

Homeless Youth Age 18-21 with Previous Social Service Placements Analysis from the Minnesota Statewide Homelessness Study, 2012

Young people on their own are some of the least visible and most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Studies show that young people who have been in the foster care system may be at high risk of becoming homeless as they emerge into adulthood. This summary, one of a series of reports based on Wilder Research's 2012 survey of homeless adults and youth, provides a snapshot of youth who have been in placement, their circumstances, and the barriers they face in trying to find stable housing.

Every three years, Wilder Research conducts a statewide study to better understand the prevalence, causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness. In October 2012, about 1,300 trained interviewers conducted interviews with more than 4,500 people experiencing homelessness at almost 400 locations across Minnesota, including shelters, transitional housing, and non-shelter locations. The 2012 study counted 1,005 homeless youth age 18-21 and interviewed 620 of these youth.

This document describes the placement experiences, demographic characteristics, homelessness histories, employment, education, health, and social service use of youth age 18-21 who had social service placements. Many characteristics are compared with homeless youth who have never experienced a social service placement. Juvenile justice and corrections placements were analyzed separately and not included as "social service" placements for the purposes of this report.

Placement experiences among homeless youth

Over one-half (57%) of the homeless youth surveyed had lived in a social service placement at some point in their lives. The most common placement was in a foster home. Other common placements included group homes, mental health treatment facilities, and drug or alcohol treatment facilities. Less common

were placements in halfway houses or residences for people with physical disabilities.

Type of placement	Number	Percent
Foster home	216	35%
Facility for persons with mental health problems	145	23%
Group home	140	23%
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	125	20%
Halfway house	50	8%
Residence for people with physical disabilities	17	3%
Any of the above	355	57%

Nine out of ten (88%) youth with placement histories lived in at least one of these placements as a minor (<18) and 35 percent lived in one of these placements as an adult (18-21). More than one-half (57%) had been in multiple types of placements. Nearly one-half of placed youth (44%) had been in placement in the previous two years, and 26 percent had left in the last year.

When youth who had left a placement within the previous year were asked what type of placement they last left, they most often reported leaving foster or group homes, drug or alcohol treatment facilities, and mental health facilities.

Demographic characteristics

Compared to other youth experiencing homelessness, youth with placement histories were more likely to be male (58% vs. 51%) and to have been interviewed in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metro area (64% vs. 55%). Placed youth were also more likely than other homeless youth to have grown up in Minnesota (77% vs. 70%).

Where youth experiencing homelessness primarily lived up to age 16	Placed youth (N=352)	Other youth (N=263)
Minneapolis	20%	18%
St. Paul	11%	11%
Seven-county metro area, but not Minneapolis or St. Paul	13%	17%
Greater Minnesota	34%	24%
Another state	22%	27%
Another country	1%	3%

Youth of color have high rates of homelessness regardless of their history of out-of-home placements, but a smaller percentage of youth with placement histories were African American (31%) compared to other homeless youth who had never been placed (43%).

Racial/ethnic background of youth experiencing homelessness	Placed youth (N=350)	Other youth (N=265)
African American	31%	43%
White (non-Hispanic)	31%	28%
American Indian	12%	9%
Other or multi-racial	12%	12%
African Native	2%	4%
Asian	1%	2%
Hispanic (any race)	12%	8%

Youth with placement histories were less likely than other homeless youth to have children (30% vs. 35%) and to have children with them at the time they were interviewed (20% vs. 28%).

Homeless youth with children	Placed youth (N=355)	Other youth (N=265)
Have children	30%	35%
Have children with them	20%	28%

In addition, placed youth were more likely than other homeless youth to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual preference (19% vs. 10%).

Permanent connections

Many studies point to the positive long-term impact for youth who have relationships with trusted adults and permanent connections with family and/or friends. Homeless youth with placement histories may have more precarious connections with their biological family if child welfare issues led to the placement. The 2012 homelessness study gives us some limited information about connections to family and other trusted adults.

When asked who they mainly lived with until age 16, 65 percent of youth with placement histories compared to 79 percent of other homeless youth lived with their biological or adopted parents. One in ten (10%) youth with placement histories reported that they had mainly lived in a foster home up to age 16.

Interpersonal support

Three-quarters (78%) of youth with placement histories had contact with their family in the previous month. This is slightly lower than other homeless youth (86%). Placed youth were also less likely than other homeless youth (39% vs. 50%) to report that if they wanted to return home, their parents or other caregiver would allow them to do so. One in five (19%) placed youth felt that they will live with their family again (17% of other youth).

