

Resources to Help Homeless Women & Children Find Permanent Housing



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Research Problem

- Homelessness interrupts the flow of family systems, a woman's ability to parent effectively in her eyes, and hinders her mental status and self-esteem.
- Literature identifies a need to further research resources to strengthen families. (Paquette & Bassuk, 2009)

Research Question

- What resources are needed by women with children accessing services and programs at a Midwestern homeless shelter to stabilize their families in permanent housing?

Purposes

- To identify successful programs and services available to help women and children facing homelessness become stable and secure permanent housing.
- To develop an email qualitative interview protocol to investigate the personal perspective of a professional in the field providing services and working with homeless women and children.
- To contribute to the existing literature pertaining to homeless women and children and make known successful intervention strategies to practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

The Family Ecological Theory

- Assumes that every system that is surrounding a human being, the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems, affect the development of that person. The systems themselves interact. An individual often finds themselves in situations that are the result of environmental influences and not solely of their own individual responsibility (Berger, 2009).

As applied to this study....

- The Family Ecological Theory would suggest that individuals accessing services at a Midwestern homeless shelter are experiencing shifts in terms of the economic and their individual family systems (Dykeman, 2011).

Literature Review

Christian, J., & Clampham, D. (2010) found that elements of an individual's wellbeing included: positive self-esteem, personal identification, and the mothers perception of themselves. Three barriers to not seeking services were budgeting, cultural identification, and age.

Dotson, H. M. (2011) found that many women who entered homeless shelters with some or none of their dependents were no more likely to suffer from "special needs issues" i.e. mental illness, domestic violence, drug addiction and physical disabilities than those who were not homeless.

Dykeman, B. F. (2011) suggested using the frame of family intervention when working with homeless families while focusing on four sequential processes: identification and acknowledgement of family concerns; relationship building; modify family dynamics; focus on achievable changes with an emphasis on addressing the basic needs of the family.

Paquette, K., & Bassuk, E. (2009) found that social networks of homeless mothers have a large impact on the success of the family recovering from homelessness.

Samuels-Dennis, J., Ford-Gilboe, M., Wilk, P., Avison, W., & Ray, S. (2010) found that cumulative trauma would increase single homeless mothers' experiences with social strain and erode personal and interpersonal agency. Personal agency acts as a buffer for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Our participant was a professional who works with the homeless population, specifically women and children, in the Midwest.

Demographic Characteristics of Participation

Gender	Female
Age	50
Position Title	Executive Director
Years of Experience Working with the Homeless	12 Years
Education Level	Undergraduate with some master's
College Degree	Bachelor's Degree

Method

Participant Sampling Type

- Purposive sampling method was used because the researchers could go to an individual who had the information needed and would be willing to share personal and lived experiences.

Research Design

- A phenomenology research design was used to collect from our participant at one point in time (Patton, 2002). An email interview was used for data collection. The underlying reason for this method is that email, rather than a face-to-face interviews, was deemed most appropriate when under time restrictions and for convenience when compared with a mailed questionnaire (Meho, 2006).

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis was used for the qualitative email responses and inter-rater reliability to 100% was established between the researchers. The researchers then identified representative quotes from the interview for each of the themes.

Selected Findings

What programs do you offer for homeless women to stabilize their families into permanent housing?

Follow up support

The center provides 6 months of follow up support after the family leaves the shelter. *"Assistance with rent, security deposit, application fees, employment clothing, bus passes, gas vouchers, a small food pantry, furniture and household items are also available."*

What barriers to services do homeless women with children in the area experience?

Partners

Sometimes the women chose not to enter the shelter in lieu of staying with their partner. *"A partner does not want to seek services because of the rules or has a background that will prevent them from being at the shelter."*

What concerns do women express about parenting their children while staying at the homeless shelter?

Overwhelmed

Trying to manage the children without a partner is very challenging for many mothers. *"Often times the moms are overwhelmed. Typically the non-custodial parent is not involved with the child physically, emotionally, or financially."*

What are the strengths of the women in your program?

Resilience

Some of the women at the shelter are very dependent and can be quite determined. *"A lot of times the father(s) of the children are not involved emotionally, physically, or financially. The women are able to juggle quite a bit."*

Do homeless mothers overall feel judged by others in the community that they are not adequately providing for their children?

Individual Life Choices

The women at the shelter feel judged on many different levels. *"Not being able to provide for their children, the choices in partners, decisions about education."*

Implications for Researchers

- Future studies should attempt to replicate our findings using a larger qualitative sample of individuals who work with the homeless population and also in different regions of the country
- Looking more in depth at how families become homeless would give researchers a better understanding of how to address rehousing the family over time
- Doing qualitative interviews with homeless mothers to get the mothers' perspective on their needs
- Interviewing male heads of households and diverse family groups

Implications for Practitioners

- Offer child care that is open during nontraditional hours
- Offer and continue follow up support with the family for the first six months and then yearly until no longer needed
- Help locate safe and affordable housing options
- Be an advocate for affordable housing through your county government and advocating for the "living wage"
- Accessible opportunities for higher education
- Empower the mothers and provide parenting resources and support to decrease their feelings of being overwhelmed
- Provide emotional support systems for women who are lacking family support

Conclusion

- When homeless shelters are able to tap into the homeless women's resiliency in addition to the comprehensive resources the shelter offers, then they are more likely to overcome homelessness.
- There is a need to provide not only "crisis orientation" but a need to advocate for resources so practitioners are able provide stable housing because without stable housing there are no stable families.