not know where you are going to sleep. If you were homeless, it would mean becoming rootless, and if you were school age it would mean explaining to

classmates why they cannot come over to your house to play. (Stronge &

Hudson, 1999, p. 8)

The above quote emphasizes the often stark realities of homelessness. In the midst

of these realities, making education a priority in the lives of homeless children and their

families is a formidable task. When the problems that homeless students bring with them

to the schoolhouse door are combined with obstacles inherent in the governance and

structure of American public education, the public school seems ill-equipped to deal with

the challenges posed by homeless students.

The stereotype of homelessness is often the bag lady or single man living on the

street. The images of a man with a handkerchief tied to the end of a stick are no longer

valid. However, since the early 1980s, there has been an alarming rise in family

homelessness not witnessed in the United States since the Great Depression (McChesney,

1993) with homeless children now comprising the fastest-growing segment of the

homeless population (The National Coalition for the Homeless, 1998).

Homelessness can range from acute and short-lived to chronic homelessness

associated with extreme poverty. The causes of homelessness include lack of affordable

housing and a minimum wage that places the working poor at great risk should a crisis

arise (i.e., job loss or illness). Domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, and

even natural disasters can create conditions that lead to homelessness. In addition,

changes in the economy have placed many families in precarious housing situations, and

it is not uncommon to hear a homeless parent say, "I never thought it could happen to

me!"

The stress caused by poverty and housing instability is increasing the vulnerability of children. Educators need a better understanding of the implications for children and families. Uneducated or undereducated youth can expect to be unemployed or underpaid and thus live unproductive lives, accumulate very little material wealth, and ultimately be forced to live in substandard housing or no housing at all. Evidence indicated that the United States is a society where millions of people are transient and/or homeless. The primary cause of homelessness is poverty.

Poverty is directly and positively correlated with underemployment and unemployment and correlates with the lack of adequate education. In view of the importance of education as a fundamental means of changing life cycles and its direct relationship to income and employment, improving access to any and all means that education is vital.

<div align="center">Statement of the Problem</div>

There are barriers to enrollment and school success for homeless students. In the midst of economic prosperity for many Americans, there exists a growing member of children and youth who are homeless. Many live wherever they can, in campers or motels, doubled up with families and friends, in shelters, or literally on the street or under bridges. In spite of this apparent visibility, homeless children and youth are mostly invisible to the public. While the number of homeless children and youth may not be known precisely, it is known that it is a large and apparently growing population (Burt, 1996). Additionally, it is clear that homeless students are not confined to urban areas; in fact, homeless children and their families can be found in large cities, small towns and suburban communities, and rural areas.

Research Questions

The primary issues this study examined were the barriers that impede education, school access, and the academic success of homeless children. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1.   What are the barriers that impede access to schools by homeless children and youth?

2.   What are the barriers that impede school success by homeless children and youth?

Definition of Terms

Most of the terms used in this study are typical as they relate to homelessness. The terms described below must be clearly understood as they relate to the study.

Attendance - the number of students present and accounted for.

Barriers to enrollment - problems that exist hinder children from registering in school.

Comparable services - educational services comparable to services offered to other non-homeless students.

Compliance - complying or in accordance with local, state, and federal regulations.

Doubled-up - a situation in which homeless children and youth are sharing housing with other families or individuals. Such children and youth are considered homeless if they are doubled-up because of loss of housing or other similar situation. Note: Doubling-up in the home of relatives or friends due to eviction or other imposed circumstances that render an individual or family homeless should not be confused with

situations in which intergenerational family members reside together by choice (Noll &
Watkins, 2003).

Enrollment - the list of students who are registered.

Family emergency shelter or a transitional house - a designated facility that has as
its primary goal to ensure the immediate safety of homeless families (as opposed to
individuals) by providing temporary shelter and meals or access to kitchen facilities to
prepare meals.

Free, appropriate public education - the educational programs and services that
are provided to the children of residents of the state and that are consistent with state
school attendance laws.

Grievance - circumstance thought to be unjust or injurious and grounds for
complaint or resentment.

Guardian - a person legally placed in charge of the affairs of a minor or of
someone incapable of managing his or her own affairs.

Homeless individuals - the McKinney-Vento Act, which established the term
homeless, or defined a homeless individual as an individual who lacks a fixed regular and
adequate nighttime residence and who has a primary nighttime residence that is:

- A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide
  temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate
  shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill).

- An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended
  to be institutionalized.

- A public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings. Residence for children with someone other than their parent(s) due to the homeless condition. For purposes of this Act, the term *homeless* or *homeless individual* does not include any individual imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an Act of the Congress or state law.

Homeless liaison - a person who functions as a representative for local school distracts that assist homeless students and families.

Homeless school-age child - any child residing or living in a transitory shelter who is of school age and whose parents have met the legally defined admission criteria for *homeless*.

LEA - local education agency (i.e., a school system).

Mobile/mobility - the condition of individual(s) moving, being capable of moving, or being moved from place to place.

Parent - a father or a mother, a protector or legal guardian.

Poverty - the condition of having deficiency in necessary subsistence, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Records - documents that are ordinarily kept by the school, including immunization or medical records, academic records, birth certificate, guardianship records, and evaluations for special services or programs.

Review and revision policies - policies that require the reviewing and revision of any policies that may act as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth in schools.

Runaways - children and youth who have run away from home and live in runaway shelters, abandoned buildings, the streets, or other inadequate accommodations are considered homeless, even if their parents have provided and are still willing to provide a home for them.

School - an institution where instruction is given, especially to persons under college age.

School of origin - the school that the child attended when permanently housed or the school in which the child is enrolled.

School success - the attainment of an adequate education as measured by student achievement; indicators such as standardized test scores, teacher grades, and graduation rates.

SEA - state education agency (i.e., State Department of Education).

Shelter - a temporary place of residence for homeless youth.

Student - a person who is enrolled for study in a school.

Throwaways - throwaway children or youth (i.e., those whose parents or guardians will not permit them to live at home) are considered homeless if they live on the streets, in shelters, or in other transitional or inadequate accommodations (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

The following delimitations were imposed:

1.   The study was limited to teachers, tutors, and administrators who work with homeless school-age students in the state of Mississippi.

2.   The study was limited to barriers related to the enrollment and school success of homeless children and youth.

3.   The study was limited to analysis of a survey conducted at selected schools.

<div align="center">Justification of the Study</div>

Public school systems in the United States are legally and morally responsible for educating all school-age children regardless of their family circumstances. In an effort to better serve the educational needs of the growing population of homeless children and youth, it becomes incumbent upon a school system to examine the barriers that impede access to school and educational success and seek out practical and effective solutions.

Figures from the United States Department of Education (USDOE) have shown an increase in the estimated number of homeless students in the last several years (1998). Based on reports from the 50 states and U.S. territories, the USDOE estimated that there were approximately 272,000 school-age children in the homeless population in 1989. In 1998, the Department of Education estimated that approximately 608,000 were homeless. In addition to the *not attending school* data reported for 1998, the USDOE also reported data for students *not enrolled* in school. For K-12 students in 1998, 12% were reported as not enrolled. Of these, 10% of K-12 students were not enrolled, and 24% of grades 9-12 homeless youth were not enrolled in school during their homelessness. These numbers may understate the problem because the counts/estimates tend to miss students who do not stay in shelters (Anderson, Janger, & Panton, 1995) as well as adolescent homeless (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1993).

Children and youth are a rapidly growing segment of the homeless population. Estimates vary because of the difficulties in accurately counting homeless children. The *Year 2000 Report to Congress* on the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program indicated that:

- The number of homeless children and youth (PreK-12) increased 10% from approximately 841,721 reported in 1997 to 928,429 reported in 2000, while the overall population of PreK-12 children increased only 2% during this time period.

- The largest numbers of homeless children are PreK-6 aged children, comprising approximately 65% of the homeless children and youth population.

- Approximately 87% of school age homeless children and youth (K-12) are enrolled in school; 13% are not enrolled. Year 2000 data showed that approximately 77% of school age homeless children and youth (K-12) attend school regularly; almost one-quarters (23%) of homeless children do not. These data show a significant improvement from the 1997 data that reported only 55% of school age homeless children and youth attended school regularly.

- Only 15% of preschool age homeless children are enrolled in school programs. These data suggest that preschool age homeless children are greatly underserved by homeless education programs.

Further, the 2000 United States Conference on Mayors Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities indicated that requests for emergency shelter by homeless families with children increased in almost three-quarters of cities surveyed in 2000. Across these cities, the average increase in requests was 17%. Half of those cities reported that people are homeless for a longer period of time than was true in past years.

Research indicated that these problems are also prevalent in rural areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Despite media coverage, advocacy efforts, and the passage of federal legislation to protect the educational rights of homeless children and youth, what happens at the schoolhouse door and beyond is often subject to chance rather than consistent application of policies and procedures. Many educators remain unaware of their special responsibilities to educate this population of students and lack the knowledge to support homeless students in their schools and classrooms. Before the educational rights and needs of homeless children and youth can be met, educators must have tools to gain the awareness and understanding of this population of students. The woman with the shopping cart and the panhandler persist as stereotypes for the homeless, in spite of the fact that increasing numbers of families are homeless. Accurate images of homelessness include mothers with babies in their arms, children saddened by loss and frightened by danger, youth dismissed as runaways or throwaways, and parents overwhelmed in a maze of service delivery systems.

Summary

The study is organized in five chapters. Chapter I, the introductory chapter, includes background information for the study, the study's general problem statement, research questions, and significance. Chapter II contains the review of the literature conducted for the study. Chapter III includes a description of the research methodology. It contains information on the research subjects and the procedures used for collecting and analyzing data. Chapter IV contains the analysis of data and interpretation of results. A summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations are provided in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of literature relating to barriers to enrollment and barriers to school success for homeless children. The literature review will also provide an overview of other relevant topics such as the historical background of homelessness, the definitions of homeless, family homelessness, the causes of homelessness, educational access, the McKinney-Vento Act of 2001, formerly Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, and the increasing need for educational services impacting the homeless student population.

Historical Overview of Homelessness

Individuals become homeless for a variety of reasons. As many as 57% are family members who become homeless after fleeing an abusive household (Nunez & Fox, 1999). Others become homeless when a parent loses a job and the family cannot pay rent, or after a natural disaster destroys their home. Homelessness may last a few days or a lifetime. Some children are born into it while others experience it for the first time during their school years. Although African Americans are disproportionately represented among the homeless, homelessness affects all socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, cultures, and races; however, it is most clearly linked to poverty (Dail, 2000; Nunez & Fox, 1999). It occurs not only in cities but also in suburban and rural areas (Noll & Watkins, 2003). Homelessness is a tragic and growing phenomenon in the United States. It is a social problem that is often devastating to families, but it is especially detrimental to young children. Over the years, the "face" of homelessness has gradually changed. Two decades ago adult males were the primary group of citizens lacking permanent shelter. Today,

families with children are the fastest growing segment of homeless Americans,

accounting for 40% of the homeless population (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2005).

Historians generally agree that the demographic characteristics of the homeless

population changed in the 1980s; the number grew from 250,000 to 3 million people in

10 years (Burt, 1996). In 1995, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that there

were slightly more than 740,000 homeless children and youth. Demographers currently

believe that over 1 million children are homeless each night, including 250,000

preschoolers (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2005). The image of the free-spirited vagabond, the

train-riding hobo, was slowly replaced by new images. Johnson and Cnaan (1995)

described the new homeless population as being more heterogeneous in appearance. They

consisted of the mentally ill; substance abusers; men experiencing a crisis sin housing,

family, or employment; unaccompanied women; young minority mothers with children;

two-parent families; children; runaways; throwaways; and the elderly (Johnson & Cnaan,

1995; Kryder Coe, Salamon, & Molnar, 1991; Shane, 1996). The conflicting numbers

show the differences in definition of the homeless among the various federal, state, local,

and private agencies that advocate and represent the homeless.

The term "history of homelessness" might include causes of homelessness,

number of episodes of homelessness, duration and location of those episodes, resources

and social support available during those times, psychiatric problems, history of abuse,

and so on. All of these variables are important in deconstructing the experience of

homelessness.

In the United States, the homeless population has changed and evolved

dramatically through the years. After the Civil War, widows, women who were deserted,

and unmarried literate men made up most of the homeless population (Clement, 1984). Industrialization of the United States in the last quarter of the 19th century led to the typical homeless person becoming a vagrant, lazy, dirty, immigrant, or mentally ill person who was thought to have deficits in moral character (Modell & Hareven, 1973).

Not only did the economic depression of the 1930s lead to an increased number of homeless people, it also led to greater compassion for them. There was a shift to associating homelessness with social conditions (Lubov, 1965). Although governmental programs reduced the incidence of homelessness, some older, single males on pensions and marginal employment remained homeless during this period (Hoch, 1987). The dramatic rise in homelessness over the past decade and a half is the result of a severe contradiction unfolding in the United States (Timmer, Eitzen, & Talley, 1994).