Youth with placement histories more frequently reported getting help accessing services from youth workers, shelter staff, and outreach workers.

Received help to find services from in the last year	Placed youth	Other youth
Friend	70%	67%
Youth worker	55%	47%
Shelter staff person	47%	40%
Social worker	44%	44%
Partner or significant other	40%	37%
Outreach worker	39%	25%
Another relative	35%	38%
Parent	33%	37%
Teacher or other school staff	21%	27%
Guardian ad Litem or other court staff	6%	3%

Most youth from both groups reported having an adult in their life that they trust and have regular contact with (81% of placed youth and 91% of other homeless youth).

Experiences with homelessness and barriers to accessing stable housing

Homeless youth with placement histories have a less stable housing history and more extreme experiences with homelessness.

On average, placed youth first experienced homelessness a year younger than other homeless youth (15 vs. 16). Placed youth were more likely than other homeless youth to have spent at least one night outside in the previous month (41% vs. 28%), and equally likely to spend time doubled-up/couch hopping (53% vs. 51%) or in shelter or transitional housing (65% vs. 63%).

For the most part, both groups reported similar reasons for leaving their last permanent housing situation. There were a few exceptions. Youth with placement histories were more likely to report drinking and drug problems (20% vs. 4%), behavior of guests (19% vs. 13%), or entering treatment or jail (17% vs. 4%) as reasons for leaving their last housing.

Top reasons for leaving last regular or permanent housing	Placed youth	Other youth
Problems getting along with other people you lived with	47%	48%
Could not afford rent or house payments	26%	22%
Eviction or lease not renewed	21%	19%
Abuse by someone you lived with	20%	20%
Drinking/drug problems	20%	4%
Behavior problem of a guest or visitor	19%	13%
Entered treatment, or jail, or residential program	17%	4%
A breakup with a spouse or partner	16%	11%
Violence in neighborhood	13%	14%
Substandard or unsafe housing	13%	11%

Youth with placement histories and other homeless youth also reported many of the same reasons for becoming homeless. Again, there were a few differences between groups of homeless youth. Youth with placement histories were more likely to report fighting with parents or guardians (31% vs. 23%), drug or alcohol use (14% vs. 2%), or delinquent activities (13% vs. 3%) as their main causes of their homelessness.

Main causes of youth's homelessness	Placed youth (N=355)	Other youth (N=265)
Fighting frequently with parents or guardians	31%	23%
Told to leave or locked out	30%	31%
Someone in home they could not stand to be around	25%	20%
Not willing to live by parents' rules	15%	8%
Neglect, or parents not attending to your basic needs	14%	9%
Own use of drugs or alcohol	14%	2%
Delinquent activities by youth	13%	3%
Parents use of drugs or alcohol	13%	10%
Did not feel safe because of violence in home	13%	9%
A parent or guardian had mental health problems	12%	7%

Both groups report similar barriers to getting housing, but youth with placement histories were more likely than other youth to report a criminal background as something that was keeping them from getting housing (10% to 5%).

Top issues preventing homeless youth from acquiring housing	Placed youth (N=337)	Other youth (N=240)
Lack of job or income	41%	43%
Could not afford housing	28%	31%
No local rental history	12%	12%
Criminal background	10%	5%

Fifty-seven percent of youth with placement histories and 49 percent of other youth were experiencing long-term homelessness (homeless for a year or longer or four or more times in the last three years).

Experience with homelessness	Placed youth (N=344)	Other youth (N=257)
Long-term homeless	57%	49%
1 year or longer	48%	42%
4+ times in last 3 years	36%	25%
Turned away from shelter in previous 3 months	28%	22%
Was homeless as a minor (with or without parents)	29%	20%

Education, employment, and income

Compared to other homeless youth, homeless youth with placement histories have similar educational attainment and almost the same level of employment and income as their homeless peers.

Education

About one-half (51%) of both groups had at least a high school diploma or GED. However, youth with a previous social service placement were more likely than other youth (50% vs. 33%) to receive special education services.

Educational attainment of homeless youth 18-21	Placed youth	Other youth
Less than high school	49%	49%
<i>Currently enrolled in an education program*</i>	29%	33%
High school or GED only	39%	33%
Some college or more	11%	18%
IEP or special education services while in school	50%	33%

* Percent of total who did not have a high school education but were currently enrolled in some type of education program.

Youth with placement histories who were attending school reported similar issues with school as other homeless youth; a slightly higher proportion of placed youth reported issues with truancy (46% vs. 39%) and poor grades (39% vs. 32%).

