

## Homeless children and families

This section examines information from the 1,351 adult parents who provided information on their children. The parents interviewed represent 1,767<sup>1</sup> children in temporary housing programs or non-shelter locations on the day of the survey.

Most children are with their mother (82%), some are with either both parents or two adult caretakers (12%), and a few are with their father or a male caretaker (6%). Thirteen percent of parents are currently married, 33 percent have been previously married, and 54 percent have never married.

The average number of children with a parent is 2.2. Sixty-nine percent of the children are in transitional housing, 14 percent are in emergency shelters, 13 percent are in battered women's shelters, and 5 percent are at non-shelter locations. Children in emergency shelters are the most likely to be with two parents. Over two-fifths (43%) of the children are under age 6, 39 percent are between 6 and 12, and 18 percent are 13 to 17 years old.

The following table provides additional detail on child demographics, based on interview data obtained from adult caretakers.

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<sup>1</sup> Information in this section is based on parents' reports about 1,767 children who were with them in temporary housing programs or non-shelter locations on the day of the survey. All together, 2,724 children were accompanying homeless parents in temporary shelter programs on October 23, 2003, and the survey counted an additional 138 children staying with homeless parents in non-shelter locations. Unlike data about the adult respondents to the survey, data presented here about children are not weighted.

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**Demographics of children with homeless adults**

	Statewide total	Area		Program type			
		Twin Cities metro	Greater Minnesota	Emergency shelter	Battered women's shelter	Transitional housing	Unknown shelter/ Street
With mother	77.4%	78.7%	75.0%	63.9%	93.7%	76.7%	69.9%
Number	(1,367)	(884)	(483)	(156)	(234)	(882)	(95)
With father	3.0%	2.5%	3.9%	4.9%	-	2.7%	7.4%
Number	(53)	(28)	(25)	(12)	-	(31)	(10)
With couple	19.6%	18.8%	21.1%	31.1%	1.3%	20.6%	22.8%
Number	(347)	(211)	(136)	(76)	(3)	(237)	(31)
<b>Total number</b>	<b>1,767</b>	<b>1,123</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>1,150</b>	<b>136</b>
Age of child							
0 – 5	43.0%	41.3%	45.8%	38.5%	48.3%	41.7%	52.6%
Number	(756)	(462)	(294)	(94)	(112)	(479)	(71)
6 – 12	38.8%	40.0%	36.6%	45.9%	34.5%	38.9%	31.9%
Number	(682)	(447)	(235)	(112)	(80)	(447)	(43)
13+	19.3%	18.7%	17.6%	15.6%	17.2%	19.4%	15.6%
Number	(322)	(209)	(113)	(38)	(40)	(223)	(21)
<b>Total number</b>	<b>1,760</b>	<b>1,118</b>	<b>642</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>1,149</b>	<b>135</b>
Average age	7.1	7.3	6.8	7.5	6.6	7.6	6.3

***Health and school problems***

Homeless parents answered several questions about the health and emotional well-being of their children. One-quarter (23%) of homeless parents report their children have an emotional or behavior problem that interferes with their daily activities, and one-sixth (16%) report their children have chronic or severe physical health problems that interfere with their daily activities. One-quarter (25%) of homeless parents report that their school-age children have repeated a grade in school and two-fifths (38%) report their children have learning or school problems. Eighty-eight percent of homeless parents report that their school-age children attended school on the day of the survey. Eight percent of homeless parents report their children have trouble going to school because of their housing situation. Additional detail is provided in the following table.

**Children's health, emotional well-being, and school-related issues**

	Statewide total	Area		Program type			Unknown shelter/street
		Twin Cities metro	Greater Minnesota	Emergency shelters	Battered women's shelters	Transitional housing	
<b>Child has chronic or severe physical health problems that interfere with daily activities</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,214	837	377	177	142	840	55
Percent whose parents report this problem	15.7%	17.0%	13.0%	17.5%	23.9%	14.2%	12.7%
(Number whose parents report this problem)	(191)	(142)	(49)	(31)	(34)	(119)	(7)
<b>Child has emotional or behavioral problems that interfere with daily activities</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,202	827	375	172	139	835	55
Percent whose parents report this problem	22.8%	21.9%	24.8%	23.8%	25.9%	22.0%	23.6%
(Number whose parents report this problem)	(274)	(181)	(93)	(41)	(36)	(184)	(13)
<b>Child has learning or school problem (age 6+ only)</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	767	531	236	104	92	543	26
Percent whose parents report this problem	38.3%	36.2%	43.2%	29.8%	35.9%	40.7%	30.8%
(Number whose parents report this problem)	(294)	(192)	(102)	(31)	(33)	(221)	(8)
<b>Child repeated a grade (age 6+ only)</b>							
Number of children for whom this information is available	761	526	235	104	94	537	27
Percent of parents who report this	25.4%	24.1%	28.1%	25.0%	24.5%	26.1%	14.8%
(Number of parents who report this)	(193)	(127)	(66)	(26)	(23)	(140)	(4)