The supply of low-income housing has been reduced, increasing the numbers of Americans, especially women, children, and minorities, who are becoming more and more economically marginal. A medical crisis, job termination, or unexpected bills could easily place a family into homelessness. Economic recession and cutbacks in federal welfare programs led to an increase in homelessness in the early 1980s. The affected population was comprised of mostly younger individuals, more women, families, more minorities, and more mentally ill people (Baxter & Hopper, 1984). According to Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, and Peters, while some data indicate that many homeless individuals suffer from addiction and/or mental illness, not all homeless people fit this profile (National Coalition for the Homeless [NCH], 2002a).

The existence of homeless children has always been part of America. In the early settlement of this country, some came to America without parents, others lost parents on

the long journey across treacherous seas, and others lost parents who were unable to survive the harsh, unknown conditions before them. At that time, these children were known as "orphans," and many were placed in homes or situations where they were apprenticed and "put on the road to become useful citizens. A successfully completed apprenticeship brought the young person the rights and privileges of citizenship that were denied to the poor and unskilled youth" (Good & Teller, 1973). Not only did apprenticeships provide the road to "being a good citizen, it served to replenish the skilled labor force" (p. 26), which was in constant shortage in colonial times.

The 1960s saw a new group of homeless children emerge. Acting out and rebelling against adult and parental authority, many children became "runaways" or "hippies" (Shane, 1996). Unlike their predecessors, many of these homeless children came from middle- and upper-class families, forfeiting educational and professional opportunities that were denied to others. Many youths were arrested as status offenders but were simply children out of home or school without expressed permission; they were placed in the juvenile and corrections system with criminals. Reacting to political pressure and the "idea that state offenses should be decriminalized and deinstitutionalized" (Shane, 1996), the federal government enacted the Runaway Youth Act in 1974. The act provided funding for the establishment of temporary shelters to house those youth and to help in reuniting them with their parents. In 1977, the Act was amended and renamed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in response to increasing reports that many youth were not just running away voluntarily but were, in fact, being forced out of their homes or abandoned by their parents.

Over the couse of a year, approximately 3.5 million people in the U.S. are likely to experience homelessness (Burt & Aaron, 2000). Duffield (2001) stated that an estimated 1.35 million of these individuals will be children under the age of 18. This number represents 2% of all children in the United States and 120% of all poor children in the U.S. (Duffield, 2001).

Definitions of Homelessness

One would suppose defining homelessness to be simple. Wright (1991) stated, "homelessness is not and cannot be a precisely defined condition" (p. 19). Hooper (1995) also stated "getting a handle on what we are talking about, let alone how many, is no simple matter when it comes to homelessness" (p. 341).

Conditions of being housed form a continuum rather than distinct categories, similar to many life conditions. Living conditions vary from being luxuriously housed with several dwellings, through being comfortably housed, marginally housed, unstably housed, squatting (living illegally, often in abandoned houses), to living without any shelter.

Abuse, neglect, and unstable living conditions are closely related to the homelessness of children. U.S. Representative George Miller, Chair of the U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families during the late 1980s, offered a very broad definition of homelessness. He considered children without health care and other essential services to be homeless (Kryder Coe, Salamon, & Molnar, 1991, p. xvii).

Homelessness is a lack of a fixed and consistent residence (McKinney, 2004). Thus, a child who moves from one family constellation to another on an irregular basis, or who sometimes stays with parent(s), other relatives, and friends, and sometimes on the

street, would be considered homeless. Children left in hospitals or in custody, shelters, cellars, abandoned housing, living with or moving between various friends, foster situations, relatives, or others are considered homeless.

The definition of homeless varies from the National Institute of Mental Health, to the American Psychological Association, the United States General Accounting Office, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

Homelessness refers not to an absolute condition but to a deprivation that varies in degree, depending on the extent to which the location departs from housing that is considered standard, the extent to which the location is temporary or unstable, and the length of time these4 conditions must be endured. (p. 8)

Recent observers of homelessness have concentrated on the differences between the *old* homeless and the *new* homeless, those homeless since approximately 1975. They find, for example, that the new homeless, when contrasted with the old homeless, are more visible, younger, and composed of a larger proportion of African Americans, Latinos, women with children, and families with both spouses present.

In the past, the term "homeless" may have conjured up the image of someone rummaging through a dumpster or asleep on a park bench. For the most part, homelessness was isolated from the educational community (Rountree, 1996). Today, homelessness is one of the most significant social problems affecting children and their families. Children and their families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population (Rountree, 1996).

Children who are homeless or are from very low-income families typically experience a myriad of academic, health, behavioral, and emotional problems (Buckner, Bassuk, Weinreb, & Brooks, 1999; Lindsey, 1998; Menke & Wagner, 1997). Pupils who are homeless often exhibit inattentiveness, frustration, aggression, and diminished academic achievement, characteristics typical of individuals who qualify for special education services (Myers & Popp, 2003a). Rafferty (1998) noted that children who are homeless score lower on achievement tests and are less likely to be promoted than their housed peers. The experience of homelessness may exacerbate the health and emotional difficulties encountered by these children (Lindsey, 1998; Polakow, 1998; Wood, Valdez, Hayashi, & Shen, 1990). For instance, homeless children are more likely to be at greater risk than low-income, housed children for the development of infections, chronic respiratory difficulties, and behavioral problems. They are also more likely to suffer from cold symptoms, diarrhea, and asthma than their peers (Wood et al., 1990). Furthermore, child homelessness is associated with increased risk of burns, accidents, injuries, and exposure to lead. This environmental stress increases the likelihood of illness, as does the poor nutritional status of homeless youth, whose diets often lack fruits and vegetables and have high amounts of grains and starches (Wood et al., 1990; Nabors et al., 2004).

In addition to this increased risk for physical health problems, there is also evidence of increased risk for emotional, behavioral, and academic problems among homeless youth (Bassuk & Rosenburg, 1988; Buckner et al., 1999; Polakow, 1998). For instance, school-aged children who experience homelessness may be at increased or greater risk for anxiety and depression than never homeless or poor children (Menke & Wagner, 1997). On the basis of the results of behavioral and emotional screening

measures, Bassuk and Rubin (1988) discovered that about 50% of children residing in homeless shelters were in need of mental health services (i.e., psychiatric evaluation) (Nabors et al., 2004).

It is suspected that the increased incidence of these health and mental health problems is related to the increased life stress associated with the experience of homelessness. Homeless youth encounter a multitude of serious life stressors, including extreme poverty, family violence, substance abuse by caretakers, frequent loss of friends, frequent moves, school changes, and daily life threats (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1988; Polakow, 1998; Wood et al., 1990). However, it should also be noted that many children who are homeless are academically successful, exhibit a high degree of resilience, and some students may even be gifted (Myers & Popp, 2003b).

There are two broad categories of homeless students: those who become homeless with their families and those who are unaccompanied by family members. Homeless children who are accompanied by family members comprise the majority of homeless students. Most of these students are young more than a 40% of all homeless children are under the age of 5 (Burt, 1999). Unaccompanied youth are more likely to be adolescents. Both groups face educational barriers that can be understood only in the context of their homelessness (Duffield, 2001).

These differences between the old and the new homeless are correct, empirically, but they are subject to two common misinterpretations that lead to inappropriate conclusions and, subsequently, ineffective social policy. They imply that the new homeless are unique and, therefore, constitute a new social problem. The old and the new

homeless are alike in that both are extremely poor and their differences only reflect the

changing demography of U.S. cities. As Hoch and Slayton have argued:

> The new homeless endure the same economic difficulties as the old homeless and
>
> have the same class origins. Both come mainly from the ranks of the urban poor.
>
> The differences in demographic characteristics and vulnerabilities between the
>
> two reflect differences mainly in the compositions and afflictions of the urban
>
> poor. For instance, the new homeless are more likely to be younger and single
>
> mothers with children because the contemporary urban poor are
>
> disproportionately composed of younger, single mothers with children. (Hoch &
>
> Slayton, 1989)

Although the extent of differences among the old and new homeless is disputed

among social scientists, there is no doubt that the number of homeless in American cities

has dramatically increased in the past decade and a half.

<div align="center">Family Homelessness</div>

Homelessness is not a new social problem in the United States; however, it is

having an increasing impact on American families. In the United States, homelessness is

a complex, often misunderstood social problem. The National Low Income Housing

Coalition (2004) reported that there are as many as 800,000 homeless people in the

country on any given night and a many as 3.5 million Americans spend some time

homeless each year.

Family homelessness is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the 1980s,

homelessness was generally confined to "skid row" areas of major urban centers, and it

primarily affected single men. During the 1980s, shifts in welfare, wage, and housing

policies combined with macroeconomics change to create the conditions for modern day family homelessness (Koegel, Burnam, & Baumohl, 1996). The lack of shelter services for homeless families has fast become a national social emergency. According to Egan (2002), families constitute 75% of the population in New York City's homeless shelters, where over 13,000 children slept in homeless settings during the winter of 2002. In Georgia, an estimated 15,000 children were homeless sometime during the 2000 school year (Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, 2002). Due to U.S. policy's failure to address issues such as livable wages, affordable housing, adequate transportation, decline in public assistance, and lack of education and training, there is evidence that the number of homeless families and children is increasing at an alarming rate (Egan, 2002; Fox & Nunez, 1999; Freeman, 2002; NCH, 2002a). The needs of the rising number of homeless families with children are exacerbated by the lack of shelter services afforded them.

At its essence, homelessness is the manifestation of severe poverty and lack of affordable housing; simply put, homeless families are too poor to afford housing. The gap between the number of affordable housing units and the number of people needing them is currently the largest on record, estimated at 4.4 million units (Daskal, 1998). The supply of affordable housing has continued to shrink in recent years. The growing economy has caused rents to rise faster than the incomes of the poorest Americans, resulting in a significant loss of housing: between 1991 and 1997, 372, rental units affordable to very low income families were lost, a reduction of 5% (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999). The loss of affordable housing for the poorest households puts increasing numbers of people at risk of homelessness (Duffield, 2001).

At the same time, stagnating wages and changes in welfare policies have contributed to a high proportion of poor people living in extreme poverty. In 1998, 13.9 million people—40% of all poor persons—had incomes of less than half the poverty level (Bureau of the Census, 1999). People living in extreme poverty are most at risk of homelessness. Children represent the largest group of people living in extreme poverty; 41% are children under the age of 18. If is therefore not surprising that, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayers (2000) survey of American cities, families represent 36% of the homeless population. Information from the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2000) indicated that in 2001, 52% of emergency shelter requests from families in the U.S. were denied, an increase of 22% in one year (cited in NCH, 2002b). For the homeless, getting or keeping a job without a place to live is a challenge. About 20% of homeless are employed, according to the Conference of Mayors. The increase in homelessness and hunger is overwhelming some cities and shelters. An average of 30% of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people and 38% of the requests by homeless families are estimated to have one unmet in 2002, according to the Conference of Mayors.

The same survey found that requests for emergency shelters increased by 17% between 1999 and 2000 and that 27% of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless families are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. The fact that many families with children who need emergency shelter do not find it—either because shelters are filled to capacity or because there are no shelters (for instance, in rural areas)—is of critical importance to the education of homeless children and youth. Families who do not find shelter are often forced to live with relatives and friends in crowded, temporary arrangements (i.e., "doubled-up" situations). Others may live in makeshift places such as

cars, campgrounds, and low-cost motels. Available evidence suggests that most homeless students are not living in homeless shelters. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Education Report to Congress (1999), only 33% of homeless students were identified as living in homeless shelters. The majority were in doubled-up situations (44%), "other" arrangements (13%), unsheltered locations (3%), and "unknown" (2%). Children who are not living in shelters are extremely difficult for schools to identify; as a result, they face even greater barriers to education (Duffield, 2001).

Other factor are associated with the nature of the emergency shelter system, the mobility that follows the loss of the home, and barriers that inhibit access to schools and to various school services (Rafferty, 1997). At last 43% of homeless children do not attend school on a regular basis, and approximately 50% have failed at least one grade (Educating Homeless Children, 2000; Foscarinis & McCarthy, 2000). According to Rafferty (1997), school aged homeless children experience continual disruption or termination of their education and seldom receive the same services as their permanently housed peers.

Sadly, there is no right to shelter in the United States. Even when families successfully obtain emergency shelter, other obstacles prevail. Choices of school placements for attendance are often made without regard to community ties or educational continuity. For example, the 1989 study by Rafferty and Rollins showed that 71% of homeless families with school-age children were sheltered in areas far removed from their original homes. Many had been frequently bounced between facilities. In many cases, each transfer to a different shelter requires a transfer to a new school, and each transfer means the loss of valuable school days. In addition, the noisy environment and

constant flow of traffic typical of many shelters make it difficult for children to do their homework or get enough sleep (Rafferty, 1997).

