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Effects on Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Public Schools

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Effects on Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Public Schools

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A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

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Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

Winona State University
College of Education
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CAPSTONE PROJECT

Effects on Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Public Schools

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of
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Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project
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Abstract

An examination of the issues of youth who are experiencing homelessness is crucial in supporting this vulnerable population. Public schools have a responsibility to assist these students in their academic, career, and social-emotional development. With unique, personal needs, students who are homeless must be understood by school counselors and other school personnel to be appropriately supported. Homelessness can be identified through many characteristics and identified needs. It is key for school counselors to recognize these characteristics and consider the impacts that the school and resources can make on the student's life. Throughout the paper, the causes of homelessness, potential protective and risk factors, advocacy efforts, along with counseling approaches that can support this population are discussed. School counselors better understand how to effectively assist students who are experiencing homelessness by looking at internal and external conflicts, such as family concerns and substance abuse. School counselors' awareness of the varying needs and concerns of this population, including multicultural concerns, can help support homeless youth in public school systems.

Keywords: youth experiencing homelessness, homelessness, public schools, social justice, advocacy, internal and external conflicts, multicultural issues

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Effects on Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Public Schools

A rapidly growing part of the homeless population is the homeless youth in public school districts. In the 2017-2018 school year, around 1,500,000 students were identified as homeless (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2020). Although this number has dropped in recent years, there were still about 1,280,000 identified students experiencing homelessness in public schools in the 2019-2020 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, [NCHE], 2021). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021) states that this number constitutes 2.5% of all students enrolled in public school systems. Between the 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 school years, the number of students and youth experiencing homelessness decreased by 15% (NCES, 2021). Despite the recent decrease of identified homeless students, support and services to this population are necessary and lacking. Homelessness is traumatic and can have serious effects on the youth's developmental growth and mental health. Homelessness can affect a student's mental health and well-being, brain development, stress levels, and can impede school readiness (American Psychological Association [APA], 2009). Many homeless students have challenging barriers to overcome to achieve academic success and are less likely to stay engaged in school. This population may have multiple academic difficulties, including less than average reading levels, high rates of disabilities that affect learning, poor school attendance or absence, and incompleteness of grade levels or graduation (SAMHSA, 2020). Advocating for this vulnerable population is necessary to progress toward resolving youth homelessness.

Many homeless youths have limited access to resources and support, including their parental figures. Activism for more resources and supporting the needs of this group is necessary to end youth homelessness. Our society needs to assist homeless students to better their living situations and help them create more successful outcomes. To increase homeless youth's

academic success, mental well-being and developmental outcomes, advocacy practices need to be done to support the needs of this population. Our society is responsible for providing the needs of this vulnerable population—children and youth in need of safe shelters, food, and education (Rahman et al., 2015).

As a part of society, schools can support homeless youth in a variety of ways. This paper will discuss the many causes and contributions of homelessness, including family breakdown, economic considerations, poverty, physical and substance abuse, and multicultural issues. The impacts on youth experiencing homelessness, including developmental and health outcomes, effects on academics and behavior, and other associated risks will then be analyzed. In this paper, recommended school-based policies and practices to support homeless youth will also be described. Particularly, interventions and advocacy efforts that align with the role of the school counselor will be shared. These include the school counselor's role to collaborate with federal, state, and local partners and liaisons, involve the family system, and communicate and interact with stakeholders. The school counselor's competency when working with homeless youth will also be explained, along with interventions that can be utilized and their ethical obligations when supporting this vulnerable population.

Review of Literature

Youth homelessness is a serious and prevailing problem in society in the United States. Definitions of youth experiencing homelessness vary among state agencies and organizations. The lack of consistent definitions of children and youth experiencing homelessness in research can be a challenge to appropriately determining and identifying the number of individuals in this population. This can be due to unique characteristics and factors of the homeless youth

population. Research lacks clear and consistent definitions of youth and homelessness, and this variability can restrict the ability to draw conclusions about youth experiencing homelessness.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless youth and children as individuals, without a specific age range, who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including young individuals doubled up with other family members or living in hotels, motels, train stations, shelters, cars, parks, public places, abandoned buildings, or similar settings (National Clearinghouse on Homeless Youth and Families [NCHYF], 2013). Student populations included in this definition are those who are sharing housing with others due to loss of their housing and financial hardship, those who are living in vehicles, those living in public or private places not used for regular sleep accommodation, unsheltered youth, and migratory children (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). In the 2019-2020 school year, the NCHE (2021) reports that 78% of homeless students doubled-up and shared housing with others due to loss of housing, 11% of this population stayed in shelters, 7% resided in hotels or motels, and 4% were unsheltered. For this paper, the terms “youth experiencing homelessness”, “students who are homeless” and “homeless youth and children” are used interchangeably to refer to this population who need increased advocacy efforts, support, and services within society in the United States. More support is necessary for this population because there are many barriers to access of adequate and suitable services, being a particular concern for this population and may impact health (including mental health), social-emotional, and academic outcomes for the homeless youth population (Edidin et al., 2011).

