

Homeless in Minnesota: A closer look

Youth and young adults on their own

Wilder Research

This survey of homeless youth and young adults reveals some very harsh life experiences. Seven out of 10 of these young people spent time as children in a foster home, group home, or other residential facility. Nearly half have been abused — either physically or sexually. Four in 10 have serious mental health problems. They may have become “visible” to the community because they are homeless, but many will need more than housing to get their lives on a better track.



The numbers

Although this study is designed to understand the circumstances of homeless youth and young adults, not to provide a definitive count of how many experience homelessness, it is also important to arrive at the best possible estimates of the extent of homelessness among young people in Minnesota.

Youth homeless on any given night: 500 to 600 homeless youth age 8 to 17 were on their own, in addition to the nearly 3,000 children who experienced homelessness in the company of their parents in Minnesota on a single night in October 2003.

Youth homeless over the course of a year: Wilder Research estimates that between 12,600 and 22,500 Minnesota youth under 18 experienced at least one episode of homelessness on their own in 2003.

Young adults homeless on any given night: Between 500 and 1,200 young adults age 18 to 20 were homeless on a single night in October 2003.

Young adults homeless over the course of a year: Wilder Research estimates that 3,720 to 6,000 young adults age 18 to 20 experienced homelessness during 2003.

About Minnesota's homeless youth

Homelessness is skewed toward the young

A striking 46 percent of all persons staying in homeless shelters or temporary housing on October 23, 2003, were under age 21. This includes 2,724 children under 18 who were with their parents, 141 youth under 18 who were on their own, and 325 young adults age 18 to 20.

Looking at youth on their own (not with parents), the average age is 16. The youngest in 2003 was 8 years old. More than 6 out of 10 (64%) homeless youth are girls. For the young adults, 65 percent are female, while in the overall homeless adult population 48 percent are female.

Youth of color

About two-thirds of homeless youth on their own (65%) are Black, American Indian, Asian, or multiracial. Among homeless young adults, 60 percent are people of color. The number of homeless young people of color is disproportionately high compared to their prevalence in the general population of Minnesota youth, of which only 15 percent are people of color.

Race	Homeless youth under 18	Homeless young adults	All Minnesota youth age 8-17 (Census 2000)
White	35%	40%	85%
Black	31%	35%	5%
American Indian	22%	10%	2%
Asian	1%	2%	4%
Multiracial or other	11%	12%	4%
Hispanic (any race)	9%	9%	3%

Education

A growing percentage of homeless youth are enrolled in school, rising from 52 percent in 1994, to 73 percent in 1997 and 2000, to 84 percent in 2003. One-third of homeless

youth report receiving special education services (33%). Nine youth (7%) have graduated or received a GED.

Nearly two-thirds of homeless youth surveyed attended school the day of the survey (64% of those who had not yet graduated or received their GED). These rates are lower than the rates for children who are with their homeless parents (88% of parents surveyed said that all of their children attended school that day). The need to deal with other problems is the main reason youth report for not being in school.

Of those who had attended school during the previous school year (2002-2003):

- 47 percent stayed in the same school all year
- 27 percent attended two schools
- 17 percent attended three schools
- 9 percent attended 4 or more schools

Among homeless young adults in 2003, 25 percent were currently enrolled in an educational program, down from 37 percent in 2000. Of those who were enrolled, 59 percent attended on the day of the survey.

Employment and income

Sixteen percent of homeless youth received income from steady employment during the month prior to the survey. This is down from 25 percent in the 2000 survey. The other primary source of income was money received from parents, other relatives, or friends.

On the day of the survey, 19 percent of homeless youth were employed (compared to 27% in 2000). More than half of the youth who were employed (56%) were working 20 hours or more per week.

For homeless young adults, 39 percent had a job (the same percentage as in 2000). Of these, 78 percent were working 20 hours or more per week and 22 percent had a full-time job. Thirty-four percent had income from steady employment — up slightly from 26 percent in 2000.

Tough circumstances early in life

History of abuse

Nearly one out of two homeless youth has been physically or sexually mistreated (46%); nearly 4 out of 10 have been physically abused (38%), and nearly 3 out of 10 have been sexually abused (28% overall; 31% of girls and 22% of boys).

History of placements

Seven out of 10 homeless youth (71%) have experienced an out-of-home placement. The 2003 survey shows a marked increase in the proportion of homeless youth who have been in foster care. The percentage remained relatively consistent between 1991 and 2000 (36% to 41%), but increased to 53 percent in 2003. Twenty percent of youth have lived in a facility for persons with emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems. Twenty-nine percent have lived in a group home. One-third of homeless youth (34%) have spent more than a week in a juvenile corrections facility.