According to First and Cooper (1990), the number of homeless people is "3 million Americans, including 500,000 homeless children" (p. 1047). The Children's Defense Fund (1991) reported that "families with children make up one-third of the nation's homeless population. In some parts of the country they make up the majority" (p.107).

The National Coalition for the Homeless (1987) reported that families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. Homeless children under the age of 19 account for between 10 and 20% of the homeless population (Wright, 1989).

In 1989, Waxman and Reyes surveyed 27 major cities for the United States Conference of Mayors. The researchers reported, "families with children account for more than half of the homeless population in Detroit, New York City, Norfolk, Portland, and Trenton" (p. 26). Twenty of the 27 cities reported that the number of homeless families increased between 1987 and 1988.

Families with children "comprised 34% of the homeless population" and "among homeless families in the survey cities, an average of 61% of the family members are children" (Waxman & Reyes, 1989, p. 26). Among homeless families in the survey cities, 23% were headed by two parents while 77% were headed by a single parent. Bassuk, Rubin, and Lauriate (1986) estimated that 94% of homeless families consisted of single mothers with two to three children.

Kondratas (1991) reported that families with children represent an increasingly larger percentage of the homeless population. Kondratas (1991) also noted that nine out of 10 homeless families were female-headed households with three-fourths of these households being non-White. Children living in homelessness and poverty are more likely to suffer academic delays and psychological development.

Some homeless families cycle in and out of homelessness; families which display this pattern can be referred to as "episodically homeless" or "chronically mobile" (Bruder, 1997). Research data show that more than one quarter of homeless children (27%) have been homeless at least once prior to their current episode of homelessness (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Other families experience only one episode of homelessness. The length of time of homeless episodes can range from a few nights to a number of months and for years, and families vary widely in the length of time they are homeless (Bruder, 1997). A related study conducted in over 20 cities in the U.S. found that on average, children are homeless 10 months at a time, the length of an entire school year (Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999). Researchers have rarely examined how different histories of homelessness across children's life span affect academic performance.

Major disruptions to the home environment inevitably take their toll on normal family life, including the education of children. Even when the change is a planned move from one permanent home to another and children are prepared for the disruption, the transition is stressful. For homeless children, the loss of their home is more sudden, more unexpected, and more traumatic when the family is suddenly thrust outside of its own

community, friends, support system, and schools. The experience is devastating for children and their families (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991).

<div align="center">Homeless Children and Children in Poverty</div>

Among the poorest of the poor are the homeless. There is extensive overlap between the problems related to poverty and those related to homelessness. Furthermore, homelessness relates to problems above and beyond those of poverty. In other words, when income is held constant, homeless children exhibit significantly more problems than do poor children who live in permanent housing (Kiesler, 1991). Molnar, Roth, and Klein (1990) wrote,

> Largely relegated to substandard, overcrowded living conditions, exposed daily to filth, violence, and random destruction, and bereft of age-appropriate activities, homeless children exhibit developmental difficulties far greater than the population at large, greater even when compared to poor but housed children. (p. 113)

The literature indicated that children who live in poverty and children who are homeless share many similar experiences. According to a comparative study done by Wood, Valdez, Hayashi, and Shen (1990), homeless children and housed low-income children were on several characteristics and experiences. The study found that 30% of the homeless children surveyed had repeated a grade compared to 18% of the housed low-income children. The study further found that 28% of the homeless children were placed in special classes compared to 24% of the housed low-income children. Forty-two percent of the homeless children missed more than one week of school in the previous 3 months. This compared with 22 % of the housed low-income children.

Further noted by the researchers, homeless children who were absent frequently missed school while their families were in transition, moving from housing into the shelter or moving from the shelter into permanent housing. Absences among the housed low-income children were related to health problems. Homeless children are more likely than children living poverty, who have homes, to repeat grades, be placed in special classes, and are more often absent.

Students who become homeless without their families are a distinct subset of the homeless population. The U.S. Conference of Mayors (2000) estimated that unaccompanied youth comprise 7% of the homeless population. Causes of homelessness among unaccompanied youth fall into three categories: family problems, economic problems, and residential instability.

Many homeless youth leave home after years of physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, addiction of a family member, and parental neglect. Disruptive family conditions are the principal reason that young people leave home. In one study, more than half of the youth interviewed during shelter stays reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1995). In another study, 46% of runaway and homeless youth were found to have been physically abused and 17% had been forced into unwanted sexual activity by a family or household member (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997).

Some youth may become homeless when their families suffer financial crises resulting from lack of affordable housing, limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, lack of medical insurance, or inadequate welfare benefits. These youth become

homeless with their families but are later separated from them by shelter, transitional

housing, or child welfare policies (Shinn & Weitzman, 1996). Thus, for instance, some

shelter policies may make it impossible for teenage boys to remain with their mothers and

younger siblings in shelters for women and children.

Residential instability also contributes to homelessness among youth. A history of

foster care is correlated with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining

homeless for a longer period of time (Roman & Wolfe, 1995). Some youth living in

residential or institutional placements become homeless upon discharge—they are too old

for foster care but are discharged with no housing or income support (Robertson, 1996).

Although the causes of homelessness for families may differ from the causes of

homelessness among unaccompanied youth, the consequences are severe for both groups

of students (Duffield, 2001).

Homelessness in Rural Areas

Homelessness is increasing in rural areas. The McKinney definition of

homelessness is typically seen as addressing large, urban communities where tens of

thousands of people are literally homeless. However, the definition may prove inadequate

for describing the plight of those persons who are homeless in areas of the country, such

as rural areas, where there are few shelters. People experiencing homelessness in these

areas are less likely to live on the street or in a shelter and more likely to live with

relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1996).

In many rural areas, homelessness has not been recognized as a problem. The increasing

problems of the urban homeless have been the focus of much research, and the extent of

the problems of homelessness in rural areas has not been adequately examined (First,

Toomey, & Rife, 1990). The literature indicated that in addition to the increasing number of rural homeless, a vast segment of the rural population is on the brink of homelessness. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (1987), "homelessness in the American countryside will shortly become as rampant and visible as it presently is in American cities" (p. 5). According to First et al., 1990), in the Ohio study on rural homelessness, the researchers estimated that during 1991 more than 14,000 persons would be homeless in Ohio's 75 rural counties.

In a similar study, a researcher interviewed both urban and rural homeless persons. The study by Stefl (1987) reported that rural homeless people "shared certain characteristics that distinguished them from the urban homeless: they more often were women, they were younger, likely would be married, and less likely to be residing in the county where born" (p. 57).

The Ohio study interviewed 921 homeless adults and found much similar results. The study found that 446 out of 921 adults (48.4%) were men and 475 of the adults were female (51.6%). The study also showed that 52.3%, or 481, of the adults were between 18 and 29 years of age. Twenty-eight percent of the adults (259) were living together, not married or married. The Ohio researchers reported additionally that rural homeless adults were also more likely than their urban counterparts to be White. Whites comprised 84.8% (781 adults) of the rural homeless population wile African Americans comprised 10.1% (93 adults).

> Often forgotten are rural homeless families . . . rural families are less likely to
> have access to formal shelters, where counting of their numbers would be easy,
> yet rural communities all over the country are reporting more and more requests

for help from homeless or near-homeless families with children. (Children's
Defense Fund, 1991, p. 6)

Housing in rural areas is substandard and very often does not have heat or running
water (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1987), with the doubling or even tripling of
families in the same house and living conditions. There are barriers, such as a lack of
land, a lack of financing, and a lack of jobs, that have contributed to individuals not
obtaining affordable decent housing.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (1987b), rural homeless are
less visible than urban homeless and receive different responses to problems they face.
Rural homeless are seen as less visible than urban homeless for a number of reasons. To
begin with, the density of rural areas is lighter. Rural homeless are spread over large areas
of land and therefore are more isolated and less of a problem.

Migration from rural areas to the larger cities has been greater in more recent
years. Migration has helped to transfer the evidence of rural homelessness to urban areas
(National Coalition for the Homeless, 1987). The overcrowding of housing with several
generations of one family living in the same house is perceived as "traditional,"
regardless of whether that "tradition" comes from long-term poverty rather than culture.
People in rural areas respond to the lack of housing in different ways than do persons
from cities. The rural homeless have less support services and shelters that would help
bring the situation to public attention (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1987). They
are forced to live with more extreme housing deficiencies and with fewer supportive
services to help them.

Rural homelessness, like urban homelessness, is the result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing. In 2005, research showed that the odds of being poor are between 1.2 and 2.3 times higher for people in non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas. One in five non-metro counties is classified as a high poverty county (defined as having a poverty rate of 20% or higher), while only one in 20 metro counties are defined as high poverty (Fisher, 2005). In 2005, 15.1% of rural Americans were living in poverty, compared with 12.5% of non-rural Americans (Jensen, 2006). Rural homelessness is most pronounced in rural regions that are primarily agricultural; regions whose economies are based on declining extractive industries such as mining, timber, or fishing; and regions experiencing economic growth, for example, areas with industrial plants that attract more workers than jobs available, and areas near urban centers that attract new businesses and higher income residents, thereby driving up taxes and living expenses (Aron & Fitchen, 1996). It has been shown that fewer job opportunities, lower wages, and longer periods of unemployment also plague the rural poor more often than their urban counterparts (Bread for the World Institute, 2005).

Education for Homeless Children

For homeless and other highly transient children, school can offer a stable and nurturing environment for growth and success (Noll & Watkins, 2003). Obstacles to homeless children's attending schools often may result from their caretakers' need and fears such as: (a) preoccupation with finding food and shelters; (b) concern that an abusive parent will locate the children; (c) concern that child welfare will take the children; and (d) lack of motivation to send children to school (Rafferty, 1997).

Homeless children face many challenges that can affect school success. Those issues include transience, family and emotional upheavals, embarrassment about their situation, and frustration in school due to lack of academic achievement (Rountree, 1996).

Although homelessness is normally a temporary experience, its effects on children can be lasting and damaging. This is particularly true as it relates to education. According to Duffield (2001), public policies to protect children from the crisis of homelessness are inadequate in the United States; there is, nonetheless, much more that can be done to prevent homelessness from robbing children of their rights to an education. Duffield goes on to say that this "education is a vital necessity if children are to escape poverty and face their own futures with any measure of hope" (p. 10).

Homelessness severely affects the health and well-being of children. Children without a home suffer poor health twice as often as other children and have higher rates of asthma, ear infections, stomach problems, and speech problems (Better Homes Fund, 1999). Homeless children also experience a greater incidence of mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and withdrawal. They are twice as likely as their housed peers to experience hunger, twice as likely to have learning disabilities, and four times as likely to have delayed development (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Physical and mental health problems of this nature clearly impact children's ability to attend school. In addition to these problems, homeless students face numerous other barriers to school enrollment and attendance, such as school enrollment requirements (including residency requirements), delays in the transfer of school records, lack of school supplies, and lack of transportation. Legal guardianship requirements pose

additional difficulties for unaccompanied homeless youth. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Education Report to Congress (1999), 326 ARTICLES 12% of homeless school-aged children are not enrolled in school while they are homeless, and 45% do not attend school on a regular basis while they are homeless.

Homeless children who are able to attend school have more problems learning than their housed peers. As a practical matter, homeless children and youth lack quiet places to study, read, or keep their schoolwork. In addition, high mobility creates significant obstacles to learning. Homeless families move frequently in search of safe and affordable housing or employment, to escape abusive partners, or due to limits on length of shelter stays. All too often, homeless children are forced to change schools because shelters or other temporary accommodations are not located in their school district. As a result of the high mobility associated with homelessness, 41% of homeless children go to two different schools within a single year, and 28% go to three schools or more. The frequent absences and school changes put homeless children at a higher risk of educational failure. Homeless children are twice as likely as their housed peers to repeat a grade (Better Homes Fund, 1999). The Improving America's School Act (IASA), particularly Title I, has changed since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Title I policy states:

> The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States that a high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to obtain that education is a societal good, is a moral imperative, and improves the life of every individual, because the quality of our individual lives ultimately depends on the quality of the lives of others. (IASA, 1994)

With over 14 million U.S. children living in poverty, about 1.6 million are homeless. These children suffer anxiety, frustration, and desperation of all children in poverty. The experience of being uprooted from what is familiar has an emotional, physical, and academic effect on them (Beach, 1996).

As Ruby Payne (1996), author of many books on poverty and education, noted, "For our students to be successful . . . we can neither excuse them nor scold them for not knowing; as educators, we must teach them and provide support, assistance, and high expectations" (p. 2). Homeless students may struggle academically, emotionally, and socially, but just like their housed peers they need clear, achievable expectations. Goodman, Owoki, and Goodman (2002) indicated that while it is important to take into account the challenges these children face daily, making excuses for them out of pity is not a good policy.

