

Homeless adults and their children in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota

Summary

*Regional survey of persons without permanent
shelter*

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Summary

This study gives a snapshot of the people experiencing homelessness in Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota on a single day in October 2003. The findings reported here are based on interviews with 133 men and 73 women in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, transitional housing programs, and in non-shelter locations on October 23, 2003 (see the Appendix of the full report for survey locations).

Key findings

Numbers of homeless

- On October 23, 2003, there were 292 people (126 men, 87 women,¹ and 79 children) residing in temporary housing programs including emergency shelters and transitional housing programs in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Temporary housing programs in Fargo housed 80 men, 52 women, and 35 children. Temporary housing programs in Moorhead housed 46 men, 35 women, and 44 children.
- Additionally, the October survey identified 101 persons in non-shelter locations, including fifteen children who were not interviewed (37 men, 11 women, and 13 children in Fargo and 32 men, 6 women, and 2 children in Moorhead).
- The total homeless population identified in the Fargo-Moorhead area on October 23, 2003 was 393 persons (228 in Fargo and 165 in Moorhead).

Who is homeless?

- In 2003, men make up the majority of homeless adults in the Fargo-Moorhead area (65% in Fargo and 67% in Moorhead). The average age of homeless men is 42.1 in Fargo and 45.5 in Moorhead. The average age of homeless women is 33.6 in Fargo and 36.4 in Moorhead. Approximately half of those interviewed have never married (51% in Fargo and 46% in Moorhead).
- Of homeless persons interviewed in Fargo on the night of the survey, 54 percent lived in North Dakota for two years or less. Of these recent residents, 52 percent came to North Dakota from Minnesota, and 44 percent had lived in North Dakota before. Of homeless persons interviewed in Moorhead on the night of the survey, 53 percent lived in Minnesota for two years or less. Of these recent residents, 34 percent came to Minnesota from North Dakota, and 37 percent had lived in Minnesota before.
- Of women in temporary housing in Fargo, 20 percent had at least one child with them at the time of the survey. In Moorhead, 44 percent of women in temporary housing had at least one child with them on the night of the survey. Fewer non-sheltered

¹ The figure for the number of women includes three unaccompanied female youth under age 18.

women had children with them (none in Fargo, and only one in Moorhead). Of all homeless women surveyed (including those in sheltered and non-sheltered locations), those with children with them were 16 percent in Fargo and 38 percent in Moorhead.

- The homeless population contains a disproportionate number of persons of color, particularly American Indian (21% for Fargo and 27% for Moorhead). While less than 10 percent of Minnesota's and 8 percent of North Dakota's overall population is made up of persons of color, more than one-third of Fargo-Moorhead homeless adults are persons of color (28% in Fargo and 43% in Moorhead).
- American Indian women make up more than one-quarter of the homeless women's population (28%) in Fargo and one-third of the homeless women's population (33%) in Moorhead.
- Persons interviewed in non-shelter locations were predominantly male in both Fargo and Moorhead (77% and 84% respectively) and more likely to have been homeless for over six months (60% vs. 46% among the sheltered in Fargo, and 51% vs. 48% among the sheltered in Moorhead). American Indians made up 47 percent of those interviewed in non-shelter locations in Fargo and 35 percent of those interviewed in non-sheltered locations in Moorhead.
- On the day of the survey, military veterans made up about one-fifth (21%) of the total homeless population in both Fargo and Moorhead. Veterans were 29 percent of homeless males in Fargo and 32 percent of homeless males in Moorhead.

Parents and children

- In Fargo, 10 homeless parents had children with them, and five of these had school-age children with them. None of these parents report having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the five parents with school-age children, one reports that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem, and two report having a child that has had to repeat a grade in school.

In Moorhead, 20 homeless parents had children with them, including 14 with school-age children. Half (50%) of the parents reported having a child with an emotional or behavioral problem. Of the parents with school-age children, 60 percent report that at least one of their school-age children has some type of learning or school-related problem and 37 percent report having a child that has had to repeat a grade in school.