Problems faced during the previous school year	Placed youth (N=110)	Other youth (N=84)
Truancy or skipping school	46%	39%
Trouble getting to school because of housing or transportation issues	46%	48%
Poor or failing grades	39%	32%
Suspensions or expulsions	23%	24%
Not feeling safe at school	6%	5%

Note: Percentages are for youth (18-21) who had not graduated and were enrolled in school at the time of the survey.

Youth who were not currently in school (and had not graduated) were asked for the main reasons they were not in school this year. About half of homeless youth reported that dealing with other issues or problems were preventing them from attending. Youth with placement histories were twice as likely as other homeless youth to report they had no interest or motivation in attending school (34% vs. 16%) and half as likely to report that employment was getting in the way of school (9% vs. 18%).

Main reasons for not attending school this year	Placed youth (N=70)	Other youth (N=38)
Dealing with other issues or problems	50%	47%
No permanent address	34%	32%
No interest or motivation	34%	16%
Dropped out	20%	21%
Have to work	9%	18%

Note: Percentages are for youth who had not graduated and were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey.

Employment

Homeless youth with placement histories were somewhat less likely than other homeless youth to be employed at the time of the survey (28% vs. 35%), but equally likely to be employed full-time (35+ hours per week) at the time of the survey (9% vs. 8%). It should be noted that homeless youth were more likely to be employed than homeless adults in the 2012 homeless survey.

On average, youth with placement histories reported slightly less income in the month of the survey than other homeless youth (\$396 vs. \$421). Youth with placement histories were more likely to report they had asked for money on the streets (16% vs. 7%).

Sources of income and financial support in October	Placed youth	Other youth
Steady employment	24%	28%
Relatives (other than parents) or friends	23%	21%
General assistance	20%	17%
MFIP or other welfare program	18%	21%
Sale or pawning of personal belongings	16%	15%
Asking for money on the streets	16%	7%
Parents	13%	12%

Both groups of homeless youth most often reported transportation as a barrier to employment. A greater percentage of youth with placement histories reported that criminal history and mental health problems were barriers to work. It is expected that mental health issues may be more prevalent for youth with placement histories since social service placements include mental health treatment, half-way houses, and residential treatment programs. However, youth with placement histories were less likely than other youth to report a lack of job experience as a barrier (14% vs. 25%).

Most significant barriers to obtaining employment	Placed youth (N=223)	Other youth (N=145)
Transportation	29%	30%
Personal reasons	20%	15%
Criminal history	18%	5%
Housing	17%	17%
Mental health	16%	6%
Job experience/history	14%	25%
Resources needed to work or look for work	14%	11%
Employment opportunities	10%	17%
Education	10%	13%
Child care	9%	15%

Note: Percentages are for those who were not employed.

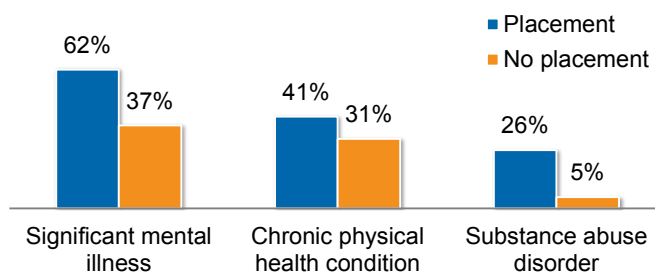
Physical, social, and emotional well-being

History of trauma and significant health conditions are common among homeless youth with placement histories.

Mental, chemical, and physical health

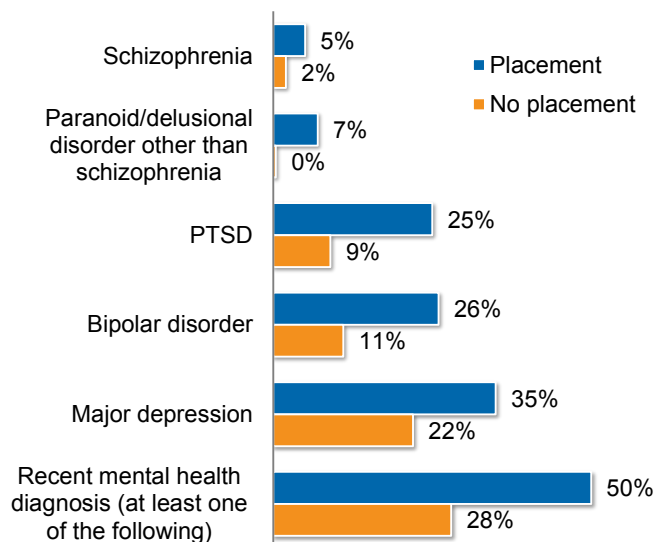
Youth with placement histories were much more likely than other homeless youth to report serious health conditions including mental illness, chemical dependency, or a chronic health problem. In fact, only one-quarter (25%) of placed youth reported none of these three conditions compared to one-half (47%) of other homeless youth.