It is important for school districts to review their policies and procedures to address the needs of homeless children. Homeless children may lack classroom learning, not intelligence, and they can be successful. It is the schools' responsibility to provide professional development for teachers and staff based on the needs of this population.

The 1987 Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act and subsequent amendments in 1990 and 1994 provide considerable protection for the educational needs of homeless children and youth in the United States. The following are key provisions of the law:

1.   The law requires states to ensure that local educational agencies do not create a separate education system for homeless children.

2.   States must adopt policies and practices to ensure that homeless children are not stigmatized.

3.   States must ensure that every homeless child has access to the same free, appropriate public education.

4.   All policies, practices, laws, and procedures must be reviewed and revised so students may experience success.

5.   Homeless students must receive access to the same educational programs and services in the classroom as their permanently housed peers (Anderson et al., 1995, National Law Center).

In 2001, under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the Stewart B. McKinney Act was reauthorized as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Under that legislation, the following provisions were amended:

1.   Transportation: The McKinney-Vento Act requires school districts to provide transportation for students experiencing homelessness in three situations. First, the school is obligated to provide transportation to the school of origin upon the request of a parent or guardian. Secondly, for other transportation (as opposed to the school of origin), the Act requires districts to provide transportation comparable to that provided to housed students. Third, school districts must eliminate barriers to the school enrollment and retention of students experiencing homelessness. For example, if a student is living on or near an extremely busy intersection, in a very dangerous neighborhood, or is otherwise unable to attend school without transportation, the district must eliminate lack of transportation as a barrier to the child attending school.

2.   School of origin: Parents or guardians of students in homeless situations can keep their children in their schools of origin (to the extent feasible) or enroll them in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend.

3.   Designated local liaison: Local homeless education liaisons are district staff members responsible for ensuring the identification, enrollment, attendance, and opportunities for academic success of students in homeless situations.

4.   Immediate enrollment: Students have the right to enroll in school immediately, even if they do not have required documents, such as school records, medical records, proof of residency, or other documents. The term "enroll" is defined as attending classes and participating fully in school activities.

The law also extends accountability to local educational agencies serving the roughly 930,000 homeless students in the country, instead of just those that receive subgrants under McKinney-Vento from the state (Jacobson, 2002). Knowledge of the McKinney Act is essential for those who provide services to homeless children including shelter workers, educators, advocates, and legislators. The revised law also prohibits states that receive McKinney-Vento funds from segregating homeless children into separate classes of schools, except for short periods of time, for health and safety emergencies (Jacobson, 2002). Although the McKinney Act helped expand services and educational opportunities for homeless children, many needs remain. Despite the progress that has been made since the passage of the McKinney-Vento Act, homeless students still encounter myriad difficulties enrolling in and attending school and in participating in school programs that might help them to succeed (Duffield, 2001).

Access to Education for Homeless Children

Educational access is more than just enrolling in school; it also includes removal

of educational barriers encountered in receiving an education, denial of school services,

and problems after homeless children are enrolled in school. Since 1991, the number of

homeless children and youth reported by the U.S. Department of Education has more than

doubled (LeTendre, 1995), and according to a 1997 report by Waxman and Turpin,

requests for emergency shelter by families with children have increased and are expected

to continue to escalate.

According to Stronge (1992), there is a need to create and maintain opportunities

for proper school placement, access to support services, and services to address the

social-emotional well-being of homeless students. He further asserted that opening the

schoolhouse door and gaining access is no guarantee to success. Once homeless children

are enrolled in school, many problems can inhibit the school's ability to deliver an

appropriate educational opportunity and the students' ability to benefit from it.

Years after the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, schools are still

working on programs that connect homeless children with school. There is a great

disparity between the number of homeless children in need and those who receive

services. Inadequate funding appropriations and lack of expertise have forced many

school districts to ignore homeless children. Authorized by the McKinney-Vento

Homeless Assistance Act, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program in

the U.S. Department of Education is intended to ensure that all homeless children and

youth have access to public education and other related services.

The literature indicated that a number of homeless children and youth come from backgrounds that include unstable families, early deprivation, and even abuse. As a result of their backgrounds, many school-age homeless children distrust authority and are wary of institutions such as schools. According to Gracenin (1994), homeless children are also given to self-defeating behaviors. They sabotage their own success, first encounters with most adults are typically hostile, they dress to offend, and often engage in petty criminal behavior, sometimes out of need. The author went on to say that focus of these youngsters on the basics of survival makes it difficult for them to concentrate on math, geography, etc. Their minds are elsewhere, assignments are not completed, and they are often inattentive in class and often do not understand a lesson the first time.

Gracenin (1994) further contended that homeless youngsters live by their wits and develop the ability to act quickly and decisively; their concern is to have instant gratification. Teachers expect students to sit in desks in neat rows and schools tend to work on delayed gratification; often the two clash. The author pointed out that homeless children share other characteristics as well:

1.   They are strongly attuned to adults' attitudes toward them and will reward genuine efforts to establish rapport. But teachers often sabotage this by "being mean" to children who are difficult to reach.

2.   Homeless children might not have the same experiences as other children. The assumption cannot be made that homeless children will have the same concept of how to make a telephone call or use a dictionary. Homeless children often live in a car or a motel or on the streets where there are no books. Readiness to learn is a problem among homeless kindergartners and preschoolers.

3.   In primary grades, most children who become homeless realize they are "different." Other children realize this as well; teasing and even harassment is a common problem. These factors form a profile of the learning needs of homeless children and youth.

Barriers to Education for Homeless Children

School attendance is especially important for children who are homeless because it may provide the only opportunity for stability in a life filled with constant change and uncertainty (Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). Sometimes homeless parents struggling to "make ends meet" cannot afford to provide their children with school supplies such as paper, pencils, and pens. This is in addition to not being able to provide them adequate clothing. Many homeless students are forced to wear used clothing. Some parents believe that the school will provide the materials students need in class. This is often not the case. These students must then either borrow the supplies they need or go without them.

When most students are looking forward to the first day of school, many homeless students are concerned with the intimidation they may encounter. Homeless students are often concerned that they will be criticized, teased, and ostracized for lack of new clothes and school supplies. Even more critical is the fact that homeless students are often at a disadvantage academically. They often do not have access to home libraries or Internet-accessible computers. Not having the proper supplies needed even creates a problem for completing work in class.

Though the number of homeless and needy children has grown, assistance for them has declined. Some of the decline is attributable to federal welfare reform and state budget shortages. Even charitable contributions have declined as some organizations and

donors have begun to direct their funds toward those who have been affected by acts of

terrorism. In addition, there are those who concentrate on giving during the holiday

season. Even then, the giving often consists of clothing and food items (Vissing, 2003).

All children have the right to be included, accepted, supported, and enabled to

participate in society through access to successful school experiences. Stronge (1993)

asserted that homeless children are more at risk of school failure and often outright school

exclusion. The author further suggested that these children and youth are often relegated

to insignificant societal and educational status due to the mere circumstances of their

birth. A number of perilous obstacles stand in the way of educational services for

homeless students, not only to access but also to success in school once they have entered

the system. Persistent and potentially damaging barriers to educational opportunities for

homeless students include the lack of (a) awareness of issues and concerns surrounding

homeless students and families, (b) parental involvement and support, (c) early

intervention, and (d) effective coordination of service delivery (Stronge, 1993). Each of

these areas denotes challenges that must be addressed if educators are to clear the path

that leads to appropriate educational opportunities, dignity, acceptance, and societal

participation.

Awareness and Sensitivity to the Plight of Homeless Children

A major challenge to the education of homeless students is the continuing lack of

awareness of homelessness, and of homeless students' educational rights, among school

personnel and communities. Homeless children and youth are frequently invisible.

Children and parents hide their condition for many reasons. Children are humiliated and

depressed by their homelessness and fear ridicule from classmates. The stigma of

homelessness and the fear of having children taken away often prevent parents from

informing school officials of their precarious circumstances. In addition, homeless

children and families strive to "fit in" so that they can be treated like everyone else and

experience normalcy in otherwise chaotic times. Children and youth who are not enrolled

in school and whose families are not living in shelters are even more invisible to schools

and their communities. Finally, prevalent stereotypes about homelessness often prevent

educators from realizing that children in their classrooms are experiencing homelessness.

For these reasons, staff training, professional development, community meetings with

homeless service providers, and other awareness-raising activities are among the most

important steps a school can take to begin to identify and serve homeless students

(Duffield, 2001).

A problem that underlies many of the barriers to the education of homeless

children is the lack of understanding and sensitivity to the needs of these students. The

homeless are not one undifferentiated mass; rather, children and their families are

homeless for different reasons (McChesney, 1993). The spectrum of homelessness ranges

from families who are first-time homeless and are only temporarily in this condition to

others who are chronically homeless (Stronge, 1993).

Educators can play a critical role in cushioning the blow for homeless children.

They need to understand how homelessness affects a child's ability to succeed in school,

what the legal rights of homeless children and their families are regarding education, and

what schools can do to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of homelessness on

children (Rafferty, 1997).

The lack of awareness to the problems posed by homelessness should be addressed among school personnel through sensitivity and awareness training (Rafferty, 1997). Professional development activities focusing on homeless issues conducted at the state and local levels can be effective in teaching educators and other school personnel specific strategies to meet the needs of homeless students. Workshops that provide educators with the knowledge of the effects of frequent relocation and on the attitudes and learning of children are important tools in raising awareness (Hightower, Nathanson, & Wimberly, 1997). In addition, dissemination of information related to available community resources, exploration of specific instructional strategies and methods of adapting curriculum, and training in crisis management are important elements in providing effective professional development related to homelessness. Strategies to raise awareness that have been employed in many states and school districts include appointment of liaisons at the local levels, staff development, and face-to-face meetings with key constituents (Anderson et al., 1995).

State and local liaisons can promote causes related to homeless children and youth and build support for their programs and efforts by presenting information on the needs and goals of homeless students in public forums sponsored by various educational and social services-related organizations (Hightower et al., 1997). Community involvement and support also can be stimulated by raising awareness of civic groups, religious organizations, and local businesses to the needs of homeless children and youth.

Raising the awareness of teachers, administrators, and others and equipping them with an understanding of homelessness and its effects on the personal and instructional needs of homeless students is an important first step in planning and providing effective

educational services. Provision of information and training designed to increase sensitivity of school personnel and the community makes an important contribution toward eliminating obstacles that separate homeless children and youth from equitable educational opportunities.

<div align="center">Parental Involvement</div>

Another support issue that is essential to the educational success of students who are homeless is parental involvement. Directors of homeless shelters and school personnel alike have listed this barrier as a major issue. A supportive climate for homeless children cannot be adequately provided without help from parents (Gonzalez, 1992). Family members play a fundamental role that supports the development of children through modeling behavior, teaching competency, and facing challenges (Reed-Victor & Stronge, 1997). Thus, an educational partnership with parents needs to be forged to assist students in accessing and succeeding in the educational enterprise. Numerous studies suggest that the degree of positive interaction between parent and school has a direct impact on the academic performance of students, particularly at-risk students (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Mortimore, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989; Ziegler, 1987).

According to Buckner, Bassuk, and Zima (1993), family dysfunction and stress related to the condition of homelessness act as barriers to healthy child development and to parental participation in the education of their children. A challenge in achieving partnerships with families lies in the fact that many homeless parents do not (or seemingly cannot) place an appropriate emphasis on the education of their children. Due to the dire situation of homelessness, parents may be so consumed with the task of daily

survival that they lack the stamina to seek opportunities beyond meeting the most basic of needs.

Although homeless families are typically lacking in components of family strength, they are not necessarily lacking in concern and aspirations for their children. Homeless families are often uninformed regarding the rights of their children and the resources that are available to them. It is important for raising awareness on homeless issues to include families so they can make informed decisions about the education of their children.

Circumstances that consume families with the tasks of daily survival underscore the urgent need for assistance and encouragement so that those parents may have the opportunity to become partners in the education of their children. Assistance and awareness-raising activities that educate families of homeless children and youth as to legal rights and resources available to them should be offered within the context of a nurturing climate. This support can be created by positive and consistent communication with parents and the provision of training effort to address parenting skills and information on available community services (Gonzalez, 1992).

Early Intervention

Programs that begin the educational process early are principal antecedents for success in learning for children, especially those from impoverished backgrounds (Maughan, 1988). Young homeless children who little stability in their lives and lack the nurture, nutrition, and health supports necessary for sound development. Frequent language, cognitive, and behavioral problems are directly related to homelessness during a child's formative years (Eddowes, 1992; Yamaguchi, Strawser, & Higgins, 1997).

