Introduction

Researchers interested in understanding the needs and strengths of young people experiencing homelessness typically rely, out of necessity, on rather small localized samples, limiting their ability to understand the full range of experiences of young people nationally. Further very little is understood about the actual lives and experiences of these young people. To fully address youth homelessness, a comprehensive and up to date understanding of the behaviors, demographics, experiences, and sources of resiliency is necessary. To address this need, the Homeless Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (HYRRS) was developed. The HYRRS is an assessment tool that provides in depth detail on experiences of young people that will provide insight into differences and similarities across cities and communities.

The current report reflects the current landscape of youth homelessness San Jose, CA.

A sample of 208 unique homeless or unstably housed youth (aged 18-25) were recruited in the winter of 2017 from service agencies in San Jose, CA. All youth accessing services during the data collection period were asked to participate and went through the informed consent process with a research assistant with the caveats that child abuse and suicidal and homicidal intentions would be reported.

For the San Jose data collection site, a research team based in Los Angeles from the University of Southern California was able to contract with the local service agency to collect an initial sample and train local staff to administer the remaining surveys. The study consisted of two parts: a self-administered main survey and a self-administered social network survey (SNS). Research assistants and staff were available at all times while the young person was completing the survey to answer any questions as they came up or resolve any technical issues. However, the survey was designed to be fully self-administered if necessary. The main survey took an average of 57.4 minutes to complete while the SNS took an average of 18.4 minutes to complete. The Institutional Review Board of Southern California approved all procedures and surveys. Similar procedures were completed in Phoenix, Denver, Houston, St. Louis, New York and Los Angeles.
Results

How Would You Describe Yourself?

Self-Identity

- Self-Homeless: 77.72%
- Have a “Street Family”: 20.96%
- Traveler: 31.19%

Race

- White/Caucasian: 41.03%
- Black/African American: 29.8%
- Latino: 16.84%
- American Indian: 2.48%
- Asian or Pacific Islander: 2.48%
- Multi/Mixed Race: 3.84%
- Other: 1.98%

Gender Identity

- Male: 57.92%
- Female: 37.82%
- Trans Male: 1.49%
- Trans Female: 0.99%
- Genderqueer: 0.99%
- Additional Gender (Other): 0.99%

Sexual Orientation

- Straight (That is not gay): 77.23%
- Gay or Lesbian: 8.42%
- Bisexual: 10.89%
- I don't know/Questioning: 0.5%
- Something else: 2.48%

Average Number of Moves: 5

Average Age: 21

Number of those from CA: 29.7%

Has Children: 25.49%

Children Living With Them: 10.89%
Reasons for Homelessness

- Kicked out of Family Home: 45%
- Kicked out of Relatives Home: 10.6%
- Kicked out of Group Home: 5.5%
- Kicked out of Foster: 3.6%
- Ran Away from Family Home: 8.6%
- Ran Away from Relatives Home: 4%
- Ran Away from Group Home: 3.6%
- Ran Away from Foster Family Home: 5%
- Had No Place to Stay When I Moved Here: 7%
- Had No Place to Go After Leaving Prison: 9%
- Aged Out of Juvenile Justice: 2.5%
- Aged Out of Foster Care: 5.5%
- Left a Situation of DV: 6.6%
- Left Gang or Gang Neighborhood: 1%
- Could Not Pay Rent: 11.6%
- Other: 6.5%

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

- Ever in Foster care: 34.65%
- Average number of placements: 6 (Range 1 - 20)

Abuse and Neglect

- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Physical Neglect
- Emotional Neglect
- Caregiver in prison
- Caregiver experienced domestic violence
- Caregiver with mental illness
- Loss of caregiver (divorce or abandonment)
- Caregiver used drugs

Household Dysfunction

School and Work

- Currently in School: 82.45%
- HS/GED+: 37.62%
- Currently Working: 36.14%
- Full-Time Work: 31.16%
- Part-Time Work: 22.28%
- Temporary Work: 18.85%
- Chronic Homelessness: 40.1%
- Identify A Need For Housing: 72.68%
With any large-scale research project, comes challenges and opportunities to grow. One of the earliest challenges, was designing the HYRRS survey instrument itself. From the beginning, investigators aimed to create a comprehensive instrument but also prioritized limiting the survey length. Limiting survey length was important for participant buy-in, understanding that young people have a variety of features that may make completing a computer-based survey difficult including lack of sleep, vision issues, distrust of research. Reducing survey burden was a priority, however, as a result some items were not included such as extended mental health scales and military status. Additionally, there were differences in time and efforts for data collection because each participating city and corresponding service environment varied. In San Jose, the population of young persons accessing services frequently had never had an opportunity to participate in research services until this point. This most likely led to some differences in reporting (i.e. possibly under reporting) as a result of distrust and skepticism of researchers. However, it is imperative to continue future collaborations with Community Based Research Partners to collect representative, unbiased data which can be used to include “youth voice” in future policy and programming decisions. It should be noted that the sample included was a convenience sample. Although the investigators believe that the samples accurately reflect the larger population of homeless youth in each city based on research that states that a large proportion of homeless youth populations access drop-in centers, it is possible that certain sub populations may be underrepresented in the sample. Future directions with the HYRRS protocol would be to refine sampling methodology to look more closely like a random sampling methodology.

Going forward HYRRS seeks to expand the number of cities and service environments included and expanding the HYRRS collective. Efforts will be made to continue to refine the HYRRS instrument. Another future priority will be to reduce the community feedback loop and creating efficient pathways for reporting research results back to service providers and other forms of dissemination as well as incorporating discussion into the next phase of the HYRRS project.

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