Causes of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Homeless youth can range between 575,000 to 1.6 million individuals annually and generally are from ages 16 to 22 (APA, 2009). The major causes of homelessness vary for youth

and can include mental illness, substance abuse, and inability to afford housing (APA). Because homeless individuals are without a fixed residence, their residence is temporary, or not designed for human habitation (Piche et al., 2018), challenges can arise. Onset difficulties of homelessness can include physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, family conflict, economic hardships, mental health concerns, substance abuse or addiction, aging out of the foster care system and food insecurity (Piche et al.). Youth experiencing homelessness are vulnerable and can display serious life concerns in response to frequently occurring histories of trauma and adversity, lack of economic and housing resources, challenges with educational opportunities, and neurodevelopmental risk (Piche et al.).

There are other significant challenges that arise in life which could cause homelessness to occur. These factors are unique for each homeless youth and can have different impacts on the experience of homelessness. Family breakdown, including divorce or separation of parental figures, physical abuse, troublesome family relationships and instability, and parental job loss may also be contributing risk factors when it comes to youth experiencing homelessness (Edidin et al., 2011). Considering the homeless youth's reason for being homeless will be important in advocating for this population to ensure appropriate support and resources are provided. Lack of proper support can create more challenges for this population, being they could be alone; so, finding and securing needs, such as food, shelter, and other resources can be difficult.

Poverty

Access to shelter is a need that all human beings require. Yet, more than 11% of children in the U.S living in poverty are homeless (APA, 2009). Homelessness among youth in the U.S is surprising for a highly developed country. Increasing poverty is one of the strongest predictors of homelessness for families and youth, and they are often involuntarily forced to choose between

housing and other survival needs (APA). When the economy is in a crisis, spiking unemployment, increasing poverty rates, and decreasing affordable housing options are credited for the increased rates of homelessness (APA). A predominant cause of homelessness is the gap between housing costs, which are increasing substantially, and wages that are stagnant (League of Women Voters of Washington [LWVWA], 2022).

In 2019, 2020 and 2021, systemic and legislative actions were addressed to communicate homelessness and housing insecurity, including increased funding of the Housing Trust Fund and preventive programs such as rental assistance, in hopes to support this population in need (LWVWA). The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC, 2022) describes that the National Housing Trust Fund is aimed to build, restore, protect, and manage rental housing for extremely low-income people. In 2016, \$174 million dollars were allocated to states, with more being given each year. In 2021, about \$690 million was available to be allocated, but more resources are needed to protect and expand this support (NLIHC). Because housing is essential in decreasing intergenerational poverty, increasing access to affordable housing is one of the most adequate plans for reducing youth poverty and homelessness (NLIHC).

Family homelessness is connected to poverty along with lack of living wages and lack of affordable housing (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). It is important to note 70% of all extremely low-income families are markedly cost-burdened and paying more than half of their earned income on rent (NLIHC, 2022). In fact, the unavailability of housing that is affordable is a major risk factor for homelessness (APA, 2009). Cost-burdened, low-income households are more likely than other renters and homeowners to surrender other living necessities, including healthy food and healthcare, to pay the rent, and to experience unstable living situations, like evictions (NLIHC). For homeless youth, it can be a challenge to find a stable place to reside and someone

willing to rent them a living space when faced with unstable housing situations, prolonging homelessness (SAMHSA, 2020). Advocating for services and providing increased access to affordable housing to combat poverty and low-income families is pivotal when supporting homeless youth in society.

Physical and Substance Abuse

Abuse is another leading predictor of homelessness in children. Parents and stepparents who abuse substances or are physically abusive can drive youth out of their home, resulting in homelessness (APA, 2009). If abuse and violence was experienced in their home, this can create even more difficulties and challenges for homeless youth, including increased risk of psychological distress for this population (Stein et al., 2009). A study found that about 79% of youth who are homeless have experienced multiple instances of childhood abuse, including physical violence, sexual abuse, and victimization (Bender et al., 2015; Santa Maria et al., 2015). Furthermore, four out of five youth who are homeless have experienced at least one physically violent event by age 12 (SAMHSA, 2020). Drug and alcohol use by parental figures are also common reasons for youth to leave their home because of parental abandonment and neglect, violence, and sexual, physical, and mental abuse (Edidin et al., 2011) that may accompany substance use.