- In Fargo, half (50%) of the homeless parents (N=10) report they have been unable to obtain needed child care. In Moorhead, 30 percent of the homeless parents (N = 20) report they were unable to obtain needed child care. No homeless parents, in either city, report their children had to skip meals in the last month because there was not enough money to buy food.

- In Fargo, none of the homeless parents (N=10) report they have been unable to obtain needed health care and none had gone without needed dental care for their children in the last 12 months. In Moorhead, 13 percent of homeless parents (N=20) report they have been unable to obtain needed health care and 26 percent report they have been unable to obtain needed dental care for their children in the last 12 months. In both cities, no parents report being unable to obtain needed mental health care for their children.

Education, employment, and income

- About three-quarters of homeless persons had completed at least high school or obtained a GED (79% in Fargo and 73% in Moorhead). In both cities, 27 percent of those interviewed had attended at least some college. Nearly half of the homeless persons interviewed have gone to school or taken classes to learn a specific job (47% in Fargo and 49% in Moorhead).
- In Fargo, 41 percent of homeless persons interviewed report having a job, and 18 percent report working full time. In Moorhead, 29 percent of homeless persons interviewed report having a job, with 12 percent working full-time.
- For those who are not working in Fargo, the most common barriers were transportation (42%), lack of housing (29%), personal reasons (27%), physical health problems (25%), and mental health problems (22%). For those who are not working in Moorhead, the most common barriers were physical health problems (48%), transportation (47%), mental health problems (42%), and lack of housing (27%).
- The average amount that homeless persons interviewed in Fargo could pay each month for their own place to live, including rent and utilities, was \$208.60 and in Moorhead the average amount was \$214.20. About one-quarter of the homeless persons interviewed report they could not pay anything for their own place to live (24% in Fargo and 29% in Moorhead). The percent of homeless persons who report they could pay something for rent but not more than \$300 a month was 54 percent in Fargo and 45 percent in Moorhead. In both cities, only 6 percent of homeless adults report that they could afford the typical rent for an apartment of the size they would need.

Public assistance and service use

- Eight percent of the Fargo homeless adults interviewed received family welfare benefits from North Dakota, 3 percent received MFIP (Minnesota's welfare assistance), and 1 percent received family welfare benefits in another state within the last 12 months. Fifteen percent of the Moorhead adults interviewed received MFIP, 5 percent received family welfare benefits from North Dakota, and 2 percent received family welfare benefits in another state within the last 12 months.

- Twelve percent of homeless adults interviewed in Fargo and 17 percent of homeless adults interviewed in Moorhead report the loss of one or more public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months. The benefits lost by the Fargo homeless adults are Medical Assistance, housing assistance, Food Stamps, child care assistance, and unemployment benefits. The benefits lost by Moorhead homeless adults are Medical Assistance, Food Stamps, housing assistance, child care assistance, and unemployment benefits.
- When asked about which services they used in October, the services most frequently mentioned by homeless persons interviewed in Fargo were: hot meal programs (42%), clothing shelves (40%), free medical clinics (37%), food shelves (25%), and Food Stamps (24%). The services most frequently mentioned by those interviewed in Moorhead were: clothing shelves (39%), Food Stamps (39%), hot meal programs (38%), transportation assistance (32%), free medical clinics (27%), and drop-in centers (26%).

Health and well-being

- One common reason for women to seek temporary shelter is to flee an abusive partner. One in five homeless women in Fargo (21%) and one in five homeless women in Moorhead (20%) indicate that one of the main reasons for leaving their last housing was to flee abuse.
- The percentage of homeless adults in Fargo reporting physical mistreatment as a child is 30 percent (22% of men and 44% of women). The percentage of homeless adults in Moorhead reporting physical mistreatment as a child is 38 percent (25% of men and 64% of women). Likewise, the percentage reporting that they were sexually mistreated as children is 20 percent of the Fargo homeless persons interviewed (10% of men and 40% of women) and 25 percent of those interviewed in Moorhead (6% of men and 66% of women).
- Mental illness is a significant problem among those who are homeless in the Fargo – Moorhead area. Over 40 percent of homeless adults (41% in Fargo and 54% in Moorhead) were told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have schizophrenia, manic-depression or bipolar disorder, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post traumatic distress disorder.
- Fifty percent of the homeless in Fargo and 41 percent in Moorhead report that they consider themselves to be alcoholic or chemically dependent. Forty-five percent of the homeless in Fargo and 33 percent of the homeless in Moorhead report they have been told by a professional within the last two years that they have a chemical dependency problem. Twenty-eight percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 25 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead report receiving inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the last two years. Twenty-seven percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 22

percent of homeless persons in Moorhead report receiving outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the last two years.

