



America's Homeless Children

More Than One Million Homeless Children

- At least 1.35 million children are homeless during a year's time.
- One any given day 800,000 people are homeless in the United States, including 200,000 children in homeless families.
- Families with children are among the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.
- Most children living with homeless parents are very young (42% are under the age of 6 years).
- Family homelessness is increasing. Requests for emergency shelter by families have increased every year since 1985, with an average increase of 20% in 2002.

(Burt, 2001; Burt, Aron, Douglas, et al., 1999; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2002)

Homelessness Hurts Children

Homelessness Makes Children Sick

- Homeless children get sick twice as often as other children. They have:
 - Twice as many ear infections.
 - Four times as many asthma attacks.
 - Five times more stomach problems.
 - Six times as many speech problems.
 - Twice as many hospitalizations.
- Homeless children go hungry twice as often as other children and 25% of homeless children report eating less after becoming homeless.

(National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999; Sandel, Sharfstein, and Shaw, 1999; Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999)

Homelessness Wounds Children

- Every day, homeless children are confronted with stressful, traumatic events. Within a single year:
 - 97% of homeless children move, many up to three times.
 - 22% are separated from their families to be put in foster care or to live with relatives.
 - 25% have witnessed acts of violence within their family.
- Homeless children have many more mental health problems than other children.
 - More than 20% of homeless preschoolers have emotional problems serious enough to require professional care.
 - 47% of homeless school age children have problems such as anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, compared to 18% of other children.

(National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999; Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999)

Homeless Children Struggle In School

- Approximately 87% of school-age homeless children and youth are enrolled in school, although only about 77% attend school regularly. Some schools don't allow homeless children to register without school and medical records. Others will not enroll children without a home address and there is often no transportation available to get children from shelters to school. The vast majority of homeless children and youth live in shelters, doubled up with friends or relatives, or in situations such as motels and campgrounds.
- Homeless children who are able to attend school have more problems learning in school. Compared with other children, homeless children are:
 - Four times as likely to have developmental delays.
 - Twice as likely to have learning disabilities.
 - Twice as likely to repeat a grade, most often due to frequent absences and moves to new schools (28% of homeless children go to three or more schools in a single year).

(U.S. Department of Education, 2000; National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999)

Homeless Children Are Not Receiving The Services They Need

- Despite their multiple and complex needs, homeless children are not receiving the services they need. For example:
 - Nearly 20% of homeless children lack a regular source of medical care and 15% rely solely on hospital emergency rooms.
 - Less than 1/3 of homeless children who need help for their emotional problems are receiving it.
 - Only 50-60% of homeless families are enrolled in Medicaid, although most are eligible.
 - Only 71% of homeless families receive Food Stamps or WIC, although most are eligible.
 - Only 37% of homeless children receive services that help them with enrollment, attendance, and success in school.
 - Only 15% of homeless children are in preschool programs, less than half the rate of all children nationally.

(National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999; Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999; Burt, Aron, Douglas, et al., 1999; National Coalition for the Homeless, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1999)

The Causes of Family Homelessness: Poverty Amidst Plenty

Housing is Not Affordable for Many Low-Income Families

- The U.S. economy has caused rents to soar, putting housing out of reach for the poorest Americans.
 - Nearly 28 million households- one in four- reported spending more than 30% of their income on housing.
 - Renter's households in forty of the fifty states face a Housing Wage (the wage a full time worker must earn to afford fair market rent) of more than twice the prevailing minimum wage. In these states, a household is unable to afford a two bedroom home at Fair Market Rent even with two minimum wage earners working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year.
- The supply of affordable housing is declining while the demand remains high.
 - 66% of Metropolitan Statistical Areas have Housing Wages of at least twice the prevailing minimum wage.
 - The number of rental units affordable to families with extremely low incomes declined by over 370,000 units between 1991 and 1997.
 - The average waiting period for a public housing unit rose from 10 to 11 months between 1996 and 1998.

(National Low Income Housing Coalition 2001; Bipartisan Millennial Housing Commission, 2002; National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2003; Daskal, 1998; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2000; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999)

Extreme Poverty Among Families and Children Continues to Grow

- 17% of children under 18 years were living below the poverty level. 10% of all families and 18% of families with a female householder and no husband present had incomes below the poverty level. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of children living in *extreme* poverty (below one-half the poverty line).
- The number of families living in poverty went up by more than 300,000 in 2002 to 7 million from 6.1 million in 2001. The number of children in poverty rose by more than 600,000 during the same period to 12.2 million.
- From the late 1970s to the late 1990s, the average income of the lowest-income families fell by over 6% after adjustment for inflation.

(U.S. Census Bureau, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; Children's Defense Fund, 1999; Bernstein, McNichol, Mishel, and Zahradnik, 2000)

Other Key Factors Contributing to Family Homelessness

- The number of people without health care insurance rose by 1.4 million to 41.2 million, putting them at extreme risk of homelessness. An injury or serious illness can quickly wipe out a family's income causing them to lose their housing and become homeless.
- Many mothers and children become homeless when they are forced to flee their homes to escape domestic violence.
 - 18% of homeless parents who had previously lived in their own apartments reported they left their residence because of domestic violence.
 - 32% of homeless mothers report that their current or most recent partner was abusive.

(Mills, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 1999; Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999; Browne and Bassuk, 1997)

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