**Children’s health, emotional well-being, and school-related issues (continued)**

	Statewide total	Area		Program type			Unknown shelter/ street
		Twin Cities metro	Greater Minnesota	Emergency shelters	Battered women’s shelters	Transitional housing	
<b>Child not attending school right now (age 6+)</b>							
Number of children for whom this information is available	676	535	237	106	92	546	27
Percent of parents who report this	12.4%	9.3%	19.4%	18.9%	21.7%	9.2%	18.5%
(Number of parents who report this)	(96)	(50)	(46)	(20)	(20)	(50)	(5)
<b>Child has trouble going to school due to housing situation</b>							
Number of children for whom this information is available	771	535	236	108	92	544	27
Percent of parents who report this problem	7.7%	6.4%	10.6%	15.7%	13.0%	3.5%	40.7%
(Number of parents who report this problem)	(59)	(34)	(25)	(17)	(12)	(19)	(11)

***Housing and economic circumstances***

MFIP is the main source of income for half (50%) of homeless families. For about one-quarter (23%) of homeless families, steady employment is the main source of income. Over three-quarters (79%) of homeless families used food stamps in the previous month, 38 percent used clothing shelves, 32 percent used food shelves, and 31 percent used the WIC program. Homeless parents report problems in obtaining needed health care (6%), mental health care (4%), and dental care (16%) for their children. Eighty-eight percent of the families were currently covered by Medical Assistance or another medical benefit. Thirty percent of parents report unmet child care needs. Sixteen percent of homeless families have been homeless less than one month, 53 percent from one to 11 months, and 31 percent have been homeless for one year or more. Two-thirds (63%) of homeless parents are on a waiting list for public or subsidized housing. About half (47%) need three bedrooms. Half (51%) of homeless parents report they can afford to pay more than \$400 for housing but 21 percent could afford only \$200 or less.

The following table shows the geographic and shelter type variations related to health care, dental care, child care, and food needs for children in our sample.

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**Children's needs reported by parents**

	Statewide total	Area		Program type			Unknown shelter/ street
		Twin Cities metro	Greater Minnesota	Emergency shelters	Battered women's shelters	Transitional housing	
<b>During the past 12 months, have you been unable to obtain needed health care (other than dental care) for any of your children who are living with you here?</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,214	836	378	176	138	844	55
Percent of parents who report this problem	5.5%	4.7%	7.4%	8.5%	8.7%	4.3%	7.3%
(Number of parents who report this problem)	(67)	(39)	(28)	(15)	(12)	(36)	(4)
<b>During the past 12 months, have you been unable to obtain needed dental care for any of your children who are living with you here?</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,210	834	376	176	140	176	54
Percent of parents who report this problem	16.4%	13.1%	23.9%	14.8%	15.7%	17.0%	14.8%
(Number of parents who report this problem)	(199)	(109)	(90)	(26)	(22)	(143)	(8)
<b>During the past 12 months, have you been unable to obtain needed mental health care for any of your children who are living with you here?</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,211	838	373	177	139	844	53
Percent of parents who report this problem	3.4%	3.1%	4.0%	2.8%	7.2%	2.7%	7.5%
((Number of parents who report this problem)	(41)	(26)	(15)	(5)	(10)	(23)	(4)
<b>During the past 12 months, have you been unable to obtain regular child care when you needed it?</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,210	833	378	176	142	839	53
Percent of parents who report this problem	30.0%	30.4%	29.1%	32.4%	32.4%	29.8%	18.9%
(Number of parents who report this problem)	(363)	(253)	(110)	(57)	(46)	(250)	(10)
<b>Have any of your children here today had to skip meals in the past month because there wasn't enough money to buy food?</b>							
Number of children for whom information is available	1,217	837	380	177	141	844	55
Percent of parents who report this problem	6.8%	7.0%	6.3%	11.3%	5.0%	5.8%	12.7%
(Number of parents who report this problem)	(83)	(59)	(24)	(20)	(7)	(49)	(7)

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

The following table compares the circumstances of homeless adults whose children are with them, and those who do not have children with them.