Stein et al. (2009) discusses that youth who left home due to the abuse and violence in the home reported increased levels of psychological distress. After experiencing physical and sexual abuse, many youths decide to become homeless to escape the encountered abuse and distress (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). There is evidence to suggest that homelessness may be a consequence of both parental figure physical and substance abuse. Services and supports are

highly needed for youth experiencing abuse, along with homeless youth who have endured abuse and left their homes as an outcome.

Family Conflict

Family life can be disruptive and troublesome, causing youth to run away from their homes. Instability and conflict within the family is another major cause of youth homelessness, with 46% of this population having experienced abuse and family disputes (APA, 2009). In highly dysfunctional family dynamics, homeless youth may be forced to leave home by being kicked out or choosing to run away to escape their challenging family life, often without a parent or guardian caring (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Family conflict can include disagreement, abuse, rejection, and inability to feel safe in the home. Providing support to youth and families experiencing conflict may decrease the number of youths who run away or are forced out of their homes.

Racial Disparities in Homeless Youth

Representation

The 2019- 2020 school year was the first time that states gathered data on race and ethnicity of students who are homeless. Though not all states recorded this information, the largest subgroups displayed were Hispanic and Latino/a students, Black students, and White students (NCHE, 2021). Students of color are more common and overrepresented among students who are homeless (NCHE). Though 28% of the overall student body are Hispanic and Latino/a, they accounted for 38% of homeless students; similarly, 15% of the overall student body in schools is African American but of the homeless youth population, 27% identify as African American (NCES, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2022) unaccompanied sheltered youth were more likely to be people of

color than all sheltered homeless individuals. Asian and White students are underrepresented in the homeless youth population, with Whites making up 46% of all students in public schools and represent 26% of identified students experiencing homeless (NCHE).

In the United States, there is a documented large and persistent overrepresentation of racial minorities, specifically African American, Native American, and Hispanic and Latino students among people who are homeless (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2015). From the 1980s to current, Jones (2016) discussed that African Americans have been consistently overrepresented in the United States homeless population. Compared to all individuals experiencing homelessness, unaccompanied youth were more likely to be African American, 43% versus 40%, or multiracial, 7% versus 4% (HUD, 2022).

Barriers

Although there is a lack of research on race and homelessness in the United States, there have been a considerable number of studies that have been conducted to gather that individuals' journeys into homelessness vary significantly among black, white, and Hispanic populations (Jones, 2016). Because racial discrimination is still present in United States society, the finding that Blacks are overrepresented in homeless shelters as compared to Whites, displays that Blacks continue to face prejudice, barriers to adequate employment, education, health care, and housing (Aviles, 2015). Research demonstrates that Blacks and Latinos/as pursuing jobs, housing options and loans are often refused, although they demonstrate similar qualifications compared to Whites (Aviles). Blacks and Latinos/as also have a higher probability to be imprisoned, live in poverty, have fewer years of school completed, and be employed in low-status jobs than Whites (Aviles). Racial and ethnic minority youth experiencing homelessness

are faced with concurrent stressors that accompany racial minority and homelessness during pivotal developmental stages (Gattis & Larson, 2016).

Intersectional Identities

In the U.S, the overrepresentation of people of color in the homeless population has significant indications for population health and health disparities (Jones, 2016). Intersectional identities, such as race and homelessness, may negatively impact individuals and their health. Weisz and Quinn (2018) conducted a study to examine a racially and ethnically diverse sample of individuals, who are homeless, to explore whether homelessness stigma and racial stigma impact psychological well-being, physical health and avoiding services. Racial minorities may avoid services due to racial stigma that they face, including negative stereotypes and treatment from individuals or entities that provide services to others (Weisz & Quinn). The study also found that the health-related effects of stigma, of both homelessness and race, suggests that poor health may negatively impact racial and ethnic minority groups, their families, and communities, along with creating barriers that prolong homelessness. This study concludes that racial disparities and intersectional identities can cause concern in health effects and homelessness longevity (Weisz & Quinn).

LGBTQ Youth and Homelessness

Sexual minority youth faced with homelessness may be burdened with stressors that come with being in a sexual minority group, along with homeless statuses and stigmas (Gattis & Larson, 2016). Youth who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender form a large percentage of youth experiencing homelessness (Muzzey et al., 2020). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) homeless youth face the battle of survival in the streets, along with the stigma of belonging to a sexual minority group community (Cochran et al., 2002). Because youth

who identify with a minority sexual orientation or gender identity are overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness (Muzzey et al.), it is crucial that the appropriate services and supports are available to this population. According to Fraser et al. (2019), LGBTQ individuals experiencing homelessness are under-explored, although this group makes up about 20–40% of the homeless population.