- Twenty-seven percent of homeless persons in Fargo and 25 percent of homeless persons in Moorhead report having both a mental illness and a chemical dependency problem. This is based on the percent of persons who report being told by a doctor or nurse within the last two years that they have a major mental illness (schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depression or bipolar disorder, major depression, anti-social personality or post traumatic stress disorder) and alcohol or drug abuse disorder.
- The vast majority of homeless respondents (97% in Fargo and 96% in Moorhead) report that their most recent temporary housing arrangements were “reasonably safe.”

Serious or chronic disability

- Many homeless adults in Fargo and Moorhead report serious or chronic disabilities in addition to the mental illnesses, substance abuse problems, and chronic health problems already mentioned. These include physical, mental, or other health conditions that limit the kind or amount of work they can do (38% in Fargo and 61% in Moorhead) or that limit their daily activities (11% in Fargo and 19% in Moorhead), as well as conditions that interfere with memory or daily decision-making (22% in Fargo and 36% in Moorhead).
- When mental illness, substance abuse disorders, chronic physical health problems, and the above disabilities are pooled, 74 percent of homeless adults in Fargo, and 85 percent of homeless adults in Moorhead, have at least one serious or chronic disability. In addition, 23 percent of homeless adults in Fargo, and 32 percent of homeless adults in Moorhead, have a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury.

How many homeless?

This study defines homelessness with the same criteria used by the United States Congress in allocating resources through the McKinney Act (P.L. 100-77, sec 103(2)(1), 101 stat. 485 [1987]).

The term “homeless” or “homeless individual” includes an individual who (1) lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) has a primary nighttime residence that is (a) 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), (b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or (c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The following table shows the total count of homeless persons in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing facilities in the Fargo area and Moorhead area on the night of October 23, 2003.² This is not the number that were interviewed, but the number that were counted by shelter providers.

Number of persons in temporary housing programs

	Men age 18+	Women age 18+	Children with parent(s)	Unaccompanied youth: Males < 18	Unaccompanied youth: Females < 18	Total
Fargo area						
Emergency shelters	58	17	13	-	1	89
Battered women's shelters	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transitional housing	22	33	22	-	1	78
Moorhead area						
Emergency shelters	31	8	5	-	-	44
Battered women's shelters	-	-	-	-	-	-
Transitional housing	15	26	39	-	1	81
Total	126	84	79	-	3	292

The next table shows the number of homeless persons surveyed in *non-shelter locations* in the Fargo area and Moorhead area on October 23, 2003.

Number of persons interviewed in non-shelter locations

	Males	Females	Children with parent(s) a	Total
Adult (18+)				
Fargo area	37	11	13	61
Moorhead area	32	6	2	40
Total number of adults in interviewed non-shelter locations	69	17	15	101

^a This number represents the number of children parents reported were with them on the night of the survey. Children were not interviewed.

² Persons receiving vouchers for temporary shelters in a motel or other location are counted with the emergency shelter totals. Persons interviewed in non-shelter locations are not included in this table.

The information presented in the preceding tables show that on October 23, 2003 in the Fargo-Moorhead area, 292 persons were living in temporary shelters or transitional programs and 101 homeless persons were identified in non-shelter locations, including 15 children who were not interviewed. The total of 393 identified homeless people represents an increase of 26 percent over the 312 homeless persons identified in October 2000. However, an unknown number of homeless persons are not represented in these counts, including persons doubled up with other individuals or families on the night of the survey and homeless persons in detoxification centers on that night.

Why these counts underestimate homelessness

Our counts of persons using shelters and transitional programs in the Fargo-Moorhead area are comparable to figures cited in the Quarterly Shelter Survey conducted by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning in July 2003 (the date closest to our study). Both are, nonetheless, undercounts of this area's total population of those who are homeless or precariously housed.