**Homeless adults accompanied by children compared to those adults without children**

<b>Housing circumstance</b>	<b>Adults accompanied by children (N=1,264)</b>	<b>Adults without children (N=3,195)</b>
<i>Current shelter*</i>		
Emergency	13.5%	41.4%
Battered women's shelter	12.7%	3.2%
Transitional housing	68.5%	39.2%
Non-shelter locations	16.2%	5.2%
<i>Length of current homeless episode*</i>		
Less than one month	16.0%	9.3%
1 – 11 months	52.9%	41.9%
One year or more	31.1%	48.8%
<i>Amount could pay per month for housing*</i>		
\$200 or less	21.1%	42.2%
\$201 - \$400	27.7%	29.1%
\$401+	51.2%	28.7%
<i>Number of bedrooms needed*</i>		
0 – 1 bedrooms	11.6%	88.5%
2 bedrooms	41.2%	9.0%
3+ bedrooms	47.1%	2.6%
<i>On waiting list for public or subsidized housing*</i>	30.9%	63.0%
<b>Income, employment and service use</b>		
<i>Average total income last month*</i>	\$700	\$431
<i>Main income source last month</i>		
MFIP*	49.9%	2.4%
General Assistance*	0.7%	22.3%
Steady employment	22.5%	18.0%
Day labor*	1.4%	14.8%
Child support*	4.6%	0.2%
No income*	5.9%	14.5%
<i>Services used last month</i>		
Food stamps*	78.7%	33.3%
Clothing shelves	38.4%	40.5%
Food shelves*	31.7%	26.9%
WIC*	30.5%	1.8%
Hot meal program*	12.7%	43.2%
Drop-in center*	8.9%	38.0%
Free medical clinic*	13.3%	21.3%
Free dental clinic*	4.0%	7.6%
Free mental health clinic*	3.7%	8.4%

**Note.** Where asterisk appears, Chi Square tests show that differences between the two groups are statistically significant ( $p \leq .001$ ).

## Women fleeing abuse

The most common single reason why women seek temporary shelter in Minnesota is to flee an abusive partner. Of the 2,275 women in the statewide study, 706 women (31%) are homeless, in part, because of an abusive relationship. Women are included in this category if they are living in battered women's shelters, recently moved to Minnesota because of abuse, or report that they left their last housing because of an abusive relationship.

Women fleeing abuse can be found in all types of shelter programs. Forty-six percent of all battered women in the study are currently living in transitional housing, 40 percent in battered women's shelters, 8 percent in emergency shelters, and 7 percent in non-sheltered locations. There was an increase from 1991 to 2003 in the number of women fleeing abuse who were living in transitional housing programs, from 42 percent to 46 percent. This is due in part to an increase in the availability of transitional housing for battered women.

The proportion of homeless women in greater Minnesota who are fleeing abuse is higher than in the Twin Cities metro area. In greater Minnesota, 39 percent of women indicate that they were fleeing abuse compared to 27 percent in the Twin Cities metro area.

In order to learn more about women fleeing abuse, we conducted separate analyses to compare these women with other homeless women in our study. In a number of ways, women fleeing abuse are similar to other homeless women. For example, both groups are similar in these areas: ever married (44% for both groups), completed high school or GED (72% vs. 74%), ever in drug or alcohol facility (28% vs. 30%), ever in half-way house (17% for both groups), ever in facility for persons with mental health problems (20% for both groups), ever institutionalized (59% vs. 56%), receive General Assistance (17% for both groups), consider self to be chemically dependent (26% vs. 28%), ever admitted to detox (19% vs. 20%), clothing shelves use (45% vs. 42%), and receipt of Medical Assistance or medical benefits (63% for both groups).

However, on many characteristics the two groups differ. The following tables compare the two groups of women. The first table shows the results for the statewide sample of homeless women in 2003. The subsequent two tables show separate results for the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota, to show the regional differences between those who are fleeing abuse and those who are homeless for other reasons.