Family Instability and Rejection

Research demonstrates that LGBTQ youth have a 2-13 times greater likelihood of experiencing homelessness compared with their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts and they represent a significant number of youths using housing and shelter services (Coolhart & Brown, 2017). Running away from home or being kicked out due to familial rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity is the most frequent pathway for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness (Coolhart & Brown). This population has a higher likelihood to leave home due to physical abuse and conflicts with parents concerning sexual orientation (Cochran et al., 2002). Expressing gender and sexual orientation was a main cause to youth's experiences of family abuse, conflict, rejection, and homelessness for some LGBTQ youth and children (Robinson, 2018). Unsupportive environments and family rejection may cause a higher risk of homelessness in the LGBTQ youth community (Alessi et al., 2021).

Intersecting Identities

Homeless LGBTQ youth experience challenges when trying to stabilize employment and housing options due to prejudice of their intersecting homeless and sexual minority identities (Alessi et al., 2021). Youth identifying as transgender or someone who does not conform to cisgender social norms represented 4% of sheltered homeless youth (HUD, 2022). Coolhart and Brown (2017) conducted a study which demonstrated that LGBTQ youth feared mistreatment

and discrimination in shelters and other homeless services, which effects youth in finding housing options when fronted with homelessness. Particularly, transgender youth may be especially vulnerable, as transgender youth are recognized to have experienced more bullying, family rejection and conflict, and physical and sexual abuse than their LGBQ counterparts (Coolhart & Brown). Nonetheless, the number of youths who were transgender staying in shelters increased by 29% and the number of non-gender conforming youth staying in shelters increased by 26% (HUD).

Risks and Outcomes

Youth experiencing homelessness who identify within sexual minority groups may have a greater chance for negative indicators and outcomes (Cochran et al, 2002). LGBTQ homeless youth are at increased risk, compared to non-LGBTQ youth, for many experiences that can impact their physical and mental health, such as physical and sexual trauma, risky survival strategies, risky sexual behaviors, including prostitution, and substance abuse (Coolhart & Brown, 2017). According to Cochran et al. homeless youth who identify to the LGBTQ community may flee their home more frequently, were victimized more, including robbery, rape, and assault, along with more frequent use of substances. Moreover, high rates of risky sexual behavior, including prostitution, may put this population at even higher risks for victimization and sexually transmitted infections (Cochran et al.). Compared to adolescents in the general population, LGBTQ youths experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to physical health and psychological concerns, which may be due to parental physical abuse and substance use (Cochran et al.). LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness may be faced with stress and trauma related to their intersectional identities, including situations of being abused by caregivers and parents, denial of financial and emotional support, and being kicked out of their homes (Alessi et

al., 2021). This population may feel unsafe and unsupported of their identities and take needs into their own hands.

Supporting LGBTQ Homeless Youth

Indicated from the research above, it is important to examine the gaps in supports and services for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Need for increased services for housing and renting, education, employment, family support services, and LGBTQ-approved healthcare, along with increased cultural competency training and advocacy efforts are implied from the findings (Coolhart & Brown, 2017). This vulnerable population can benefit from more research in this area of housing and homelessness, in hopes to decrease the obstacles they face from intersectional identities.

Impacts on Youth Experiencing Homelessness

There are multiple impacts that homelessness can have on youth and children. The trauma of homelessness can have major effects on future development of youths, and children who experience homelessness may show higher rates of emotional, behavioral, and health problems (SAMHSA, 2020). Homeless youth are at increased risk for experiencing a range of negative outcomes, including school dropout and academic concerns, development of mental health problems, use of illicit substances, suicidality, and early mortality (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014). These youth will need support and services to overcome barriers to achieving success. Usually, parents, teachers, and other adults guide youth and adolescents in decision making and reasoning, but homeless youth often do not have access to healthy and supportive adult relationships (Edidin et al., 2011). Advocating for this population is critical, being that they may have very limited support, and these activism efforts may assist homeless youth in creating more successful outcomes.

Developmental and Health Outcomes

Homelessness has multiple effects on children and youth, that includes hunger, lower physical and mental health, and missed educational opportunities (APA, 2009). Inadequate food and nutrition can have significant health impacts during youth and adolescence, including development and reducing the effectiveness of the immune system (Lee & Greif, 2008).

Ensuring that homeless youth receive the appropriate nutrition by advocating for more resources and food programs can help with hunger in this population, and therefore, can decrease the health issues associated with homelessness. Homeless youth are twice as likely to experience food insecurity, hunger, and its effects compared to their peers who are not homeless (APA).