Loss of access to medical care, hunger, and lack of school attendance lead to significant health issues, as well as developmental, psychological, and social growth issues. The importance of a warm, structured, capacity-building environment (such as in a preschool program) reduces stress, creates opportunities, and promotes educational and personal competence (Werner & Smith, 1992; Yamaguchi et al., 1997).

The lack of enrollment of homeless children in preschool programs presents an obvious obstacle to educational success. Although the importance of early educational intervention to success in learning for homeless children is clear, program access is often limited. The problem of inadequate space in preschool programs in compounded by the fact that homeless children who are moving in and out of a community are not in line for open slots in existing programs. One practical solution associated with providing adequate preschool education programs for homeless children is to hold a few slots open that can be filled by those who are transient.

<div align="center">Transportation</div>

Another barrier is a lack of transportation to and from school. Frequent moves from location to location often cause children to be in and out of schools. Some shelter directors stated that there is no formal procedure for transporting homeless children to and from school. They list this as an important concern to ultimately helping such students.

The National Coalition for the Homeless (1987) reported that transportation is the number one barrier facing children who are homeless. Section 722 (g) (4) (A) of the McKinney Act (1994) requires schools to provide transportation comparable to that provided to all students. Even though the Act is in place, it is sometimes difficult to

implement these transportation provisions. Students who are homeless are given the option of continuing attendance at their school of original residence for the remainder of the school year, which raises questions of responsibility for bus service if their current, temporary residence is in a different zone or district. School bus service between zones is not a usual service, and parents who are homeless are often unable to afford other transportation for their children.

<div align="center">Enrollment Requirements</div>

One major problem confronting homeless children has been the difficulty of enrolling in school homeless students may live on the street, in temporary settings such as motels, or in cars. When attempting to enroll in school, homeless families may not be able to produce birth certificates, immunization records, or the name and address of the last school of attendance (Rountree, 1995).

Residency requirements have been the most significant barrier because homeless students are, by definition, without a residence. When parents have attempted to enroll children in the school district where they are temporarily staying, admission often has been denied because they are not residents of the district. In some cases, restrictive shelter policies toward adolescent males force parents to send their adolescent children to stay wit relatives or friends (Rafferty, 1992).

Homeless families often find it difficult to enroll their children in public schools. At one time, not being able to show a permanent address was an issue that stood in the way of receiving a public education. There are some administrators who worry that homeless children will disrupt classroom progress, potentially create an increase in the dropout rate, and even lower standardized test scores. All of these are measures used to

determine how well a school performs (Gibbs, 2004). Most states require that the child be enrolled in school by a parent or legal guardian. Children who are homeless may be living with a relative or friend who is unable to register the child because they lack guardianship papers (Stronge & Tenhouse, 1990). For enrollment a family also must show proof of residence in that school district or zone. For children with no permanent address, enrollment can be delayed or refused until residency issues are resolved (Stronge & Tenhouse, 1990). A further complication is the question of which district is responsible for educating the child—the district where the child attended school before becoming homeless or the district where the child is currently residing. In addition, some states require that the child be enrolled in the district where the parent lives, even if the child is living elsewhere (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty,1997).

The McKinney Act Amendments of 1994 clearly state that children who become homeless during a school year have the option of continuing in their present school for the rest of the year or attending the school where they now reside. This mandate also applies if the child becomes homeless during the summer (McKinney Act, Section 722 (e) (3) 1994). The decision is to be made in the best interest of the child, and parental preference must be considered. Nevertheless, school districts may interpret state procedures in such a way as to circumvent the provisions of the Act (Stronge & Tenhouse, 1990). Because disputes over residency can delay a child's enrollment for weeks or months, it is possible that the child will move or the parent, whose resources are being stretched to the limit, will give up trying to enroll the child.

Problems with obtaining birth certificates and transferring school records are also significant barriers for students across all grade levels who are homeless (National Law

Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1995). According to Stronge and Tenhouse (1990),

parents who are homeless may be unable to provide school and immunization records if

the family has moved frequently and the child has attended several schools. Families who

have no permanent residence or who have lost their personal belongings may be unable to

produce health records, or the child may be living with a relative or friend who may not

know where to obtain immunization records and birth certificates, and families who are

homeless often lack the financial resources to pay the necessary fees (Helm, 1993).

The education of homeless children in public schools has become a controversial

topic because in many cases these students have been ignored by public schools. The

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was created in recognition of the fact that

homeless children do exist and they have the right to the same quality education as those

children in more traditional settings. Just the creation of the act has brought more public

attention to the existence of homeless children and the risk that is associated with their

circumstances.

To combat that risk, school districts across the country have appointed homeless

education liaisons to identify and help homeless families. Through McKinney-Vento

funding, school districts have produced environments that foster the learning, growth, and

self-confidence of homeless children. There have even been a number of independent

establishments across the country to aide in providing homeless children with a place

where they can be educated in a secure and safe environment. These types of schools

provide environments where homeless children are not ostracized or criticized for the

circumstances that bring them there. Giving homeless children options is a vital key to

helping them continue their education once it has begun (Gibbs, 2004).

Special Needs and Circumstances

The diversity of homeless students' needs are influenced by "such factors as

length of time without a home, reason for homelessness, availability of outside support

systems, the environment of the shelter, and the age, sex, and temperament of the child"

(Linehan, 1992, p. 62). Certain subpopulations of homeless students, such as homeless

preschoolers and homeless youth, present unique challenges to schools and communities.

Homeless youth often face extreme barriers to school access. For instance, one national

evaluation found that, notwithstanding the McKinney-Vento Act's provisions, states and

districts continue to struggle to provide access to school for homeless youth while

meeting guardianship requirements (Anderson et al., 1995). For unacccompanied youth,

this barrier often means extreme difficulty in enrolling in school. The evaluation also

found that efforts to ensure school safety may impede enrollment for teens. The

evaluation also found that teens may be placed in locations throughout a state, with up to

six or seven moves a year to disrupt learning. Finally, the evaluation found that few

McKinney-Vento homeless education programs provide instructional services to older

students (Duffield, 2001).

Similarly, few homeless children are enrolled in public preschool programs (U.S.

Department of Education, 1999). A 1997 national survey of homeless service providers

found that barriers to public preschool for homeless children were, in order of frequency,

lack of transportation, lack of the availability of preschool programs, family mobility, and

parental lack of understanding of their children's rights (National Law Center on

Homelessness & Poverty, 1997). The lack of access to preschool education is especially

disconcerting in light of the large population of homeless children who are very young; it is estimated that over 40% of all homeless children are under age 5 (Burt, 1999).

A further manifestation of all the challenges previously described is the continued existence of separate schools for homeless children and youth (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2000). The McKinney-Vento Act prohibits the separation of homeless children from the mainstream school environment based o their homeless status and requires states to ensure that homeless children are not isolated or stigmatized. Despite these provisions, continuing barriers to homeless children's mainstream school education have resulted in many homeless children being relegated to classrooms in shelters or other "homeless only" facilities. Segregating homeless students from their housed peers increases the stigma associated with homelessness, causes unnecessary disruption in the lives of homeless children, and deprives homeless children of the full range of educational opportunities to which they are entitled. Indeed, a survey of more than 40 segregated classrooms or schools found that separate programs provide vastly inferior educational opportunities (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 1997).

It cannot be forgotten that homeless children dwell in a very unique set of circumstances. Though much progress has been made in the education of some of these children, it may not have been realized by all of them. Homeless children may not have access to facilities for bathing and washing their clothes. This leads to an appearance that may be a magnet for ridicule and isolation by peers. Homeless children are often ostracized and made fun of in public schools. Lack of safety and stability in the locations where they live may cause the homeless to get inadequate sleep at night and therefore fall

asleep in class. Homeless families tend to move from place to place and this often leads

to a break in the continuous education of their children. Such breaks can cause students to

struggle academically.

Academic struggles in conjunction with feelings of insurmountable odds often

lead homeless students to quit school. Lack of permanent housing, safety and stability are

all problems that the homeless education liaison must help to combat.

The present system for helping homeless children is not perfect, but the

development of homeless education liaisons provides hope for the future. School districts

nationwide are becoming more aware and more informed about the plight homeless

children must endure. Barbara James, the 2002-2003 president of the National

Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, stated in the February

2003 issue of *The Beam* (the newsletter of the NAEHCY),

> While we've made much progress, we must realize that our work has just begun.
>
> We still face challenges. Not every district throughout the country has
>
> appointment a homeless liaison; some districts still believe that they could not
>
> possibly have homeless children within their boundaries; some districts are not
>
> transporting children to their school of origin. Many school districts are
>
> confronting serious budget crises, making the allocation of scarce resources seem
>
> more difficult. (p. 2)

James summed up as follows: "Now, more than ever, we NAEHCY members

must remain steadfast and continue our advocacy efforts on behalf of children and youth

in homeless situations. We've struggled too hard and too long to lose ground now" (p. 2).

The research literature has shown that there are numerous barriers to enrollment and school success. The next section of this study is Chapter III. Chapter III will provide information on the methodology on this study. The population in this study, methods of the data collection, and instrumentation will be presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methods used to conduct this study. It contains a

description of the subjects, the methods of data collection, and techniques used for data

collection in this study. A description of the techniques for analysis of data is included.

Research Questions

This study analyzed variables that are reported in the literature as impediments to

school attendance and school success for homeless children. The research questions that

were addressed were worded as follows:

1.   What are the barriers that impede access to schools of homeless children

and youth?

2.   What are the barriers that impede school success by homeless children and

youth?

Participants

The subjects for this study consisted of tutors and homeless liaisons in 23 school

districts. Of the 23 districts asked to participate in the study, 17 gave their permission and

were, therefore, sent surveys. These districts are listed in Table 1. The respondents were

sent surveys in the 17 districts and were chosen because they received funding from the

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant during the 2002-2003 school year. Tutors

and liaisons in all 17 school districts were sent questionnaires; 17 districts responded to

the survey. The study sample was comprised of 230 tutors and liaisons in these districts,

representing the populations who provide after-school instruction to homeless students.

Of these, 215 responded, including current teachers, retired teachers, and volunteers.

Liaisons were the coordinators for the after-school program within each school district. These personnel were chosen because they had direct contact with homeless students.

According to data obtained from the Mississippi State Department of Education, there were 3,292 homeless students within the 17 school districts in this sample. The largest reported enrollment of homeless students for a single school district was Harrison County with 1,293, while the smallest reported enrollment was West Point with 21. The average for the 17 districts was 193.6 (3.292 ÷ 17). Table 1 illustrates these data.

The demographic characteristics of homeless children in the districts represented in this study follow. Students were in grades kindergarten through 12. All of the students receiving homeless education services received free or reduced lunches due to the income level of their families.

Data Collection

Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, letters requesting permission to conduct the study (Appendix A) were sent to the superintendents of the 23 school districts awarded funds from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. Permission was granted from 17 of the 23 districts contacted. Permission was received from the superintendents by a return letter or via e-mail. A formal proposal was submitted to the doctoral committee for approval to conduct the study. A summary of the proposed study was sent to The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection ReCommittee which approved the request to conduct the study (Appendix B).

In the spring of 2003, the survey instruments were mailed to each homeless liaison of the 17 participating school districts. The district homeless liaison then distributed and administered the questionnaire to tutors and liaisons working with

Table 1

School District Homeless Student Totals for School Year 2002-2003

District	Number of Homeless Students Identified
Harrison County School District	1,293
Starkville	362
Oxford	205
Leflore County	200
Tupelo	166
Humphrey County	156
Petal	137
Alcorn	120
Vicksburg	114
Forrest County	113
Hollandale	96
Hancock County	82
Meridian Public Schools	68
Shaw	55
Moss Point	53
Benoit	51
West Point	21
Total	3,292
Mean	193.65
Range	21-1,293

homeless students. Completed questionnaires were collected by the homeless liaison and returned by mail to the researcher in the self-addressed envelope provided.

Instrumentation

The instrument used in the study was a researcher-designed questionnaire on barriers to enrollment and barriers to school success of homeless students. It was a 20-item instrument with three subsections: (a) barriers to enrollment, (b) barriers to school success, and (c) demographic information (Appendix C). Each of the items was measured on a 4-point Likert scale anchored with the indicators of 1 (*not a barrier*), 2 (*a slight barrier for a few students*), 3 (*a barrier for several students*), 4 (*a major barrier for most students*), and 5 (*do not know*). The instructions for rating items were given at the top of the page. There was no time limit for completing the questionnaire; however, participants could complete the questionnaire in 10 to 15 minutes.