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**Statewide: Women fleeing abuse compared with other homeless women**

	Homeless women fleeing abuse (N=706)		Other homeless women (N=1,569)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ever married	313	44.4%	689	44.2%
Completed at least high school or GED	499	72.2%	1,159	73.9%
Lived in Minnesota for more than 2 years	465	66.0%	1,159	73.9%
Receives Food Stamps *	472	66.9%	969	62.0%
Used clothing shelves in last month	317	44.8%	645	41.2%
Used emergency room in last six months ***	333	47.2%	640	40.9%
Receive Medical Assistance or other medical benefits	584	63.2%	980	63.0%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted less than 1 month***	135	19.3%	187	12.1%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted 1 year or more***	196	28.0%	659	42.6%
Ever in alcohol/drug treatment facility	196	28.0%	464	29.6%
Ever in some type of halfway house	120	17.1%	272	17.4%
Ever in hospital for persons with mental health problems	137	19.5%	308	19.7%
Ever institutionalized (any type of institution)	416	58.9%	883	56.3%
Evicted from last housing***	142	20.2%	495	32.1%
Have child(ren) under 18***	537	76.1%	1,031	65.8%
Have child(ren) with you in shelter*	305	43.2%	754	48.2%
Unable to obtain child care when needed**	128	36.6%	197	27.1%
Receives MFIP***	306	44.3%	580	37.1%
Receives General Assistance	116	16.7%	264	16.9%
Use hot meal programs in last month***	93	13.2%	337	21.5%
Considers self chemically dependent	180	25.5%	439	28.2%
Ever admitted to detox	131	18.6%	310	19.8%
Physically mistreated as a child or youth***	371	53.2%	641	41.3%
Sexually abused as a child or youth***	363	51.1%	580	37.9%
Experienced violence in a relationship in last 12 months***	471	67.4%	370	23.7%
Sought health care due to violence in last 12 months***	227	32.4%	130	8.3%
Average age **	32.7 years		34.2 years	
Median income**	\$437		\$500	
Median amount can pay for monthly housing	\$300		\$300	

**Note:** Where asterisks appear, Chi Square tests show that differences between the two groups are statistically significant: \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**Twin Cities metro area: Women fleeing abuse, compared with other homeless women**

	Homeless women fleeing abuse (N=433)		Other homeless women (N=1,150)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ever married	179	41.5%	475	41.5%
Completed at least high school or GED	301	70.9%	843	74.3%
Lived in Minnesota for more than 2 years	273	63.2%	856	74.4%
Receives Food Stamps	289	66.7%	703	61.5%
Used clothing shelves in last month	202	46.5%	493	43.0%
Used emergency room in last six months	191	44.2%	475	41.5%
Receive Medical Assistance or other medical benefits	278	64.4%	712	62.5%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted less than 1 month	60	14.0%	130	11.4%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted 1 year or more	138	32.1%	532	46.7%
Ever in alcohol/drug treatment facility	125	28.9%	353	30.7%
Ever in some type of halfway house	75	17.3%	197	17.1%
Ever in hospital for persons with mental health problems	87	20.1%	223	19.4%
Ever institutionalized (any type of institution)	225	58.9%	644	56.0%
Evicted from last housing	99	22.9%	371	32.7%
Have child(ren) under 18	315	72.7%	747	65.1%
Have child(ren) with you in shelter	227	52.4%	590	51.5%
Unable to obtain child care when needed	69	34.0%	155	28.8%
Receives MFIP	200	46.4%	432	37.8%
Receives General Assistance	81	18.9%	211	18.4%
Use hot meal programs in last month	57	13.2%	248	21.6%
Considers self chemically dependent	116	26.9%	337	29.5%
Ever admitted to detox	74	17.1%	226	19.7%
Physically mistreated as a child or youth	226	52.7%	459	40.3%
Sexually abused as a child or youth	227	53.0%	412	36.6%
Experienced violence in a relationship in last 12 months	275	63.8%	261	22.8%
Sought health care due to violence in last 12 months	127	29.5%	101	8.8%
Average age	32.4 years		34.5 years	
Median income	\$437		\$500	
Median amount can pay for monthly housing	\$300		\$300	

