

Facts about homeless children and youth

Minnesota statewide survey of homeless people, October 2000

Background characteristics

On October 26, 2000, Minnesota emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs were providing shelter to 3,122 homeless children age 0-17 who were with parents, and to 179 unaccompanied youth age 10-17. Using conservative estimates based on studies done elsewhere, another 8,430 children and youth were "doubling up" temporarily with family or friends. The total estimated number of children homeless or precariously housed in Minnesota on this night, or any other recent night, is 11,721. This figure does not include the unknown number of children staying with their parents in places not meant for human habitation (such as in cars, under bridges, and in abandoned buildings).

Seventy-two percent of homeless adults had children age 17 or younger, and one-third (34%) had children with them. Of adults who had any children, 65 percent had been involved in their day to day care during the past months (84% of women, 33% of men, about the same as in 1997).

Thirty-nine percent of homeless children were age 5 or younger (including 5% who were under the age of 1). Forty-three percent were age 6 to 12, and 18 percent were 13 to 17. Homeless children were slightly older in 2000 than in 1997.

Thirty-four percent of mothers reported that they were homeless because of abuse by a partner.

Homeless parents with children were most likely to be served in battered women's shelters and transitional housing, and least likely to be in non-sheltered locations. Most homeless households with children were headed by single adults; only 12 percent were headed by couples.

Besides the children who were with their parents, 2,592 more were affected by their parents' homelessness, but were not with them. Over half of homeless parents reported that these children were being cared for by the other parent (58%), or by a grandparent (11%) or other family member (14%). Nine percent said their children were in foster care. These proportions were about the same as in 1997.

Employment and income of parents

Employment. Forty-three percent of homeless parents were working, 26 percent full-time. These proportions were up from 31 percent and 15 percent in 1997, and are about the same as for all homeless adults.

Sources of income. Among homeless parents with children, 32 percent reported their main source of income was from steady employment, and 42 percent had income from steady employment in the month of the survey. Forty-five percent reported the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) as their main source of income, and 63 percent received income from it during the month.

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Child support. About one-third (36%) of parents, regardless of whether their children were with them or not, reported that there was an order for at least one of their children to receive child support. Sixty-three percent of men reported that support was being provided for all of their eligible children, but only 44 percent of women said it was.

Children's health, nutrition, and mental health

Chronic or severe physical health problems. Sixteen percent of homeless parents reported that at least one of their homeless children had a chronic or severe physical health problem. This is higher than in the general population of Minnesota children, but about comparable to the population of poor and near-poor. A random sample of Minnesota parents of children age 14 and younger found that 11 percent of all households had a child with a physical or developmental disability or health care need that requires extra attention, while 15 percent of low-income households (below 200% of poverty) had a child with such a disability (Chase and Shelton, *Child Care Use in Minnesota*, Wilder Research Center, March 2001).

Access to health care. Most homeless parents reported being able to obtain health care for their children when needed, but 10 percent reported that there had been occasions during the past year when they had been unable to obtain needed health care for their children. Fourteen percent reported having been unable to obtain needed dental care.

Nutrition. Eleven percent of homeless parents reported at least one child had to skip meals in the previous month because there had not been enough money to buy food.

Emotional or behavioral problems. Twenty-one percent of homeless parents reported that at least one of their homeless children had an emotional or behavioral problem that interfered with their daily activities. This is twice the incidence among low-income parents in the general population, and nearly four times the rate for the overall population. The statewide child care survey mentioned above found that among Minnesota households with children 0-14, six percent of all household, and 10 percent of low-income households, reported that at least one of

their children had an emotional or behavioral problem that required special attention.

Education

Early care and education. Thirty-four percent of parents with children under six reported that at least one of their children was enrolled in Head Start or some other early education program. Two-thirds (68%) had been able to obtain regular child care when they needed it during the previous year, up from 54 percent in 1997.

Learning or school problems. Forty-one percent of homeless parents reported at least one of their children age 6 or older had a learning or school problem, up from 36 percent in 1997. Twenty-six percent reported a child had repeated a grade, up from 20 percent in 1997.

School attendance. Eighty-eight percent of homeless parents reported that all of their school-age children attended school on the date of the survey. Thirteen percent reported that their children had trouble going to school because of their housing situation. The problem was greatest in emergency shelters (26%) and battered women's shelters (20%), and lowest in transitional housing (5%). The proportion of children having trouble attending school has not changed since the 1997 survey.

Parental characteristics and history

Prior experiences with homelessness. Eight percent of homeless parents had been homeless as a child (had lived in transitional housing, an emergency shelter, or a battered women's shelter). Sixty-five percent of homeless parents (compared with 60% of homeless non-parenting adults) reported that this was the first time they had been homeless. Parents who had been homeless before reported an average of 2.9 previous episodes of homelessness, compared with 4.8 for non-parenting adults.

Length of time homeless. Slightly over half (53%) of parents had been homeless for six months or less, and 29 percent had been homeless for a year or more. Families remained homeless for longer in 2000 than in 1997, when 62 percent had been homeless for six months or less and 21 percent for a year or longer.

Shelter vs. on the streets. Parents with children were less likely to stay in non-sheltered locations. During October, homeless parents reported staying an average of half of one night in places not intended for housing, compared with 3.7 nights for non-parenting adults.