Prior to the initial mailing of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted on a select group of 10 former homeless liaisons, teachers of homeless students, and school administrators, and the state homeless coordinators for Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas to determine the validity of the instrument being used. The former liaisons, teachers, and administrators came from school districts that had previously received funds from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. Participants in the pilot group were not included in the primary study. Those completing the pilot study were former grant recipients, retired personnel, etc. and were no longer in the employment of their respective districts. Based on feedback from the pilot study, minor editing of the first instrument was made to the type of demographic information that was obtained from survey participants.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was that survey participants were only from

Mississippi school districts and were confined to a specific population of those districts

receiving a McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. This does not take into account

education personnel throughout the entire state who could have had different experiences

and background with working with homeless students based on the region in which they

lived. Generalizability beyond the population, therefore, might be limited. There was a

very small limitation in this study. From the 230 surveys that were sent, 15 tutors and

liaisons did not respond or returned the surveys incomplete.

Additionally, it would be difficult in a study of this nature to determine whether

respondents answered the survey themselves or how seriously they took the true meaning

of the questions. An additional limitation is noted in that, of the 230 individuals surveyed,

15 tutors and liaisons did not respond or returned the surveys incomplete.

Analysis of Data

The data assembled through this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviations were calculated. A post hoc

analysis of the relationships between participant descriptors and barriers was conducted

as well using Pearson correlation for experiences and Spearman correlations for

educational level and age.

Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the methods used for data collection in the

study of barriers to enrollment and school success for homeless school-age children and

youth in Mississippi. Procedures for identifying selected school districts were outlined as

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well as the identifications of appropriate school personnel who could be targeted as potential respondents for the questionnaire. The survey instrument was developed and sent to school districts identified because they received funding from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance grants during the 2002-2003 school year.

Chapter IV presents an analysis of the data that were collected through processes outlined in this chapter. The presentation of the results of this data analysis will lead to further conclusions included in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected during this study of the barriers to enrollment and school success for homeless children and youth in the state of Mississippi. The data included in the study came from liaisons, tutors, and administrators who worked in after-school programs with homeless students. Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire entitled Barriers to Educating Students in Homeless Situations in Mississippi. The data collected through this method were compiled and analyzed, and the results are presented in the following sections.

Description of Data

In March of 2002, a survey packet containing an introductory letter and a questionnaire was mailed to 230 individuals. Participants in the study included tutors, homeless liaisons, and administrators in 23 school districts. There were 23 liaisons and 207 tutors surveyed. Out of the 230 surveys sent out to liaisons and tutors, 215 questionnaires were returned. Therefore, a usable sample size and response rate of 93% was obtained.

The questionnaire included two sections related to barriers faced by homeless students. The first section consisted of seven questions measuring the perceived barriers to enrollment. The second section consisted of eight questions measuring the perceived barriers to school success. Using a Likert scale, the respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived subsequent items to be barriers. The scale elements were

as follows: 1 = *not a barrier*, 2 = *a slight barrier for a few students*, 3 = *a barrier for several students*, 4 = *a major barrier for most students*, and 5 = *do not know*.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 2 illustrates that respondents ranged in age from 21 to 64 years with the mean being 49 years. There were 12.1% (n = 26) between the ages of 21 and 30, 20.9% (n = 45) between the ages of 31 and 40, and 66% (n = 144) who were age 41 and above. This means the majority of those working with homeless students are more mature in age.

Table 3 describes the gender of participants. The results indicated that of the 215 respondents, approximately 81.9% (n = 176) were female.

Teaching/administration experience levels of respondents are noted in Table 4. The smallest group in terms of years of experience were those with 15-19 years (13.5%; n = 29). Approximately 11.3% (n = 24) had 20-24 years of experience. The largest group had over 25 years of experience (31.2%; n = 67). Of those surveyed, 14.4% had less than 5 years of experience. Nearly half of the respondents (42.5%) had 20 or more years of experience. In other words, the majority of personnel responding to the survey were quite experienced in education.

Respondents' levels of experience working with homeless children are noted in Table 5. According to the survey, 43% (n = 93) of respondents had 0-4 years of experience. In addition, 21% (n = 45) of respondents had 5-9 years of experience. This means that over half (64%) of those who work with homeless students had less than 9 years of experience in doing so.

Table 6 illustrates the educational level of survey participants. Approximately 44.7% (n = 96) had a bachelor's degree. Of the respondents, 44.7% (n = 96) had a

Table 2

Age Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents by Age Category

Age	Number	Percent
21-30	36	12.1
31-40	45	20.9
41-50	78	36.3
51 and over	66	30.7

Table 3

Gender Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents by Gender

Age	Frequency	Percent
Female	176	81.9
Male	39	18.1

Table 4

Teaching/Administration Experience Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents by Number of Years of Working in the Education Field

Years	Frequency	Percent
0-4	31	14.4
5-9	38	17.5
10-14	26	12.1
15-19	29	13.5
20-24	24	11.3
25 and over	67	31.5

Table 5

Years of Experience Working with Homeless Children Frequencies and Percentages in After-School Programs

Years	Frequency	Percent
0-4	93	43
5-9	45	21
10-14	21	10
15-19	13	6
20-24	9	4
25 and over	34	16

master's degree. This accounts for over 88% of those working with homeless students. This indicates that less than 10% of those who work with homeless students have more than a specialist's degree. Over 90% of those who work with homeless students have at least a bachelor's degree.

Perspectives of Participants Regarding Barriers Faced by Homeless Children

The survey participants responded to the 15 questions using a 4-point Likert scale. Table 7 includes the number of respondents to each question who perceived barriers to enrollment faced by homeless children and youth. Among respondents, 81 (38%) did not perceive lack of transportation(Item Q1) to be a barrier to enrollment; 48 (38%) believed this to be a slight barrier. In response to Q2, "Lack of immunization," 85 (40%) did not perceive this to be a barrier; 53 (24%) considered this a slight barrier. In response to Item Q3, "Lack of school records," 80 (37%) did not perceive that this is a barrier, while 52 (24%) indicated that it was a barrier. Concerning Item Q4, "State guardianship," 73 (34%) did not perceive this to be a barrier, while 57 (27%) believed it was a slight barrier. Among respondents, 87 (41%) did not perceive the lack of a birth certificate (Item Q5) to be a barrier; 62 (29%) believed this to be a slight barrier. Regarding Item Q6, "School Attendance Policies, 99 (40%) did not perceive such policies to be a barrier, while 41 (19%) believed them to be a slight barrier. Concerning Item Q7, "Local enrollment policies and practices," 100 (47%) did not perceive such policies to be a barrier; 54 (25%) believed these policies to be a slight barrier.

The means and standard deviations for the dependent variables are given in Table 8, which illustrates and reports in rank order the reported barriers to school enrollment for homeless students. The highest means were for Item Q1, "lack of transportation" (mean

Table 6

Educational Level Frequencies and Percentages

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor	96	44.7
Master	96	44.7
Specialist	17	7.9
Doctorate	6	2.8

Table 7

Ratings of Barriers to Enrollment as Noted by Respondents

Question	Not	Slight	Barrier	Major	DNK
1. Lack of transportation	81 (38%)	48 (38%)	37 (17%)	40 (19%)	9 (4%)
2. Lack of immunization	85 (40%)	53 (24%)	49 (23%)	14 (7%)	15 (7%)
3. Lack of school records	80 (37%)	49 (23%)	52 (24%)	23 (11%)	11 (5%)
4. State guardianship	73 (34%)	57 (27%)	44 (21%)	22 (10%)	19 (9%)
5. Lack of birth certificate	87 (41%)	62 (29%)	35 (16%)	19 (9%)	12 (6%)
6. School attendance policies	99 (46%)	41 (19%)	36 (17%)	28 (13%)	11 (5%)
7. Local enrollment policies & practices	100 (47%)	54 (25%)	33 (25%)	16 (7%)	12 (6%)

DNK = Do Not Know

2.17), Item, Q3, "lack of school records" (mean 2.09), and Item Q4, "state

guardianship/residency requirements" (mean 2.087). The reported barriers to school

enrollment with the lowest means were Item Q7, "local enrollment policies and practices"

(mean = 1.83), Item Q5, "lack of birth certificates" (mean = 1.93), and Item Q2, "lack of

immunization" (mean = 1.96).

Table 9 reports the number of respondents who perceived that each issue served as

a barrier to school success by homeless children and youth. Among respondents, 80

(37%) perceived frequent mobility (Item Q8) to be a major barrier; 65 (30%) believed it

was a barrier. Regarding Q9, "Frequent absenteeism," 93 (43%) perceived this issue to be

a major barrier, while 61 (28%) thought it was a barrier. In response to Item Q10, "Lack

of staff awareness," 76 (35%) did not perceive this to be a barrier; 60 (28%) considered it

a slight barrier. Regarding Item Q11, "Lack of school supplies," 80 (37%) did not

perceive this to be a barrier, while 57 (27%) thought it was a barrier. Lack of parental

involvement (Item Q12) was perceived by 110 (51%) respondents to be a major barrier,

while 51 (24%) believed it to be a barrier. In response to Item Q13, "Lack of

psychological services," 55 (26%) did not perceive this to be a barrier; 53 (25%) believed

it was a barrier. Regarding Item Q14, "Poor health and inadequate medical care," 62

(29%) perceived this to be a slight barrier, while 60 (28%) considered it to be a major

barrier. Physical needs (Item Q15) were considered by 71 (33%) to be a major barrier; 51

(24%) believed it was a slight barrier.

The means and standard deviations for the dependent variables are given in Table

10, which illustrates and reports in rank order the reported barriers to school success for

homeless students. The highest means were for Item Q12, "lack of parental involvement"

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations for Barriers to Enrollment

Barriers	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1. Lack of transportation	2.17	1.15
Q3. Lack of school records	2.09	1.05
Q4. State Guardianship/residency requirements	2.08	1.02
Q6. School attendance	1.97	1.10
Q2. Lack of immunization	1.96	.98
Q5. Lack of birth certificates	1.93	.99
Q7. Local enrollment policies and practices	1.83	.97

Scale 1-4
N = 215

Table 9

Ratings of Barriers to School Success by Respondents

Question	Not	Slight	Barrier	Major	DNK
8. Frequent mobility	32 (15%)	32 (15%)	65 (30%)	80 (37%)	6 (3%)
9. Frequent absenteeism	20 (9%)	35 (16%)	61 (28%)	93 (43%)	6 (3%)
10. Lack of staff awareness	76 (35%)	60 (28%)	44 (21%)	27 (13%)	8 (4%)
11. Lack of school supplies	80 (37%)	44 (21%)	57 (27%)	31 (14%)	3 (1%)
12. Lack of parental involvement	17 (8%)	25 (12%)	51 (24%)	110 (51%)	12 (6%)
13. Lack of psychologist	55 (26%)	46 (21%)	53 (25%)	48 (22%)	13 (6%)
14. Poor health	45 (21%)	62 (29%)	60 (28%)	36 (17%)	12 (6%)
15. Physical needs	41 (19%)	51 (24%)	71 (33%)	45 (21%)	7 (3%)

DNK = Do Not Know

(mean = 3.25), Item Q9, "frequent absenteeism" (mean 3.09), and Item Q8, "frequent

mobility" (mean = 2.92). Additionally, the reported barriers to school success with the

lowest means were Item Q15, "physical needs" (mean = 2.58), Item Q13, "lack of

psychological services" (mean = 2.47), Item Q14, "poor health" (mean = 2.43), Item Q11,

"lack of school supplies" (mean = 2.18), and Item Q10, "lack of staff awareness and

sensitivity training" (mean = 2.11).

<div align="center">Results of Research Questions</div>

The primary questions of this study addressed barriers that impede education,

school access, and the school success of homeless children. The study examined the two

research questions. Research Question 1 was stated as follows:

1.   What are the barriers that impede access to schools by homeless children

and youth?

Based on the results of this study, barriers to enrollment with the highest means

were the lack of transportation, the lack of school records, and state

guardianship/residency requirements.. This indicates that of all the barriers investigated in

this study, these are the most prevalent barriers when considering access to schools for

homeless students. Based also on the study results, the mean results from school

attendance, lack of immunization, lack of birth certificates, and local enrollment policies

and practices were indicated to be slight barriers for a few students.

Research Question 2 was worded as seen here:

2.   What are the barriers that impede school success by homeless children and

youth?

Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations for Barriers to School Success

Barriers	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q12. Lack of parental involvement	3.25	.97
Q9. Frequent absenteeism	3.09	1.00
Q8. Frequent mobility	2.92	1.07
Q15. Physical needs	2.58	1.04
Q13. Lack of psychological services	2.47	1.13
Q14. Poor health	2.43	1.02
Q11. Lack of school supplies	2.18	1.10
Q10. Lack of staff awareness and sensitivity training	2.11	1.05

Scale 1-4
N = 215

Based on the results of this study, barriers to school success with the highest means were lack of parental involvement, frequent absenteeism, and frequent mobility. This indicates that these are the factors perceived as most likely to impede success in school for homeless students. Further results indicated that physical needs, lack of psychological services, poor health, and lack of school supplies were slight barriers for several students.