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

**Greater Minnesota: Women fleeing abuse, compared with other homeless women**

	Homeless women fleeing abuse (N=273)		Other homeless women (N=420)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ever married	134	49.1%	213	51.3%
Completed at least high school or GED	197	74.1%	315	75.9%
Lived in Minnesota for more than 2 years	192	70.3%	304	72.4%
Receives Food Stamps	183	67.0%	266	63.6%
Used clothing shelves in last month	115	42.1%	152	36.3%
Used emergency room in last six months	142	52.0%	165	39.3%
Receive Medical Assistance or other medical benefits	166	61.3%	268	64.6%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted less than 1 month	74	27.4%	57	13.9%
Current episode of homelessness has lasted 1 year or more	58	21.5%	225	55.0%
Ever in alcohol/drug treatment facility	71	26.6%	111	26.6%
Ever in some type of halfway house	45	16.7%	74	17.7%
Ever in hospital for persons with mental health problems	87	20.1%	223	19.4%
Ever institutionalized (any type of institution)	161	59.0%	239	56.9%
Evicted from last housing	43	16.0%	124	30.5%
Have child(ren) under 18	222	81.3%	284	67.8%
Have child(ren) with you in shelter	174	63.7%	221	52.7%
Unable to obtain child care when needed	59	40.1%	42	22.2%
Receives MFIP	106	40.9%	148	35.4%
Receives General Assistance	35	13.1%	54	12.9%
Use hot meal programs in last month	32	13.2%	88	21.0%
Considers self chemically dependent	64	23.4%	102	24.6%
Ever admitted to detox	57	20.9%	84	20.0%
Physically mistreated as a child or youth	144	53.9%	181	43.9%
Sexually abused as a child or youth	126	48.1%	168	41.3%
Experienced violence in a relationship in last 12 months	196	73.1%	109	26.3%
Sought health care due to violence in last 12 months	100	36.9%	29	7.0%
Average age	33.1 years		33.2 years	
Median income	\$457		\$500	
Median amount can pay for monthly housing	\$250		\$300	

## SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

In the statewide sample of homeless women, there are significant differences between women fleeing abuse and other homeless women. Specifically, women fleeing abuse are *more* likely than other homeless women to have:

- Been homeless less than one month
- Lived in Minnesota for more than two years
- Been unable to obtain needed child care
- Received MFIP
- Received Food Stamps
- Been physically abused as a child or youth
- Been sexually abused as a child or youth
- Experienced violence in a relationship in the last 12 months
- Sought health care due to violence in the last 12 months
- Visited an emergency room in the last six months

Women fleeing abuse are *less* likely than other homeless women to have:

- Been homeless for more than one year
- Been evicted from last housing
- Children with them in shelter
- Used hot meal programs in the last month

Women fleeing abuse tend to be younger, on average, than other homeless women (32.7 years vs. 34.1years).

## Homeless ex-offenders

Since the 1997 statewide survey, we have observed an increasing proportion of the homeless adults in Minnesota who have ever been in a juvenile or adult detention center, jail, or prison. The proportion was around one-quarter from 1991 through 1997 (27 to 28%), before rising to 36 percent in 2000 and now to 42 percent in 2003. The survey also shows that criminal histories are a growing barrier to housing among homeless Minnesotans. In 1997, 15 percent reported that they had ever had difficulty getting or keeping housing because of their criminal background, a proportion that now stands at 21 percent, with 13 percent reporting this as a current barrier to housing.

Results from the 2003 survey indicate that 609 adults had been in a correctional facility within the past two years. This is one-eighth of all homeless adults (12.8%). In order to learn more about homeless people with recent experiences in the criminal justice system, we have analyzed the survey information to compare these individuals with other homeless adults.

In brief, the analysis shows that recently released ex-offenders among the homeless are mostly men (75%) and, although they are found in all kinds of shelters, they are more likely than other homeless adults to be in unsheltered locations (24%, compared to 12% of others) and less likely to be in transitional housing (38%, compared to 49%). Compared to other homeless adults, a higher proportion are in greater Minnesota, and fewer have come to Minnesota from other states. They report more frequent experiences of homelessness, and more exposure to unsafe conditions while homeless.

In many respects, the ex-offenders are similar to other homeless adults. About the same proportions are military veterans. They are just as likely to be employed, and working about the same number of hours per week.

On many measures, however, ex-offenders report somewhat different experiences and needs than other homeless adults. They are more likely to have received special education services as a child, and less likely to have completed a high school education. Fewer have ever been married, or have had contact with their family in the last month. Fewer have any minor children, and far fewer have any children with them.