SERIOUS HEALTH CONDITIONS



Homeless youth were also asked if they had been told by a doctor or nurse that they had one of several mental health conditions. A greater percentage of youth with placement histories compared to other homeless youth reported that they had a mental health diagnosis. Bipolar disorder (26% vs. 11%) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (24% vs. 9%) diagnoses were almost three times more prevalent among homeless youth with placement history versus other homeless youth.

RECENT MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS



Other evidence of mental health issues	Placed youth	Other youth
Ever had outpatient treatment	57%	31%
Considered suicide	45%	24%
Feel they need to see a mental health professional	37%	19%
Evidence of a traumatic brain injury	29%	16%
Not taking mental-health related medication they have been prescribed	24%	12%
Any evidence of mental illness	84%	56%

One-quarter (26%) of youth with placement histories reported a substance abuse disorder (compared to 5% of other homeless youth), 31 percent received outpatient substance abuse treatment, and 20 percent left their last housing because of a drinking or drug problem. Placed youth were also much more likely than other youth to report using an illegal drug in the previous 30 days (46% vs 29%).

Abuse and exposure to violence

Experiences with abuse and violence are common among homeless youth with placement histories. Youth with placement histories were much more likely than other youth to have been abused and neglected as a child.

- 56% of youth with placement histories were physically abused as a child (28% of other homeless youth)
- 38% of youth with placement histories experienced parental neglect (20% of other homeless youth)
- 34% of youth with placement histories were sexually abused as a child (17% of other homeless youth)

Youth with placement histories were also much more likely than other homeless youth to experience violence, abuse, or exploitation while homeless.

- 29% of youth with placement histories had been physically or sexually attacked or beaten while being homeless (14% of other homeless youth)
- 34% of youth with placement histories reported they had to stay in an abusive situation because they did not have other housing options (27% of other homeless youth)

- 24% of youth with placement histories reported they had been encouraged to make money through sexual services (13% of other homeless young people)
- 22% of youth with placement histories reported being sexual with someone only for the purpose of getting shelter, clothing, food, or other things (10% of other youth)

More than two-thirds (70%) of youth with placement histories had a parent who had been incarcerated (45% of other homeless youth) including 8 percent who had a parent who was currently incarcerated (5% of other youth).

Assistance and services

Many homeless youth surveyed are getting assistance, especially with SNAP/food stamps and transportation help such as bus cards. Youth with placement histories are accessing services at similar or higher rates than other homeless youth.

Top seven services homeless youth reported using in the last 30 days	Placed youth (N=355)	Other youth (N=265)
SNAP/Food stamps	59%	61%
Transportation assistance	59%	51%
Drop-in centers	41%	31%
Clothing shelves	36%	30%
Food shelves	35%	32%
Hot meal program	32%	22%
Emergency room	29%	23%

Conclusion

Overall, youth with placement histories have higher rates of traumatic and stressful life experiences than those homeless youth who have never had a foster care or other social service placement. Youth with placement histories may also be at higher risk while homeless. They are more likely to stay outside, experience violence while homeless, and experience long-term homelessness.

Compared to homeless youth who have never been placed, youth with placement histories are more likely to have been in the corrections system, both as an adult and as a juvenile. They are also more likely to have left their last stable housing because they entered treatment, jail, or a residential program.

Homeless youth, especially those who have histories of placements, have high rates of mental health problems, physical health issues, and substance abuse. These may be linked to past histories of abuse and neglect.

In an effort to better tailor services to the needs of youth who have experienced an out-of-home placement, it is important to consider the support they may need to transition into stable housing after mental health and chemical dependency treatment as well as corrections placements. In addition, the data suggest that those who seek to serve these vulnerable youth may need to have heightened training and awareness of the impact of trauma on the lives and the behavior of these youth. A trauma-informed holistic approach that incorporates the mental and physical health needs of youth will better serve youth with placement histories and may positively impact all young people that experience homelessness.

The Analysis of Homeless Youth Age 18-21 with Previous Social Service Placements from the Minnesota Statewide Homelessness Study, 2012 was sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Human Services

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January 2015