Results of Post Hoc Analysis

Subsequent to the analysis of the original research questions, the additional examination of data was undertaken. Using the Spearman correlation, the researcher examined relationships between the importance of barriers with age, educational degree, teaching/administration experience, and years working with homeless students. These results are reported in Table 11.

According to the data, the age of the respondents was slightly correlated with lack of school records ($r = .17, p = .015$). The older teachers believed that the stronger barrier was a lack of school records. Age was also inversely correlated to a modest degree with frequent absenteeism($r = -.141, p = .041$). Younger teachers were slightly more likely to perceive that frequent absenteeism was a barrier.

The education level/degree of the respondents was slightly correlated with lack of school records ($r = .216, p = .002$). The higher the education level, the more the respondents perceived it was a barrier. The higher the education level/degree, the greater the correlation with frequent mobility ($r = .211, p = .002$). Thus, the higher the degree the stronger the perception by teachers that frequent mobility was a barrier.

Table 11

Spearman Correlation of Importance of Barriers with Age, Degree, Administrative Experience, and Years of Working with Homeless Students

	Age	Degree	Admin. Exp.	Years
1.	-.040	-.018	-.095	-.133
2.	.111	.101	.021	.0091
3.	.170*	.216*	.096	.155*
4.	.005	.107	-.057	.045
5.	.087	.085	-.003	.177*
6.	.027	.104	-.033	.098
7.	.038	.054	-.041	.032
8.	-.051	.211*	-.018	.075
9.	-.141	.097	-.125	-.033
10.	.007	.080	-.050	.017
11.	-.131	.070	-.093	-.006
12.	-.112	-.049	-.098	-.088
13.	-.061	-.018	-.180*	-.047
14.	-.059	.061	-.109	.008
15.	-.044	.133	-.108	.027

*$p < .05$

According to the results, the administrative experience of the respondents was slightly correlated with the lack of psychological services ($r = .180, p = .010$). The less experienced administrators felt that the lack of psychological services was a barrier for most students.

The number of years that respondents had worked with homeless students was correlated slightly with the lack of school records ($r = .155, p = .028$). The fewer years respondents worked with homeless students the less they felt that the lack of records was a barrier. The years of experience had a slight correlation with lack of birth certificates ($r = .177, p = .012$). The more years of experience the teachers had working with homeless students, the less they felt that birth certificates were a barrier to enrollment.

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected for the study of the barriers to enrollment and barriers to school success for homeless school-age children and youth and the demographics of the liaison, tutors, and administrators who have worked with these students. Results from each of the statistical tests were offered. Chapter V provides a discussion of the conclusions and implications drawn from this data analysis and includes direction for further research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Throughout this study, research was conducted to focus on two central issues: the determination of barriers to school enrollment and barriers to school success for homeless children and youth. When the problems that homeless students bring with them to school are combined with obstacles in the structure of American public education, public schools seem ill-equipped to deal with homeless students. Chapter V will discuss the findings within this study, drawing from the data and results presented in Chapter IV. Directions for future research and study are provided as well.

Summary of Results

This study involved participants consisting of tutors and homeless liaisons in 23 school districts. The study sample was designed to include approximately 230 educators representing the populations that provided after-school instruction to homeless students in the state of Mississippi. A survey instrument was sent to a homeless liaison in each of the 23 districts. It was distributed and administered to tutors and homeless liaisons working with homeless students. Of the 230 mailed survey instruments, 215 were completed and returned for a 93.5% rate of response.

The instrument was divided into three major sections:

Section 1: Barriers to enrollment.

Section 2: Barriers to school success.

Section 3: Demographic data with queries of the sample used to provide biographical information about participants.

The data revealed that the vast majority of respondents in this study were female. Tutors and homeless liaisons were experienced educators with administrative experience, with nearly 70% having served 10 or more years. On the other hand, over 70% had less than 10 years of experience actually working with homeless children. The levels of education attained by the respondents included 44% with a bachelor's degree, 44% with a master's degree, 8% with a specialist degree, and 2% with a doctoral degree.

Respondents in this study cited the lack of transportation, the lack of school records, and state guardianship as the most significant barriers to school enrollment. Respondents cited local enrollment policies and practices, the lack of birth certificates, and the lack of immunization as "slight" barriers to school enrollment of homeless students.

The most significant barriers to school success by respondents were the lack of parental involvement, frequent absenteeism, and frequent mobility. Respondents, in general, did not perceive lack of staff awareness and sensitivity training, lack of school supplies, and poor health as significant barriers in the school success of homeless students.

Limitations

The study revealed several major limitations that arose during the research and investigation. For future study on homeless children and youth, researchers should consider these limitations.

The primary limitation of this study was that survey participants were only from Mississippi school districts and were confined to a specific population of those districts receiving a McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. The selection of this restricted

population does not take into account education personnel throughout the entire state who could have had different experiences and background with working with homeless students based on the region in which they lived. This limitation could be further problematic if one takes into account the difficulties with classroom instruction of homeless students across the United States. Generalizability beyond the sampled population, therefore, might be limited.

Additionally, it would be difficult in a study of this nature to determine whether respondents answered the survey themselves or how seriously they discerned the meaning of the questions. An additional limitation is noted in that, of the 230 individuals surveyed, 15 tutors and liaisons did not respond, or returned incomplete surveys.

Discussion

This research study sought to contribute to the knowledge in the field of inquiry by providing more information regarding the homeless student population. Each research question is restated. Results reported are discussed within the context of the literature review presented previously.

Question 1 was stated as follows: What are the barriers that impede access to schools by homeless children and youth? Based on the responses from the tutors and homeless liaisons, there was a range in perceived barriers to enrollment. Transportation, lack of school records, and concerns over meeting residency requirements were ranked highest among the perceived barriers. Lack of transportation to and from school was a barrier cited frequently in the literature. Frequent moves from location to location often cause children to have noncontinuous enrollment patterns for school attendance. Consistently, the literature lists an important concern, the absence of formal procedures

for transporting homeless children to and from school. The National Coalition for the Homeless (1998b) reported that transportation is the number one barrier to education that is faced by children who are homeless. Participants in the study provided responses that were consistent with prior research: only 38% of respondents did not perceive lack of transportation to be a barrier to enrollment. The remaining range of responses ranged from perceptions of transportation as a slight to major barrier.

Also addressed in the review of literature was the delay in the transfer of school records and the related impact on children's ability to attend school. This issue ranked second among respondents as a barrier to enrollment for homeless students.

Legal guardianship requirements pose difficulties for unaccompanied homeless youth, according to the literature. According to Stronge and Tenhouse (1990), for children with no permanent address, enrollment can be delayed or refused until residency issues are resolved. Most states require that the child be enrolled in school by a parent or legal guardian. Children who are homeless may be living with a relative or friend who is unable to register the child because they lack guardianship papers (Stronge & Tenhouse, 1990). While study respondents did not discard this as an important consideration, 80 (37%) did not perceive lack of school records as a barrier, while 75 (35%) indicated that it was a barrier.

The results of the study revealed respondents' beliefs that lack of immunization was not a significant barrier. Previous research, on the other hand, addressed immunization as a consistent barrier to enrollment due to the temporary setting in which the homeless student lives. The literature also addresses the problems confronted by homeless children when enrolling in school. Students may live on the streets, in

temporary settings such as motels, or in cars. The study respondents (87, or 41%) did not perceive the lack of a birth certificate to be a barrier, while 62 (29%) believed this to be a "slight" barrier.

It is interesting to note that study respondents did appear to not perceive local enrollment policies and practices as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children. This issue ranked last among perceived barriers. Homeless families often find it difficult to enroll their children in public schools. Not being able to show a permanent address was cited in the literature as an issue that stood in the way of receiving a public education. In addition, some states require that the child be enrolled in the district where the parent lives, even if the child is living elsewhere (National Law Center on Homeless and Poverty, 1991). Given the prevalence of these concerns in the literature, it is of concern that study participants appeared to absolve their districts' policies of blame related to their enrollment policies and practices. Those barriers to school success most frequently cited were problems within the purview of the family and students. Those issues over which the schools had greatest control were rated as minor impediments to school success.

The conclusions concerning enrollment policies and practices were modified somewhat by the ancillary findings from the post hoc analysis. The more experience and years of teaching/administrative experience the respondents had, the more they appeared to believe that local enrollment policies and practices were barriers to enrollment. In other words, it appears that the more familiar a staff member is with these practices, the more he or she begins to perceive flaws in them. This supports Duffield's (2001) assertion that staff training, professional development, community meetings, and other awareness-

raising activities are among the most important steps a school can take to begin to address barriers and identify and serve homeless students.

Question 2 was stated as follows: What are the barriers that impede school success by homeless children and youth? There was significant concurrence among responses of the study respondents and the literature regarding lack of parental involvement. This was the barrier ranked highest by study participants. Among respondents, 110 (51%) perceived lack of parental involvement to be a major barrier to school success, while 51 (24%) believed it to be a barrier. The literature asserts that parental involvement is essential to the educational success of students who are homeless. A supportive climate for homeless children cannot be adequately provided without help from parents (Gonzalez, 1992). Numerous studies suggest that the degree of positive interaction between parent and school has a direct impact on the academic performance of homeless students. However, homeless parents may be so consumed with the task of daily survival that they lack the stamina to seek opportunities beyond meeting basic needs. As a result, many homeless parents do not place an appropriate emphasis on the education of their children. Parenting skills can be addressed through training efforts which support and encourage positive interaction with the child and school staff. An individual staff person should conduct home or shelter visits to instruct parents on school progress and to become the bridge between the school, teacher, and parent.

Absenteeism was the second-ranked barrier to school success. Ninety respondents (43%) of respondents perceived frequent absenteeism as a major barrier, while 61 (28%) thought it was a "slight" barrier. As indicated by the research literature, homeless children are twice as likely as their housed peers to repeat a grade due to frequent absenteeism.

Among study respondents, 80 (37%) perceived frequent mobility to be a major barrier to school success and 65 (30%) believed it was a barrier. This barrier to school success ranked third among barriers rated by participants and is consistent with the literature that indicates that high mobility creates significant obstacles to learning. Homeless families move frequently in search of safe and affordable housing or employment. Homeless children are forced to change schools because shelters or other temporary accommodations are not located in their school districts. As a result, frequent absences and school changes place homeless children at a higher risk of educational failure.

A significant contrast existed between the literature and study findings relative to the issue of staff awareness and sensitivity. Of the respondents, 76 (35%) did not perceive lack of staff awareness and sensitivity to be a barrier, and 60 (28%) considered it a slight barrier. In contrast, the review of literature cites as a major challenge the ongoing, continuous lack of awareness of homelessness and of students' educational rights among school personnel. The literature further indicated that prevalent stereotypes about homelessness often prevent educators from realizing that children in their classrooms are experiencing homelessness. This contrast between study respondents and the literature seems to indicate an apparent reluctance by school staff to shoulder some responsibility for the lack of school success of homeless students. Thus, staff members may be reluctant to follow the prescriptions of Duffield (2001) regarding staff training, professional development, community meetings with homeless service providers, and other awareness-raising activities that are among the most important steps a school can take to begin to identify and serve homeless students.

The post hoc analysis examined relationships among the demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of barriers to school success. The age of the respondents was moderately correlated with perceptions that the lack of school records is a barrier to school success. The older teachers tended to believe more than did younger teachers that this was a barrier. Age among tutors also was inversely correlated to a modest degree with the belief that frequent absenteeism was a barrier. The younger tutors were moderately more likely to perceive that frequent absenteeism was a barrier.

Implications for Policy and Practice

A number of implications can be drawn from this study. All children have the right to receive a free public education as established by law. However, literature by authors such as Stronge (1992) and Duffield (2001) suggests that children from families experiencing homelessness face intimidating barriers. There can be a number of reasons why homeless families rarely have or can afford all of the required documents for school enrollment. This burden on these families can be eased by local school systems accepting motel receipts, an official enrollment affidavit as proof of residency, or a letter from a shelter. It is very common that birth certificates are unavailable. Birth dates can be verified through a passport document, bible inscription, church baptismal record, and even a social service form. Students who are referred to health clinics can bring immunization records up-to-date, and there can be circumstances where a social worker can sign an affidavit as a proxy for the guardianship requirement.

With federal and state laws that require school attendance, homelessness often keeps children and youth from coming to school regularly. The lack of adequate food and clothing, movement to and from living accommodations, inadequate transportation, and

the lack of close friends at school can all make regular attendance difficult. The most effective way to ensure attendance on a regular basis is to reach out to homeless families and, most important, follow up when students are absent. The school attendance officer and/or home liaison should conduct an on-site home or shelter visit to investigate absenteeism and its causes.