One-third of homeless youth have run away from placement at some time in their lives.

Mental health, substance use, and chemical dependency

Four out of 10 homeless youth (42%) report some type of significant mental health problem. Twenty-three percent of homeless youth and 29 percent of homeless young adults report needing to see a health professional about a mental health problem. One-third of homeless youth (34%) have considered suicide; 23 percent have attempted suicide.

Seventeen percent of homeless youth and 25 percent of young adults report needing to see a doctor about a physical health problem. Over one-third of homeless youth (36%) and 29 percent of young adults report at least one chronic health condition (asthma, other lung problems, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, diabetes, hepatitis, or HIV/AIDS).

Sixteen percent of the 15- to 17-year-olds and 19 percent of the 18- to 20-year-olds consider themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent (none under age 15 consider themselves so). Twenty-eight percent of youth and 31 percent of young adults used either alcohol or other drugs during the week prior to the survey.

Compared to other Minnesota youth

Overall, homeless youth report more difficult life experiences than other Minnesota youth. Compared to youth in the general population, homeless youth are:

- Five times more likely to have been treated for alcohol or drug problems, although homeless youth are half as likely to report current use of alcohol.
- Three times more likely to use cigarettes or other tobacco.
- More than three times more likely to have been hit by a date or intimate partner.
- Three times more likely to have been physically abused.
- For boys seven times more likely to have been sexually abused; for girls three times more likely.
- For girls, about 20 times more likely to have been pregnant; for boys, 10 times more likely to have had a sexual relationship that resulted in a pregnancy.

Pregnancy and parenting

One in six homeless youth have a child of their own. This is up significantly from 2000 (16% in 2003, compared to 8% in 2000). Twenty-nine percent of young adults age 18 to 20 have children. Most of these young parents had their children with them on the day of the survey.

Reasons for not returning home

Homeless youth most often report these things prevent them from living with their parents:

- Conflict or fight with family (63%)
- Youth prefer to make their own decisions (51%)
- At least one adult in the home will not tolerate the youth's presence (39%)
- Alcohol or drug use by parent (24%)
- Danger of emotional abuse (22%)
- Adults in the household do not attend to the youth's basic needs (19%)
- Criminal or drug activity by someone else in the household (19%)
- Youth's substance use or delinquent activity (15%)
- Family does not have housing (15%)
- Not enough space for everyone in the household to live (15%)

- Danger of physical abuse (11%) or sexual abuse (5%)
- Parents will not accept youth's sexual orientation (7%).

On average, homeless youth left home for the first time around age 14. The main reasons cited for leaving home include: conflict with family (60%), kicked out or told to leave (43%), and wanted to be on their own (43%).

Over half of homeless youth (55%) indicate that if they wanted to return home, they could do so. However, less than half (46%) believe they will live with their families again.

History of homelessness

In 2003, over one-third of homeless youth (38%) had been homeless before. Twenty-three percent had slept outside at least one night in the past month. Over one-third of homeless youth (38%) had a relative who also did not have housing. One out of eight homeless youth had stayed in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options.

Most homeless youth (92%) lived in Minnesota in their last regular or permanent housing, primarily with parents (56%).

Services rated

"most helpful"

Out of all the services used by homeless youth, those considered most helpful were food stamps (26%), transportation assistance (22%), other social services (19%), medical benefits (18%), and outreach services (18%).



Foster care and homelessness

National studies have found that a history of foster care is correlated with becoming homeless at an earlier age and remaining homeless for a longer period of time. Some youth living in residential or institutional placements become homeless when they leave. Many researchers and advocates have voiced concern about youth "aging out" of the foster care system. One study reported that more than one in five youth who arrived at emergency shelters came directly from foster care, and that more than one in four had been in foster care in the previous year. National research by the Casey Family Foundation found that 42 percent of Casey's foster care alumni (adults who had been in foster care as children) had been homeless at some point. Twenty-two percent were homeless for at least one night within a year after being officially discharged from foster care. The average age for first-time homelessness of foster care alumni was 18.

In our study of Minnesota's homeless youth, we found that one-fourth of those who left foster care or a correctional facility within the past year had no stable housing afterward. They had no place to go.

Some advocates feel that the over-representation of former foster care youth among homeless youth reveals a lack of transition services from childhood to adulthood for this population. Others feel that family issues that may have led to out-of-home placement may also contribute to youth homelessness. In addition, mental health and behavior problems may contribute to a youth's inability to get or keep housing. The data show us that all of these factors play a role in youth homelessness and that youth in out-of-home placement share many of the same characteristics associated with a difficult start in life.