Along with food insecurity, exposure to traumatic experiences has significant outcomes for youths' mental health who are experiencing homelessness and creates greater risk for severe psychological problems, including suicidal ideation and stigma, and decreased overall psychological functioning (Oppong Asante et al., 2015). Depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are also more commonly displayed among youth experiencing homelessness compared to the overall population (Bender et al., 2015). Frequent victimization, depression, and PTSD symptoms, including avoiding and numbing, can cause concerns in homeless youth, which may lead to substance abuse and other avoidant behaviors, such as trusting and engaging with support systems and services (Bender et al.). Bender et al. mentions that homeless youth's social and emotional skills may lack due to inconsistent and unstable emotional relationships and interaction with others, which may lead to prolonged homelessness. This lack of social skills can lead to reduced opportunities for social success for this population (Piche et al., 2018), which may create challenges in overcoming their homeless experience.

Academics

Schooling and education can be interrupted for youth experiencing homelessness. The homeless youth student population is at a higher risk to struggle academically due to the challenges and barriers they face. Challenges with consistent educational opportunities are associated with neurodevelopmental risk in youth and adolescents experiencing homelessness (Piche et al., 2018). This population is twice as likely to have a learning disability, repeat a grade or to be suspended from school (APA, 2009). Additionally, children and youth living in stable, affordable housing have an increased likelihood to thrive in school, due to greater opportunities for learning inside and outside the classroom compared to homeless youth (NLIHC, 2022). Supporting these academic gaps that homeless youth experience is a need for this population so that they can work to up to their academic potential.

Students who are homeless may miss multiple days of school for many reasons, including poor transportation methods, constantly switching schools, low motivation, and dropping out. Students experiencing homelessness may be highly mobile, meaning they change locations frequently, and can include sleeping in different houses, cars, motels, or shelters (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Increased rates of school mobility and poor attendance correlate with poor academic achievement and creating academic gaps (Edidin et al., 2011). This poor academic achievement can be a consequence of the homeless youth's many stressful and traumatic experiences, such as parental abuse, poverty, hunger, and unstable family relationships. Rice et al. (2007) found that time away from home and homelessness can lead youth to develop anti-social behaviors, including dropping out of school and being unemployed in their future. School systems and communities need to provide homeless and runaway youth with more academic supports and services, in hopes to keep this population educated (e.g., post-secondary options) and to assist with employment in society.

Behaviors and Risk Factors

Homeless and runaway youth often display impulsive and problem behaviors, including substance abuse and a variety of delinquent, violent and sexual behaviors, along with reporting more mental distress than the general adolescent population (Stein et al., 2009). Homeless youth possess resilience, but their decision-making skills, planning, and reasoning may be vulnerable because of the experienced homelessness and impoverishment during youth and adolescence developmental stages (Piche et al., 2018). Stein et al. mentions that if the youth has been away from home for a longer period, there may be an increase in external and internal problems. Although homeless youth are more likely to report having a variety of problem behaviors, they may hold more protective skills than the general youth population (Lightfoot et al., 2011) A study that Lightfoot et al. conducted discovered that homeless youth with higher problem-solving abilities and planning skills had lower levels of problem behaviors, and they suggest that the preexisting personal assets of these youth and the preformed essential interventions for this population had a positive impact on their resilience and therefore decrease problem behaviors. Both protective skills and risk factors can impact youth who are experiencing homelessness and their behaviors.

Violence and Deviant Behaviors. External problem behaviors and an increased dangerous and delinquent way of living can accompany the homeless youth population (Stein et al., 2009). Heerde et al. (2013) also explain that homeless youth report experiencing a variety of physically violent behaviors, including assault, fights, and robbery, along being victims of assault and robbery. Many youths experiencing homeless are thrust into a deviant culture when they are living on the streets, including engagement in criminal activity, which may be associated with survival methods, such as an exchange for food, protection, or income, and these behaviors

may increase as they are on the streets longer (Stein et al.). Violence and aggressive behaviors may also be displayed in this population for intimidation purposes and to dominate others and seem acceptable in the deviant street culture (Oppong Asante et al., 2015). Examining how homelessness impacts youth participation in violence and how their experience of victimization relates to behaviors is an important supporting their behavioral concerns, along with providing prevention and interventions strategies to promote safety and wellbeing for this population.

Substance Use. Halcon and Lifson (2004) found that youth experiencing homeless have an increased rate of drug use compared to the general youth population. Causes for youth experiencing homelessness to use more substances include having lower capacity for behavioral skills, like impulse control and the ability to regulate emotions (Piche et al., 2018). Homeless youth's decision-making skills, inhibition, and reasoning may be impacted during youth and adolescence and may cause an increased chance of substance use (Piche et al., 2018).