The barriers they mention to housing are mostly similar to those of other homeless adults. For both groups, a lack of affordable housing is the most-frequently mentioned current barrier, and credit problems are also among the top three. For the recent ex-offenders, their criminal background is the second most frequently cited barrier, while for other homeless adults, credit problems come second and the cost of application fees ranks third. Besides the difficulties from their criminal backgrounds, ex-offenders are also

Homeless adults and children in Minnesota statewide survey  
**SPECIFIC POPULATIONS**

more likely to cite difficulties from having no local rental history, from use of alcohol or drugs, or from having caused abuse or injury to someone they lived with.

More ex-offenders have spent time in a variety of institutional settings such as foster care, drug or alcohol or mental health treatment facilities, halfway houses, or group homes. More report a diagnosis with an alcohol or drug abuse disorder or have a serious mental illness. They report similar kinds of illnesses and physical health conditions as other homeless adults, but are more likely to have indications of possible brain injury or to report that they are often confused or have problems with memory or decisions. Considering all kinds of chronic physical, mental, or other health conditions, more have some kind of serious or chronic disability. They are less likely to have any kind of current health care coverage.

Although the same proportions are employed, more are earning less than \$8 per hour, and they report lower median monthly incomes. Those who are unemployed cite barriers to employment that are similar to the barriers among other unemployed homeless adults, except for higher rates of problems with the category “personal reasons,” which includes criminal records, and a lack of employment opportunities.

The table below presents these and some other key comparisons between homeless adults released from correctional facilities in the last two years and other homeless adults.

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**Homeless adults released from correctional facilities within the past two years, compared to other homeless adults**

	Homeless recent ex-offenders (N=609)		All other homeless adults (N=4,165)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Men	456	74.9%	2,043	49.0%
Never married	374	61.5%	2,260	54.4%
Has any minor children	280	46.1%	2,165	52.4%
Has any children with them now	58	9.5%	1,293	31.1%
Less than high school education	174	29.2%	968	23.5%
In any kind of institution as a child	321	52.7%	1,279	30.7%
Received special education services as a child	194	31.9%	990	24.0%
Has had contact with family in the past month	386	64.3%	2,941	72.0%
Military veteran	93	15.3%	609	14.6%
Now in 7-county metro area	394	64.7%	3,059	73.4%
Now in greater Minnesota	215	35.3%	1,106	26.6%

**Homeless adults released from correctional facilities within the past two years, compared to other homeless adults (continued)**

	Homeless recent ex-offenders (N=609)		All other homeless adults (N=4,165)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Spent most of time growing up:				
Twin Cities metro area	173	28.5%	1,204	29.1%
Greater Minnesota	124	20.4%	609	14.7%
Outside of Minnesota	311	51.2%	2,326	56.2%
Currently employed	167	27.4%	1,268	30.5%
Employed who earn less than \$8/hour	85	51.5%	525	41.9%
Median income in October	\$239		\$440	
Main current barriers to employment (self-reported):				
Lack of transportation	147	35.3%	952	35.1%
Physical health problems	131	31.6%	770	28.4%
Lack of housing	124	30.0%	819	30.2%
Personal reasons (includes criminal history)	105	25.2%	503	18.6%
Mental health	104	25.1%	580	21.4%
Lack of employment opportunities	88	21.2%	440	16.2%
Shelter type at time of survey:				
Emergency shelter	219	36.0%	1,382	33.2%
Battered women's shelter	13	2.1%	267	6.4%
Transitional housing	232	38.1%	2,037	48.9%
No or unknown shelter	145	23.8%	479	11.5%
Ever assaulted while homeless	145	23.9%	584	14.1%
Ever homeless before	336	55.3%	1,623	39.2%
Current barriers to getting housing (self-report):				
No housing you could afford	210	34.5%	1,365	32.8%
Criminal background	189	31.0%	427	10.3%
Credit problems	156	25.6%	878	21.1%
No local rental history	82	13.5%	366	8.8%
Cost of application fees	67	11.0%	464	11.1%
Eviction or bad rental history	54	8.9%	458	11.0%
Use of alcohol or drugs	43	7.1%	187	4.5%
Ever lived in ... :				
Drug/alcohol treatment facility	376	61.7%	1,492	36.0%
Halfway house	307	50.5%	979	23.6%
Mental health treatment facility	157	25.9%	815	19.6%
Foster home	156	25.7%	783	18.9%
Group home	137	22.8%	605	14.6%
Indian school	29	4.8%	85	2.1%
Any kind of correctional facility	609	100%	1,391	33.4%

