



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EDUCATION  
OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Building Futures Through  
Education

## Fact Sheet: Young Children Experiencing Homelessness September 2016

**Over 1.2 million children under the age of six are estimated to experience homelessness in the United States; this represents one in eighteen children under the age of six.<sup>1</sup>**

### **Most Homeless Children Do Not Stay in Shelters Due to Limited Availability and/or Restrictive Rules.**

Primary Residence of Homeless Children Enrolled in Public Schools in the United States in 2013-2014<sup>2</sup>

- Unsheltered – 4%
- Motels – 6%
- Shelters – 15%
- Doubled-Up (staying temporarily with other people because there is nowhere else go to) – 75%

### **More Than Half of Children in Federally-Funded Homeless Shelters Are Under the Age of Six.**

Homeless Children in Shelters funded by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2012<sup>3</sup>

Total Number of Children Under Age 18:	322,319	
Under Age 1:	33,044	(10.3%)
Ages 1 – 5:	134,631	(41.8%)
Ages 6-12:	111,230	(34.5%)
Ages 13-17:	43,414	(13.5%)

### **A Small Percentage of Homeless Children Are Enrolled in Public Preschool Programs.**

Homeless Children and Youth Enrolled in Public Schools in the United States in 2013-2014<sup>4</sup>

Total:	1,360,747
Ages 3-5:	50,084
Grades K-3:	483,568
Grades 4-5:	205,382
Grades 6-8:	276,511
Grades 9-12:	341,676

<sup>1</sup> [Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile](#). January 2016. Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Federal Data Collection 2013-2014: <http://www.serve.org/nche>

<sup>3</sup> 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR): Volume 2: <https://www.onecpd.info/resource/3297/2012-ahar-volume-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, [eddataexpress.ed.gov](http://eddataexpress.ed.gov)

## **Homeless Children Make Up a Small Percentage of Children Enrolled in Head Start.**

Homeless Children in Head Start, 2012-2014<sup>5</sup>

	2012	2013	2014
Total Cumulative Enrollment	1,146,468	1,129,805	1,076,126
Homeless Children at Enrollment	38,958 (3.3%)	40,858 (3.6%)	40,324 (3.7%)
Homeless Children Served During the Year	54,446 (4.7%)	50,992 (4.5%)	48,853 (4.5%)
Over Income Children at Enrollment	54,480 (4.7%)	55,493 (4.9%)	56,053 (5%)
Children With Income Between 100-130% of Poverty	29,911	26,647	30,048

## **Homelessness, Poverty, Pregnancy, and Youth**

- The age at which a person in the United States is most likely to stay in a homeless shelter is in infancy.<sup>6</sup>
- Homeless parents tend to be young and have very low incomes, with average household incomes at 41 percent of the poverty level.<sup>7</sup>
- Pregnancy is a risk factor for entering shelter. Many women who enter shelter will give birth during a homeless episode.<sup>8</sup>
- Mothers experiencing homelessness are less likely to have received adequate prenatal care and are more likely to give birth prematurely.<sup>9</sup>
- Homeless youth are at particularly high risk for teen pregnancy; research indicates as many as 20% of homeless youth become pregnant.<sup>10</sup>

## **Homelessness Harms Young Children**

- Homeless families who are not in shelters are particularly at risk since they do not have access to the support services provided by the shelter, early learning or educational systems. Such isolation may exacerbate the already negative impacts homelessness has on early childhood development.<sup>11</sup>
- The younger and longer a child experiences homelessness, the greater the cumulative toll of negative

<sup>5</sup> 2012-2013 Head Start Program Information Report Enrollment Statistics Multi-Year Report

<sup>6</sup> Perlman, S.M. & Fantuzzo, J.W. (2010). Timing and impact of homelessness and maltreatment on school readiness. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 874-883

<sup>7</sup> Rog, D., Holupka, S., & Patton, C. (2007). *Characteristics and Dynamics of Family Homeless Families with Children: Final Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Services Policy, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

<sup>8</sup> Weitzman, B. C. (1989). Pregnancy and childbirth: Risk factors for homelessness? *Family Planning Perspectives*, 21(4), 175-178.

<sup>9</sup> Perlman, S., Sheller, S., Hudson, K., & Wilson, C.E. (2014). *Parenting in the face of homelessness*. In M.E. Haskett, S. Perlman, and B.A. Cowan (Eds.). *Supporting families experiencing homelessness: Current practices and future directions* (pp. 57-77). Springer, NY.

<sup>10</sup> Runaway and Pregnant: Risk Factors Associated with Pregnancy in a National Sample of Runaway/Homeless Female Adolescents [Sanna J. Thompson](#), Ph.D.,\* [Kimberly A. Bender](#), M.S.W., [Carol M. Lewis](#), Ph.D., and [Rita Watkins](#), M.S.W. Retrieved <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2742657/> Published online Apr 11, 2008. doi:

<sup>11</sup> [Access to Early Childhood Development Services for Homeless Families with Young Children: An Exploratory Project](#). July 2016.

Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

health outcomes, which can have lifelong effects on the child, the family, and the community.<sup>12</sup>

- Young children who experience homelessness are disproportionately more likely than their stably housed peers to experience an array of risk factors-including child maltreatment, lead toxicity, chronic health conditions, and food insecurity.<sup>13</sup>
- Students who experienced homelessness as very young children are more likely than their stably housed peers to score poorly on standardized assessments across an array of content areas including math, reading, science, and language in early elementary school<sup>1</sup>.
- Children experiencing homelessness are more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities.<sup>14</sup>
- Twenty-five percent of very young children experiencing homelessness evidenced poor social emotional development.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- Homeless children begin Head Start at age three with poorer socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development than their low-income classmates.<sup>17</sup>
- Homelessness during infancy and toddlerhood has been linked to later child welfare involvement and early school failure.<sup>18, 19</sup>
- Homelessness in early childhood is associated with poor classroom engagement and poor social skills in early elementary school.<sup>20</sup>
- Academic achievement in elementary school is slowed during periods of homelessness and housing instability.<sup>21</sup>
- The achievement gaps between homeless and low-income elementary students tend to persist, and may even worsen, over time.<sup>22</sup>

### **Homeless Children Face Barriers to Accessing Child Care and Early Learning Programs**

- Homeless families face barriers to accessing child care and other early education programs that exceed those confronted by families in poverty with stable housing even though the research tells us that they are exactly the children who could benefit most from high quality care.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sandel, M; Sheward, R; and Sturtevant, L. (2015) *Compounding Stress: The Timing and Duration Effects of Homelessness on Children's Health*. Center for Housing Policy and Children's HealthWatch. Available at [http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Compounding-Stress\\_2015.pdf](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Compounding-Stress_2015.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Perlman, S. (2015). *Access to Early Childhood Programs for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness: A Survey Report*. <http://naehcy.org/sites/default/files/pdf/naehcy-survey-report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Rafferty, Y., Shinn, M., & Weitzman, B. C. (2004). Academic achievement among formerly homeless adolescents and their continuously housed peers. *Journal of School Psychology, 42*, 179-199.

<sup>15</sup> Haskett, M. & Armstrong, J. (2013). Young children of the CATCH project. Presentation at the Growing Up Homeless series. Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>16</sup> Perlman, S. (2013). Promoting positive parenting among families experiencing homelessness. Presentation at the Growing Up Homeless series. Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, *Head Start and Housing (In)stability: Examining the School Readiness of Children Experiencing Homelessness*, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Perlman, S. & Fantuzzo, J. (2013). Predicting to placement: A population-based study of out-of-home placement, child maltreatment, and emergency housing. *Journal of the Society for Social Work Research, 4*. Retrieved from: <http://www.jsswr.org/rt/prnterFriendly/10701/0>

<sup>19</sup> Perlman, S. & Fantuzzo, J. (2010). Timing and influence of early experiences of child maltreatment and homelessness on children's educational well-being. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 874-883.

<sup>20</sup> Fantuzzo, J., LeBoeuf, W., Brumley, B., & Perlman, S. (2013). A population-based inquiry of homeless episode characteristics and early educational well-being. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(6), 966-972.

<sup>21</sup> Cutuli, J.J., Desjardins, C.D., Herbers, J.E., Long, J.D., Heistad, D., Chan, C.K., Hinz, E. & Masten, A. (2012). Academic Achievement Trajectories of Homeless and Highly Mobile Students: Resilience in the Context of Chronic and Acute Risk. *Child Development, 1-17*.

<sup>22</sup> Obradovic, J., Long, J.D., Cutuli, J.J., Chan, C.K., Hinz, E., Heistad, D. & Maston, A.S. (2009). Academic Achievement of homeless and highly mobile children in an urban school district: Longitudinal evidence on risk, growth, and resilience. *Development and Psychopathology, 21*(2), 493-518.

<sup>23</sup> McCoy-Roth, M., Mackintosh, B.B., & Murphey, D. (2013). When the bough breaks: The effects of homelessness on young children. *Early Childhood Highlights, 3*. Retrieved from: <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/2012-08EffectHomelessnessChildren.pdf>

- Barriers to accessing early learning programs include lack of documentation/enrollment requirements, high rates of mobility, lack of transportation, waitlists, and “invisibility” in communities due to unstable living situations, families’ reluctance to share information due to fear and shame about their circumstances, and lack of awareness and outreach by providers.<sup>24</sup>
- In approximately half of all states, a homeless family with no countable income would still be expected to make copayments toward child care.<sup>25</sup> Without a subsidy, average annual cost of full-time child care ranges from \$3,704 in Mississippi to \$16,430 in Massachusetts.<sup>26</sup>

A report from the Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness found the following barriers to accessing child care<sup>27</sup>:

- Mothers who have experienced homelessness are less likely to have received government subsidies for child care than those at-risk of homelessness or those with stable housing.
  - Only 32% of ever-homeless mothers received a child care subsidy, while 55% of mothers at-risk of homelessness and 36% of those stably housed received such financial assistance.
- Mothers who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have unreliable child care and are less likely to access center-based care.
  - Over a third (35%) of ever-homeless women characterized their child care as unreliable, compared with 23% of mothers at risk of homelessness and 6% of stably housed mothers.
  - Only 24% of ever-homeless mothers access center-based care, compared to 55% of mothers at-risk of homelessness. Enrollment in formal, center-based programs has been linked to improved social, cognitive, and language skills for low-income children.
- Mothers who have experienced homelessness are more likely to be forced to leave jobs or school due to lack of child care.
  - 25% of ever-homeless mothers reported quitting jobs or school due to problems with their child care, compared to 15% of mothers at-risk of homelessness and 5% of stably housed mothers.

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<sup>24</sup> National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2013. *National Survey on Early Childhood Education and Homelessness, Preliminary Findings*.

<sup>25</sup> Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, Analysis of Fiscal Years 2014-15 Child Care and Development Fund State Plans.

<sup>26</sup> Child Care Aware, *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 2013 Report*.

<sup>27</sup> Profiles of Risk, No. 7: Child Care. Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, 2012, <http://www.icphusa.org/index.asp?page=16&report=94&pg=54>