Our survey shows that approximately two-thirds of all homeless persons in shelters occasionally stay with friends. This population of homeless persons "doubled-up" with friends or relatives was briefly investigated by the Saint Paul Overnight Shelter Board in 1990. By asking Saint Paul school children about persons living in their homes on a temporary basis, they found that there were as many people living in these circumstances as there were people in Saint Paul shelters.³ The U.S. General Accounting Office found in 1989 that the number of children and youth who were "doubled-up" in precarious housing situations was 2.7 times the number of children and youth in emergency shelters.⁴

If we combine the above estimates and use the same methods, we show the following result.

³ Wilder Research Center. (1990). *St. Paul overnight shelter board report*. Saint Paul, MN: Author.

⁴ U.S. General Accounting Office. (1989). *Children and youths: About 68,000 homeless and 186,000 in shared housing at any given time*. Washington, DC: Author.

Estimates of homeless and precariously housed persons in the Fargo-Moorhead area on an October night in 2000 and 2003

Fargo Estimate

Count or estimate		2000	2003
Count	Persons in shelters or transitional housing programs	139	167
Count	Persons in the non-sheltered locations on night of survey	58	61
Estimate ^a	“Doubled-up” children and youth (2.7 times sheltered youth and children)	119	100
Estimate ^b	“Doubled-up” adults	95	130
Total		411	458

Moorhead Estimate

Count	Persons in shelters or transitional housing programs	61	125
Count	Persons in the non-sheltered locations on night of survey	47	40
Estimate ^a	“Doubled-up” children and youth (2.7 times sheltered youth and children)	35	121
Estimate ^b	“Doubled-up” adults	48	77
Total		191	363

Fargo-Moorhead Area Estimate

Count	Persons in shelters or transitional housing programs	200	292
Count	Persons in the non-sheltered locations on night of survey	105	101
Estimate ^a	“Doubled-up” children and youth (2.7 times sheltered youth and children)	154	221
Estimate ^b	“Doubled-up” adults	143	207
Total		602	821

Methods for calculating these estimates:

- a) Estimate of children and youth who are “doubled-up” = Total number of sheltered children and youth x (2.7)

Based on the U.S. General Accounting Office 1989 study that found 2.7 times as many children and youth in doubled-up situations as in emergency shelters.

Year	Fargo	Moorhead	Fargo-Moorhead
October 2000	(44) x (2.7) = 119	(13) x (2.7) = 35	(57) x (2.7) = 154
October 2003	(37) x (2.7) = 100	(45) x (2.7) = 121	(82) x (2.7) = 221

- b) Estimate of the number of adults “doubled-up” = Total number of sheltered adults
(Based on Saint Paul Overnight Shelter Board 1990 study, which found as many people living in “doubled-up” circumstances as living in shelters.)

Year	Fargo	Moorhead	Fargo-Moorhead
October 2000	95	48	143
October 2003	130	77	207

Survey interviews

The number of interviews conducted with adults and youth in temporary housing programs is shown below. In the Fargo-Moorhead area, three persons approached for an interview refused to participate (two in Fargo and one in Moorhead). The overall response rate (including street locations) was 99 percent (98% in Fargo and 99% in Moorhead).

Number of adults (18 and older) interviewed in temporary housing programs

	Men interviewed	Women interviewed	Total interviewed	Total number of adults* in temporary housing	Percent of total population interviewed
Fargo area					
Emergency shelters	19	18	37	76	49%
Battered women's shelters	-	-	-	-	-
Transitional housing	20	17	37	56	66%
Moorhead area					
Emergency shelters	15	7	22	39	56%
Battered women's shelters	-	-	-	-	-
Transitional housing	10	14	24	42	57%
Total	64	56	120	213	56%

*Note: *The figures for adults in temporary housing include three unaccompanied female youth under age 18.*

Number of persons interviewed in non-shelter locations

	Males	Females	Total
Adult (18+)			
Fargo area	37	11	48
Moorhead area	32	6	38
Total interviewed in non-shelter locations	69	17	86