**Homeless adults released from correctional facilities within the past two years, compared to other homeless adults (continued)**

	Homeless recent ex-offenders (N=609)		All other homeless adults (N=4,165)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Substance abuse disorder diagnosis	260	42.7%	919	22.1%
Considers self alcoholic/chemically dependent	318	53.0%	1,289	31.2%
Serious mental illness	322	52.9%	1,910	45.9%
Onset of symptoms after head injury (possible traumatic brain injury)	222	36.5%	1,154	27.7%
Chronic physical health condition	344	56.6%	2,359	56.6%
Often confused, trouble with memory, problems making decisions (cognitive impairment)	221	37.2%	1,187	28.8%
Any serious or chronic disability*	505	82.9%	3,135	75.3%
Had any kind of health coverage in October	388	64.7%	2,939	71.0%

**Note:** Serious or chronic disabilities include substance abuse disorder, serious mental illness, chronic health condition, cognitive impairment, or health condition that limits work or activities of daily living.

The above information about homeless ex-offenders masks many significant differences between men and women. The one-quarter of this group who are women are much more likely to have children with them (28%, vs. 3% of the men), and to be in transitional housing (52% vs. 34%) or battered women’s shelters (9%) rather than emergency shelters (21% vs. 41%). The proportion in unknown shelters or on the street is about the same, but women are less likely to have spent any nights outdoors in October (31% vs. 48%). As children, they are more likely to have been physically or sexually abused (69% vs. 35%) or to have lived in a foster home (35% vs. 23%). Their reasons for losing their last housing are less likely to include the loss of a job (22% vs. 34%) but more likely to include a drinking or drug problem on the part of some other household member (28% vs. 15%) or abuse they received (32% vs. 10%) or another kind of relationship problem (31% vs. 22%). They are more likely to have a serious mental illness (65% vs. 49%) and to report they now need to see a mental health professional (58% vs. 33%). The women ex-offenders are more likely to have at least one serious or chronic disability (91% vs. 80%), and more likely to have some kind of health care coverage (83% vs. 58%).

## SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

A recent review of research<sup>2</sup> points out that homeless people with experience in the criminal justice system may have committed their crimes for any of several different kinds of reasons, which the researchers describe as follows:

- Long-term deviant life styles (people who are deeply involved in crime and antisocial behavior as a way of life, including drug abuse)
- Subsistence (the need to commit crimes for material subsistence)
- Adaptation (criminal behavior as a necessary part of adjusting to life on the street)
- Diminished capacity (crime resulting from the inability to tell right from wrong)

As these varied categories suggest, homeless ex-offenders may have committed their crimes before becoming homeless, after they were already homeless, or both. The survey findings presented here give evidence that a mix of all four of these categories are likely to be found among Minnesota's homeless ex-offenders.

The different patterns suggest that any single approach to working with homeless ex-offenders is likely to have limited effectiveness across all the groups. More outreach and services can help reduce the subsistence and adaptation crimes, but are unlikely to reduce those committed by individuals with long histories of anti-social behavior. Increased treatment for substance abuse and mental health problems may reduce some of the crime arising from deviancy and diminished capacity, but by themselves are not likely to address the difficulties often encountered by people finishing treatment and attempting to re-connect to supportive communities. Finally, regardless of the motivation or timing of their crimes, or the degree of their rehabilitation, criminals who have completed their sentences and are ready to rejoin civil society often find a variety of legal barriers that make it more difficult for them to do so, including systematic incentives to employers and landlords to avoid hiring or renting to ex-offenders.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rosenheck, R., Bassuk, E., & Salomon, A. (1999). "Special populations of homeless Americans." In Fosburg, L.B., & Dennis, D.L., Eds., *Practical Lessons: The 1998 national symposium on homelessness research* (pp. 2-1 – 2-31). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>3</sup> Further details about legal barriers to the social re-integration of ex-offenders, and suggested remedies, can be found in *Every door closed: Barriers facing parents with criminal records*, by Hirsch et al. (2002), available on the Internet at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).