Bullying can also play a major role in homeless youth substance use and abuse. Although bullying rates in the general youth population are high, there is increased prevalence among certain subgroups, specifically youth experiencing homelessness and sexual minority homeless youth (Tyler & Schmitz, 2021). Enduring bullying can lead to mental health concerns, victimization, and substance abuse among homeless youth, whether they are being bullied at school or on the streets among other homeless youth (Tyler & Schmitz). Substance abuse is a presenting concern that needs to be addressed to decrease prolonged homelessness and promote health and wellbeing among this population.

Sexual Risks. Time away from home had effects on increased sexual risk behaviors in the homeless youth population, which may be caused in efforts to support themselves financially in addition to their part in deviant cultures (Rice et al., 2007). Engaging in risky sexual behavior,

caused by coping with stress and stigma, can generate participation in trade sex, voluntarily or involuntarily, for needs such as money and shelter (Santa Maria et al., 2015). Oppong Asante et al. (2015) discusses that engaging in sexual risky behaviors are mainly due to survival strategies. Youth in this population may struggle to meet their needs, which can lead to behaviors and situations associated with sexual risks, including HIV (Santa Maria et al., 2015). Harassment, coercion, and rape are evident among homeless youth, also making them victims to sexual risks (Oppong Asante et al., 2015). These behaviors and risks have been found to be more common and longer lasting in homeless youth than compared to housed youths (Piche et al., 2018).

Piche et al. (2018) explains that youth homelessness can also cause an increased tendency to engage in risky behaviors, such as unprotected sexual activity, influenced by negative and impoverished environmental factors, adversity, poverty, trauma, and brain development leading to reduced control and self-regulation. Impoverished environments, such as accessible economic and housing resources and supports, increased likelihood of trauma and sex risk behaviors (Piche et al.). Engaging in unprotected sex and having multiple sexual partners is also associated with survival sex strategies (Oppong et al., 2015). Because sexual risky behaviors and unprotected sex are increased among homeless youth, pregnancy rates are considerably higher than in the general youth population (Tucker et al., 2012).

Youth and adolescents who live with family or in supervised institutional settings receive more social support compared to those living in nonfamily settings, which may influence sexual risk behaviors (Solorio et al., 2008). Stein et al. (2009) also found that youth living away from family are at an increased risk for involvement in risky sexual behaviors and cultures. Lack of family support and supervision impact participation and victimization of sexual behaviors, being an issue that needs to be examined when supporting this population.

Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness

To end youth homelessness in the school system, we must strengthen our advocacy and activism efforts for this population. Focusing advocacy efforts on housing needs, poverty, abuse, mental health, and family conflict can help decrease the youth homeless population. Looking at risk and protective factors that contribute to youth homelessness is crucial when supporting this vulnerable population. Focusing on the unique needs of homeless youth will be a key step in advocating for this group. Effectively interacting with youth at risk for homelessness or who are already homeless and connecting with them to get a deeper understanding of their situation is necessary to support their varying needs.

Collaboration

We can prevent youth from becoming homeless by working with families who are at risk of homelessness stemming from conflict, abuse, or economic considerations. Counselors are in a position to act early when youth become homeless and work toward family reconciliation, when safe and appropriate (U.S Interagency Council on Homelessness [USICH], 2015). Advocacy strategies should focus on strengthening family or other supportive relationships if they can benefit the youth at risk. Family-focused advocacy efforts may help youth homelessness, but ending homelessness for youth requires more interventions, short and long term. Homeless youth need multiple levels of support and services because of their unique and varying needs. Collaboration across federal, state, and local agencies to create partnerships is needed to fund solutions and programs for this population (USICH). To meet all the unique needs of homeless youth, we must create and implement advocacy efforts in every community across the U.S.

Collaboration is an important step in advocacy efforts. Collaborating with homeless liaisons to clarify students' needs, apply school policies to promote positive school environment and connect with community agencies that support homelessness is an important step in this process (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). According to the Administration for Children & Families (ACF, 2012), working to build strong and collaborative relationships with the local homeless liaison or social workers so school counselors and school-based mental health workers feel comfortable referring students is another necessary advocacy effort. This collaboration is a major key in successful advocacy for this population.

Family involvement has positive benefits for students in school and for homeless youth as well. This involvement can be strengthened by improving communications skills between the homeless youth and parental figures (Fisher & Kennedy, 2017). Collaborating with the homeless youth's parents and the youth themselves may reconcile the family relationship and improve communication skills. Fisher and Kennedy explain that if a homeless youth has experience of abuse in their home, advocacy efforts can include consulting with social service personnel who provide services for homeless youth to ensure that the student will not be in a dangerous situation with parents or parental figures.

Family-focused advocacy efforts may help youth homelessness, but ending homelessness for youth requires more interventions, including individual counseling and building systems of support. Homeless youth need multiple levels of support and services because of the unique and varying needs. Collaboration across federal, state, and local partners is needed to fund solutions and programs for this population (USICH, 2015). To meet all the unique needs of homeless youth, we must create and implement advocacy efforts in every community across the U.S.