Transportation remains the most prominent enrollment barrier for homeless children and youth, although substantial progress has been made in this area. In 1994, 30 state coordinators identified transportation as a barrier, compared to 18 in 1998. Between 1994 and 1998, 10 states either created state laws, made efforts to enforce state laws, or relaxed enforcement of state laws to eliminate this barrier. In addition, recognizing the magnitude of the transportation problem, almost half of states provided additional funds to support districts' transportation efforts on behalf of homeless students.

Three factors combine to make school transportation a difficult problem for states to resolve through laws and regulations. First, school transportation is primarily a local issue. Second, the provision of transportation for homeless children and youth often requires the infusion of significant and new resources, and these can be hard to locate. Finally, even if policies and resources can be located to provide transportation, the other survival needs of homeless families often make the logistics of transportation difficult. That is, when a family moves to find food or shelter, the proximity of the shelter site to educational transportation services are usually not the family's primary concern. The transportation of homeless students to their schools of origin is an ongoing challenge for districts, due to high costs, scheduling problems complicated by students' mobility, and questions about district responsibility for transporting students (USDE, 2002). Although

the McKinney-Vento Act permits students in homeless situations to remain in their schools of origin despite their residential instability, lack of transportation commonly prevents them from continuing in their schools of origin. Therefore, local education agencies are now required to provide transportation to the school of origin. The resulting educational stability will enhance students' academic and social growth, while permitting schools to benefit form the increased test scores and achievement shown to result from student continuity (McKinney-Vento, 2001 - LAW into Practice).

School and district policymakers and personnel will need to adopt additional strategies if adequate services and resources are to be made available to homeless students. Examples of these strategies are outlined below:

1.   Coordinate with local housing authorities and community-based organizations to house students near their schools of origin.

2.   Re-route school buses (including special education, magnet school, and other buses) to better assure adequate transportation for homeless students.

3.   Ensure that school buses travel to shelters, transitional living projects, and motels where homeless students reside.

4.   Provide sensitivity training to bus drivers and arrange bus stops to keep students' living situations confidential.

5.   Designate a district-level point of contact to arrange and coordinate transportation.

6.   Provide passes for public transportation, including passes for caregivers when necessary.

7.   Take advantage of transportation systems used by public assistance agencies.

Although the number of state coordinators reporting that guardianship requirements pose a problem for homeless children and youth remained almost constant between 1994 and 1998, almost one-quarter of respondents did report that their states took steps to eliminate this barrier. In 1998, 13 state coordinators, compared to 15 in 1995, reported that state requirements for legal guardianship still pose a barrier to the enrollment of homeless children and youth.

Schools and other agencies remain apprehensive about eliminating guardianship requirements because of liability questions and because of fears that non-homeless students would abuse the policies to enroll in schools with popular academic or extracurricular activities.

Since 1994, states have made the most progress in eliminating barriers to enrollment to school for homeless children and youth in the area of immunizations. Some coordinators explained that immunization requirements were difficult to eliminate because state policies follow the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and seek to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. In 1998, one-quarter of state coordinators reported that their states made changes to laws or regulations to eliminate immunization requirements as barriers to the enrollment of homeless children and youth in school. Since 1994, 12 states either created a system to provide immunizations to homeless students, created new state regulations, or changed existing laws or regulations. In addition, 10 coordinators reported state efforts to either enforce or relax existing laws in this area. Successful strategies for minimizing this barrier include

providing immunizations on school sites, coordinating with a local health agency, or verifying immunization records by telephone.

Parental involvement and support are essential if education is to become and remain a priority for homeless children. Although parents of homeless students often recognize the importance of education for long-term success, they are often too preoccupied with securing basic needs to effectively advocate for their children's educational needs. Congress established the McKinney Act's Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program in 1987 in response to reports that over 50% of homeless children were not attending school regularly. Table 10 indicates that the level of importance for frequent absenteeism had a mean of 3.09 and a standard deviation of .996. At least 20% of homeless children do not attend school. Within a year, 41% of homeless children will attend two different schools. Twenty-eight percent of homeless children will attend three or more different schools. Mobility and absenteeism are often associated with poor school performance (Alexander, 1996). By keeping students in regular attendance, schools can improve the students' chances of success.

The barrier to success for homeless children and youth cited by the majority of state coordinators was frequent mobility from school to school. A "*highly mobile*" student is defined as one who moves six or more times in the course of his or her K-12 career. Given this definition, it becomes immediately evident that many children fall into this category. They include migrant workers, families experiencing domestic violence or homelessness, and other unstable work/home situations related to high poverty. For several groups, poverty may not be a factor, but mobility remains a potential challenge.

These groups include: "*third culture kids*," children in military families, children of corporate executives and diplomats, and children of immigrants.

According to the 1999 U.S. Census Report, 15% to 18% of school-age children changed residences from the previous year. Also, nearly 12 million children changed their places of residence in 1999-2000.

According to a 1994 U.S. General Accounting Office report analyzing national data on third graders, one-half million children attended more than three schools between first and third grade. It also found that 30% of children in low-income families (annual incomes below $10,000) changed schools versus 8% of children from families with annual incomes above $50,000. In fact, poor families move 50% to 100% more often than non-poor families. The reports also stated that inner-city students are more likely to change schools frequently, with approximately 25% of third graders having attended three or more schools, while approximately one-seventh of suburban and rural third graders had mobility rates this high. In urban schools at large, the turnover rate for students range between 40% and 80% each year.

With each change in schools, a student is set back academically by an average of 4 to 6 months (NCHE). In addition to being unprepared for school due to lack of supplies, and no time or place to do homework, there also may be changes in curriculum from school to school (Noll & Watkins, 2003).

For students in homeless situations, the incidence of illness is higher, often more serious, and occurring more often than among their housed peers. Students may have difficulty recovering from illnesses due to a lack of transportation to the doctor, privacy to recuperate, necessary resources to prepare a special diet, the ability to afford

prescriptions, and consistent immunizations to prevent illnesses. The ability to acquire regular injections is challenging when parents do not have the money for routine care or the ability to make trips to a doctor on a weekly or monthly basis.

Implications for Further Research

The research has shown the importance of removing barriers to school enrollment and school success. It was found that the lack of transportation is a major barrier to school enrollment. Further study is recommended to determine how the lack of transportation prevents school attendance by homeless children living at a temporary address that is outside existing school bus routes. This study found the lack of school records was a slight barrier to enrollment. Further research should track the effects of enrollment delays in the school-to-school transfer of records. Frequent changes in school more than likely occur as families move from place to place as they seek shelter. This frequent movement can pose difficulty in maintaining personal documents. It also revealed that state guardianship/residency requirements was a slight barrier to enrollment. Further study is recommended on how placement of temporary living conditions with friends and relations without seeking a court ordered legal guardianship delays enrollment. Children experiencing homelessness may be denied enrollment in school or continue attendance in the school attended before becoming homeless if they move to a facility outside their original district.

This study indicated the lack of parental involvement as a major barrier to school success. Parents are considered a child's nurturer, their first teacher, and their child's advocate. Additional study is recommended on the factors which prevent parents of homeless students from fully assuming their roles for their child's education. The

dynamics of family instability and low skill levels can contribute to the parent's ability to help their children succeed. Further indications from this study revealed that frequent absenteeism and frequent mobility were also major barriers to school success. Eliminating student mobility is difficult; there is no magic bullet, though reduction of mobility is feasible and possible. Further research should focus on family interventions that increase the support to students of homeless families that move on a regular basis.

This researcher suggests that more research is needed to determine the effects of students' mobility on academic achievement. Temple and Reynolds (1999) suggest that few studies examining the effects of frequency of mobility and school stability on achievements are available. Similarly, the Kids Mobility Project points to two possible areas for future research: (a) the development and testing of targeted intervention efforts to help explain the interrelationship of variables shown to impact student outcomes, and (b) research to identify and quantify relationships between inadequate housing and school achievement and/or other factors that impact housing, such as family stability and employment (Family Housing Fund, 2003).

Furthermore, this study revealed that respondents did not see staff awareness and sensitivity training as a barrier to school success. As the number of homeless students increases in classrooms, homeless students will continue to experience social difficulties and academic weaknesses. Homeless children have the same educational issues and needs as non-homeless students. The educational system provides some daily stability in the lives of homeless families and serves as an intervention into the brokenness of these families' lives. Increasing pressure to handle problems associated with the homeless student population is more demanding on school staff, tutors, liaisons, and administrators.

Acknowledgment of the problems is vital, but it is essential for the school staff, tutors, liaisons, and administrators to be provided training and resources to help work with this population. Further research is recommended to determine whether the coping skills of staff and attitude change towards homeless families after going through intensive training actually have demonstrable effects. This seems particularly important in light of the degree to which respondents asserted that the greatest barriers to student success are those over which parents/families, not schools, have greatest control.

This research was limited to 23 school districts in Mississippi that were awarded a McKinney-Vento subgrant. Further extensive data should be collected from school districts across the state that did not receive grant awards. This would allow documentation of which school district staff members are aware of enrollment barriers and barriers that affect school success. Further expansion of the study to a national sample would be of value. Likewise, expanding the study to address the issues of homelessness that are unique to immigrant families is important in light of rapid expansion in enrollment by the children of such families.

Summary

Homelessness is a cycle which needs to be broken. For whatever the reason, the number of homeless families is increasing. Tragically, the children of these families are deeply affected. It is the homeless child who encounters specific barriers and problems to accessing an education. One can easily assume that parents prioritize basic daily needs over an education. However, many homeless children perceive the school setting as a safe place where basic needs can be met. Children who are experiencing homelessness are entitled to receive an education no matter what their living condition may be. For

educational opportunities to be accessible, it is important to review and examine federal,

state, and local practices and policies that act as barriers to enrollment and school success.

The findings of this study of the barriers that impede enrollment and school

success represent a very small targeted number of selected school districts from across the

state of Mississippi that received grant funding for after-school instruction. Although

these selected districts represent a limited percentage of individuals in public education

who serve homeless children, their perspectives on barriers to enrollment and school

success are instructive. There is much more to be done with respect to meeting the unique

educational needs of homeless children. If this study serves to enhance the degree to

which these needs are addressed, then the researcher's time and energies will have been

well spent.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

Gloria E. White Adams
227 Melbourne, Rd.
Jackson, Mississippi 39206
(601) 366-4303
gadams@mde.k12.ms.us

[Date]

[Title] [First] [Last Name]
[School District]
[Street Address]
[City], Mississippi [Zip Code]

Dear [Title] [Last Name]:

I am currently a student in the Doctor of Philosophy program in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern Mississippi, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi under the direction of Dr. Johnny Purvis. For my doctoral dissertation research, I have chosen to explore the barriers to educating students in homeless situations in Mississippi.

[School District] currently receives McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant funds, which work to ensure that students in homeless situations receive the same education and opportunity for school success as all other students.

In order to continue this study, I am soliciting permission to survey the homeless liaison, teachers/tutors of homeless students, and administrators in the schools where the after-school tutoring programs are held. Upon receipt of this permission, I will send questionnaires to the homeless liaison that will distribute the instrument. Please return the permission letter in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

I know that your time is valuable, and I appreciate your willingness to assist in this study. Please feel free to contact me at the address, telephone number, and email address above if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Gloria E. White Adams

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

The University of
Southern Mississippi

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 23101305
PROJECT TITLE: Barriers to Educating Homeless Children and Youth
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 05/12/03 to 05/23/04
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Gloria E. White Adams
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership and Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/30/03 to 10/29/04

Lawrence A. Hosman
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

10-30-03
Date

APPENDIX C

BARRIERS TO EDUCATING HOMELESS STUDENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information regarding the barriers to education and school success of homeless students in Mississippi. Please indicate the extent to which you perceive the following items to be barriers homeless children and youth face in accessing education. Circle the appropriate number to indicate your response to each item. Your response will remain confidential.

1 = not a barrier   **2** = a slight barrier for a few students   **3** = a barrier for several students
4 = a major barrier for most students   **5** = do not know

BARRIERS TO ENROLLMENT

1.	Lack of transportation to or from temporary residence	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Lack of immunization and medical records	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Lack of school records	1	2	3	4	5
4.	State guardianship/residency requirements	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Lack of birth certificates	1	2	3	4	5
6.	School attendance policies	1	2	3	4	5

BARRIERS TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

7.	Frequent mobility	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Frequent absenteeism	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Lack of staff awareness and sensitivity training	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Inability to complete school assignments	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Lack of parental involvement	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Lack of psychological services	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Poor health and inadequate medical care	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Physical needs—food, clothing, health care, etc.	1	2	3	4	5

DEMOGRAPHICS

15. Your age range   21-30 yrs   31-40 yrs   41-50 yrs   51-over years

16. Gender   _____

17. Years of teaching/administration experience   _____

18. Years working with homeless students   _____

19. Grade level assignment   _____

20. Education level/degree   _____

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