Access to subsidized housing. On the date of the survey, over half (55%) of homeless parents were on a waiting list for subsidized housing, and had been waiting for an average of 9.7 months. Another 12 percent had tried to get on a waiting list but couldn't because it was closed. During the past two years, 17 percent had received a housing voucher they were unable to use, either because no place would accept it, or because it expired or was revoked. In all categories except the waiting list, parents had more trouble accessing subsidized housing than non-parenting adults:

	Homeless parents	Homeless non-parents
On a waiting list for subsidized housing	55%	25%
Average length of time on waiting list	10 months	6 months
Tried to get on a waiting list but couldn't because it was closed	12%	12%
Had a housing voucher in the past 2 years but were unable to use it	17%	8%
Couldn't find a place that would accept it	14%	6%
Voucher expired or was revoked	10%	4%

Ability to pay rent. Homeless parents said they could afford to pay an average of \$502 per month for rent. This average includes those 14 percent of parents who said they could not pay anything at all. It is nearly \$200 per month higher than the amount that adults without children said they would be able to pay (\$308). Even after adjusting for inflation, these amounts are higher than those reported in 1997 (\$441 for parents and \$291 for non-parents, in 2000 dollars).

Size of apartment needed. Forty-two percent of parents said they would need two bedrooms and 51 percent would need three or more bedrooms. The table below shows what size apartments homeless families say they would need, what they say they could afford to pay, and the current fair market rents for the Twin Cities area. "Fair market rent" is the amount that a Section 8 (federally subsidized housing) voucher will cover. It is generally set at the 40% percentile rent, that is, the dollar amount which allows voucher-holders access to 40 percent of standard quality rental units. In some areas, including the Twin Cities, not enough units are available at this price, and beginning January 2001 HUD has authorized fair market rents at 50 percent of area rents.

Size of apartment needed (number of bedrooms)	Percent of homeless parents needing this size apartment	Average amount parent would be able to pay per month	Fair market rent, Twin Cities metropolitan area, 2001
0 (efficiency)	0.9%	\$263	\$451
1 bedroom	5.9%	\$423	\$580
2 bedrooms	42.0%	\$435	\$742
3 bedrooms	39.5%	\$563	\$1004
4 bedrooms	9.7%	\$612	\$1137
5 bedrooms	2.0%	\$514	\$1308

Source: Homeless data, Wilder Research Center. Fair market rents, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Parents' mental and chemical health

Substance abuse. Fourteen percent of homeless parents considered themselves alcoholic or chemically dependent, one-third the rate among non-parenting homeless adults, which was 42 percent. These proportions are about the same as in 1997. Eleven percent reported they left their last housing because of a drinking or drug problem, compared with 27 percent of homeless non-parents. Seven percent said that a health professional had told them in the last two years that they had an alcohol and/or drug abuse disorder, down from 10 percent in 1997. Five percent of parents had a dual diagnosis of at least one mental health problem and a drug or alcohol abuse disorder, the same as in 1997. By contrast, 20 percent of homeless non-parents had a dual diagnosis in 2000.

Mental health. Over one-quarter (29%) of parents reported having been told by a medical professional, within the past two years, that they had a serious or persistent mental health disorder. This proportion was slightly up from 26 percent in 1997. Both were lower than the proportions in the overall homeless population (38% in 2000 and 32% in 1997). The most common mental health problem reported by parents was major depression (15%), followed by post-traumatic stress disorder (8%).

At the time of the survey, 23 percent of parents felt they needed to see a medical professional about an emotional or mental health problem. This was down from the 26 percent who expressed such a need in 1997. In 2000, 17 percent reported mental health problems in the last 12 months, and 11 percent said they had received treatment.

Homeless youth

On October 26, 2000, 209 unaccompanied homeless youth were surveyed. Of this number, 78 were staying in shelters, 44 in transitional housing programs, and 87 in other locations including on the streets and doubled up in households not their own. The youth were about evenly divided between boys (47%) and girls (53%). The average age was between 15 and 16. Homeless youth were disproportionately African American and American Indian. On average, they had first left home at age 13. Half (51%) had grown up in single-parent families, one-third (35%) in two-parent families, including those with step-parents. The remaining 15 percent had spent most of their time in other kinds of settings (with other relatives, or in foster care or group settings).

School attendance. Seventy-seven percent of homeless youth reported attending school during the current year. Sixty-two percent had attended school on the date of the survey, and 85 percent said they usually attended school.

Prevalence of "bad starts." Eighty percent of boys and 90 percent of girls had already had at least one of the following major traumatic events in their life:

- Physical abuse: 40% of boys, 53% of girls (up from 32% and 43% in 1997)
- Sexual abuse: 14% of boys, 41% of girls (up from 6% and 37% in 1997)
- Pregnancy or childbirth: 30% of girls
- Institutionalization: 67% had lived in a foster home, detention center, facility for people with mental disorders, or other out-of-home placement

AGE DISTRIBUTION HOMELESS YOUTH

Age	Percent
10-12	3.8%
13	5.3%
14	9.6%
15	14.8%
16	31.1%
17	35.4%

RACIAL DISTRIBUTION

	Homeless youth (age 10-17), Oct. 2000	Minnesota youth (age 10-17), 1999
African American	24.9%	4.0%
American Indian	20.0%	1.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5%	4.1%
White	46.3%	90.0%
Other/mixed	8.3%	--
Hispanic or Latino origin (may be of any racial group)	6.6%	2.5%

Sources: Homeless data from Wilder Research Center; 1999 population estimates from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning. (Data on mixed race is not available for the general population.)