School Counselor's Role

School counselors communicate and interact with the community stakeholders to connect students and families experiencing homelessness to outside supports, assist them in removing academic barriers and apply prevention and intervention programs for youth experiencing homelessness (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2018). School counselors collaborate with students, caretakers, and stakeholders to overcome the challenges to school, career and social success among youth experiencing homelessness (ASCA). School counselors can also provide systems of supports and connections within the school system and in the community for both students and their families through collaboration with others.

School Counselor Competency

Homeless youth experience trauma that affects their lives. Trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and developmentally appropriate interventions are crucial in advocacy efforts for this population (USICH, 2015). Being culturally competent and informed on the effects of trauma is an important aspect when supporting this vulnerable population and can ensure appropriate types of assistance are provided. To ensure that appropriate support is provided, counselors must ensure that needs assessments include the unique needs and circumstances of homeless youth (USICH).

It is also important for school counselors to be aware of the rights of homeless youth. The McKinney-Vento Act is a federal law that gives students the right to go to school even when they are homeless and do not have a permanent address (ACF, 2012). The Act's aim is to mitigate gaps that have prevented homeless youth from attending and succeeding in school, including transportation, residency requirements, and documentation requirements, such as a birth certificate (AFC). Informing students who are homeless about this law and the rights that they have can be included in advocacy efforts for this population. Many homeless youths may

not know their options and rights as a student, so notifying this population of their rights may create more successful academic, career, and social-emotional outcomes.

Ethical Obligations

It is a school counselor's role to assess and identify students who may be homeless. Being aware of these youth and assisting them with their needs can help counselors advocate for all students. Communicating with parents, guardians, the school, and community resources is needed to decrease the barriers and gaps related to enrollment, academic success, and suitable educational placement. They can also organize adequate support and connect students to appropriate referrals and services (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2018). As mentioned, the McKinney-Vento Act includes the removal of institutional barriers in school systems, such as transportation, requirements of immunization and physical examination, requirements of residency and birth certificate, and lack of school transcripts disrupting families who are homeless and their ability to put their children in school (ASCA, 2018). School counselors are advocates and a support system for students from all backgrounds and circumstances and should be respectful, treat others with dignity and provide access to a school counseling program that affirms all students from diverse backgrounds, including the homeless youth population (ASCA, 2016).

Being educated on how oppression and privilege based on living situations like homelessness can affect youth and community stakeholders is a school counselor's duty (ASCA, 2016). School counselors as advocates support students from all backgrounds and collaborate with other supports and professionals when their personal competency needs additional assistance (ASCA). Expanding multicultural and social-justice awareness and skills to be effective and culturally competent when working with diverse populations is also an ethical

obligation of a school counselor (ASCA). It is important to be knowledgeable on how to assist homeless youth and provide appropriate support services and resources based on personal, academic, and social/emotional needs, adhering to legal and ethical codes, including the McKinney-Vento Act and homeless students' rights (ASCA, 2018).

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Because homeless youth are at increased risk for experiencing a variety of negative life outcomes, such as academic gaps, developmental and health problems, substance abuse, problem behaviors, and risks, effective intervention practices and mental health supports are needed to help address their complex needs that are frequently unrecognized and untreated. Homeless youth needs are unique, and prevention and treatment strategies may be more effective with targeted and flexible approaches (Wang et al., 2019).

Opportunely, because many homeless youths, especially those in their younger years and those who are part of a homeless family, normally attend school, it is important that members of school communities and school mental health workers implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to meet the needs of these students (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014).

Comprehensive, targeted, and integrated assessments and interventions are necessary for this vulnerable population (Halcon & Lifson, 2004; Sulkowski & Michael). Removing barriers to academic achievement and utilizing prevention and intervention services for youth experiencing homelessness is essential in reducing this population (ASCA, 2018). Discussed below are the MTSS that students experiencing homelessness may benefit from and can assist with mitigating this societal concern.

Tier 1

More holistic interventions to promote the health and wellbeing of youth experiencing homelessness are needed. Tier 1 interventions can include Positive Behavior Instruction Supports (PBIS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), trauma informed practices, and racial equality and social justice, which should be integrated into schoolwide settings, such as curriculum and classroom lessons. These interventions should be included in core classroom instruction and act as a standard for all students. Tier 1 practices can help build positive relationships with all students and is a progressive response to problem behaviors, including those that homeless youth engage in.