History of placements among homeless youth

Have you ever lived in:	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
Foster care	38%	36%	38%	41%	53%
Group home	22%	33%	29%	27%	29%
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	15%	10%	19%	13%	13%
Detention center or correctional facility	31%	34%	36%	46%	35%
Any institution	Not available	61%	70%	67%	71%

One story

"Daniel" is a 17-year-old American Indian youth who spent his early years in California, but moved to Minnesota when he was 12. Currently, he is couch-hopping — moving around from friend to friend to have a place to sleep. Daniel has been without a regular place to live for four months. It has been more than a year since he last had contact with his family. He says that he was physically mistreated and his parents neglected to provide for his basic needs at times. Daniel has lived in a lot of different places away from his family including a foster home, a group home, and a halfway house. He has lived in an emergency shelter and a battered women's shelter with his family, and his parents are currently homeless. In fact, Daniel and his family have experienced homelessness several times. Within the past year, Daniel left a group home, but he did not have a place to live when he left it. Daniel has recently earned his GED, and has taken some classes to learn the construction trade. In the last month, Daniel has used drop-in centers and job training services. Daniel is currently working, but he does not have a steady job. Daniel does not think he will be with his family again. He does not think he can return home — not only because of substance abuse by his parents and criminal activity in the household, but also because of his own behavior.

Outside the Twin Cities area

About half of the youth under 18 and one-third of young adults age 18 to 20 were interviewed outside of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. Most homeless youth in greater Minnesota are White (55%), American Indian (31%), or Hispanic (10%). Homeless youth in the Twin Cities area are mostly African American (56%), White (16%), American Indian (13%), Hispanic (11%), or multi-racial (10%).

Twin Cities area homeless youth are more likely than those in greater Minnesota:

- To have been physically abused (43% vs. 34%)
- To be employed (24% vs. 14%)
- To report that they need to see a dentist about tooth or gum problems (47% vs. 31%)

Metro boys are more likely to have been abused or neglected (58% vs. 37%), while greater Minnesota girls

are more likely to have been abused or neglected (59% vs. 48%).

In contrast, greater Minnesota homeless youth are more likely:

- To have been homeless less than one month (51% vs. 29%)
- To report that money from parents was their main source of income in October (50% vs. 8%)
- To report prior stays in foster homes, group homes, or other residential facilities (73% vs. 61%) as well as correctional facilities (47% vs. 22%)
- To feel that they now need to see a professional about a mental health problem (30% vs. 17%)
- To consider themselves chemically dependent (18% vs. 5%)
- To report that if they wanted to return home, their parent or guardian would allow them to do so (80% vs. 48%)



Risk factors associated with homelessness

- History of abuse/neglect
- Chemical dependency
- Sexual orientation different from parents
- Delinquency
- History of out-of-home placement
- Few family resources
- Parental substance abuse
- Poor parent/child relationships
- Substandard housing

About the research

On October 23, 2003, trained volunteers conducted interviews throughout Minnesota with 129 homeless youth (age 8 to 17) who were not with their parents and with 302 homeless young adults (age 18 to 20). These interviews were conducted in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs as well as drop-in centers, hot meal sites, and street locations. The study was based on similar surveys of homeless youth and adults conducted in Minnesota in 1991, 1994, 1997, and 2000. The purpose of the study is to provide a current description of the characteristics and needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults under 21 years of age.

School counselors and social workers often know of homeless youth in their schools, but seldom know where they spend the night and how frequently they move around. Homeless youth are less likely than adults to stay in shelters, more often staying temporarily with friends or in places not intended for habitation. Compared to homeless adults and families, homeless youth have fewer shelters available and fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs.

For these reasons, it is more difficult when surveying homeless youth to be certain that changes from one study to the next reflect actual changes in the entire group rather than the sample of youth found on a given night in October. However, the comparisons we can make to the few national studies of homeless youth and young adults give us some measure of confidence that the information presented here is a valid representation of homelessness among youth in our state.

Study funders

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For more information

This summary presents a closer look at youth homelessness, drawing from the Wilder Research 2003 statewide survey. For more information about this report, contact Michelle Decker Gerrard or Greg Owen at Wilder Research, 651-647-4600. Other briefing papers and special reports on homelessness are found on the Wilder Research web site (www.wilderresearch.org). To learn about new research added to our web site, you can subscribe to the free e-mail newsletter The Random Sampler at www.wilderresearch.org.



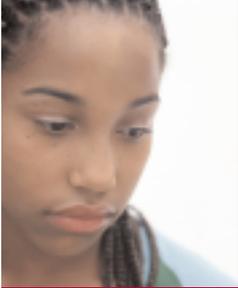
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