Tier 2

Because many homeless youths portray mental health concerns and have experienced trauma, MTSS delivery for this population may need to include more intensive assessment and intervention services, with school mental health workers ensuring that these students are offered with the supports and resources they individually need (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014). These intervention practices should focus on presenting concerns among this population, including academics, substance use, sexual risks, and provide access to mental health services (Oppong Asante et al., 2015). Because Tier 2 interventions are more targeted, initiating small group and individual counseling can be effective with this service delivery method. Small groups may be particularly beneficial to the homeless youth population to help build peer relationships and support, share experiences, help them realize they are not alone, and to try to mitigate the stigma. Identifying a mentor for homeless youth can also help them build more trusting relationships and create more connections within the school system (Every Day Counts [EDC], n.d.).

An effective Tier 2 intervention is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), provided in individual or group counseling, for assessing psychological concerns, such as depression, substance abuse, and severe mental illness (Wang et al., 2019), which homeless youth commonly display. Wang et al. suggests family-based therapy for family conflict and substance abuse, which can be associated with homelessness; school counselors may make these referrals, which may be an efficient Tier 2 intervention for the homeless youth population. Assisting students to find and obtain access to housing programs for housing security would also fall under this intervention delivery method. Mitigating transportation barriers and providing these students access to services is also an effective intervention with homeless youth (EDC, n.d.).

Tier 3

More intensive care and supports are utilized in Tier 3 interventions. Connecting with students and families on an individualized approach to provide a variety of supports, including funding, plans for transportation, and supplying them with homeless liaisons, who may also assist with medical, dental, and other health services, is a Tier 3 intervention that should be utilized in school systems (EDC, n.d.). These interventions often require legal intervention, along with referrals to outside and community resources that support homeless youth (EDC). Intensive and individualized intervention strategies are needed to support and serve this vulnerable population.

Applications to School Counseling

It is important for school counselors to intervene directly with this population in practice and will need to support their varying and unique needs. School counselors can be a voice in supporting this group by advocating and collaborating with others to problem solve the issues they face in their schools and communities. Communicating with a local homeless liaison or

school social worker, other school staff, parents, and the homeless youth may help school counselors get a better understanding of the needs of this vulnerable population. To effectively advocate for this group, more research will need to be completed to gather more relevant information on homeless youth and contributing risk factors. The implementation of advocacy for this population can create a major change in the school systems when collaboration, communication and tiered systems of support are utilized in public school systems.

Discussion

More research is needed to provide more necessary support, resources, and adequate services to youth and adolescents experiencing homelessness. Examining presenting causes, potential protective and risk factors, and impacts of youth homelessness, with a focus on their unique and identified needs can help with the implementation of strategies and interventions to support this population. Advocacy efforts, along with counseling approaches, can support this group's needs. Investigating the internal and external conflicts, such as family concerns, physical and substance abuse, and poverty, and racial disparities can help school counselors effectively assist students experiencing homelessness. School counselor awareness of the varying needs and concerns of this population, including academic gaps, developmental and health outcomes, and behavioral risks, can help support homelessness in public school systems.

Homeless youth are a vulnerable population whose needs are varying and require the attention of school personnel. A school counselor's job is to support the ever-changing needs of all students, including those who face homelessness. Collaboration is the most important part in advocating for this population to assess the needs of these students. Counselors can collaborate with the district's homeless liaison, parents and guardians, and other school support staff that can provide services to this population. Advocating not only locally, but at the state and federal level

will be pivotal in this process, being that local funding cannot only support the systemic needs of the homeless youth population. Being culturally competent and having experience with informed trauma approaches and interventions will be helpful in supporting this population and understanding the barriers that they face and how to assist them after experiencing traumatic experiences. Lastly, being informed on laws and ethics regarding homeless youth, including the McKinney-Vento Act, can majorly impact advocacy and support services for this population in the school system. Informing homeless students of their own rights may change their academic achievement, increase their mental and physical health outcomes, impact positive behaviors, and create more successful outcomes.

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Appendix A

Resources and Supports for Youth Experiencing Homelessness

For essential services, referrals, and resources in your community: Call 211 or visit

<https://www.211.org>

Federal Resources:

Department of education releases guidance on homeless children and youth. (2016).

<https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/education-department-releases-guidance-homeless-children-and-youth>

McKinney-Vento education for homeless children and youths program:

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/index.html>

Street outreach program: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/fysb/fact-sheet/street-outreach-program-fact-sheet>

Transitional living program for homeless youth: <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/619>

Youth homelessness: <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-youth/>

Minnesota Resources:

Housing and homelessness: program overviews. <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/housing-and-homelessness/>

Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota: <https://www.lssmn.org>

Rochester MN Youth Resource Center: <https://rochestermnyouth.org/link-services/>

Winona County Community Resource Guide:

<https://www.co.winona.mn.us/DocumentCenter/View/1721/Community-Resources-Brochure-PDF>