The Health of Homeless Children

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IT IS ESTIMATED THAT FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN ACCOUNT FOR 45% OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION.

“RELATIVE CHILD POVERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH HEALTH, AND, IN PARTICULAR, THE HEALTH OF NATIONS.”

Figure. Relationship Between Relative Child Poverty and Under Age 5 Mortality in High-Income OECD Countries
“INCREASED RATES OF CHILD POVERTY HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH WORSE HEALTH OUTCOME:

... Poorer overall child well-being, infant mortality, low birth weight, not having immunizations, child mortality due to unintentional injuries, juvenile homicide, low educational attainment, dropping out of school, nonparticipation in higher education, aspiring to low skill work, poor peer relations, having been bullied, teenage birth rate, physical inactivity, childhood obesity, not eating breakfast, feeling lonely, and mental health problems...

“HOMELESS CHILDREN ARE NOT SIMPLY AT-RISK, MOST SUFFER SPECIFIC PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND EMOTIONAL DAMAGE.”

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Illness each month
Extended care post-birth
Chronic problems
Infectious disease
Respiratory infections
Hospitalized Asthma
Stunted growth
Anemia

Increased likelihood in homeless children.

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EXPOSURE TO POVERTY (LOW SES) AS A CHILD IS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED MORTALITY & MORBIDITY IN ADULTHOOD.

Access to healthcare, particularly preventive healthcare, is impaired for homeless families and children.

Consequences of Lack of Access to Care

• Health is a low priority when focused on food and shelter
• Frequent relocation results in lack of a health home.
• Acute problems = trips to the ER or clinics
  - Episodic and fragmented care
Consequences of Lack of Access to Care

- Continuity of care is rarely comprehensive or nonexistent
- High rates on under immunization
- High rates of unmet health needs
THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS FROM BIRTH THROUGH SCHOOL AGED
Before Birth

• Majority of homeless parents are single mothers, many of whom were homeless as children.

• Many obstacles to healthy pregnancies
  • Substance abuse
  • Chronic and acute health problems
  • Lack of prenatal care
Infants

- More likely to have low birth weight
- At greater risk of death
- Exposed to environmental factors that endanger health
- Lack essential immunizations
- Attachment disorders
Toddlers

• Significant developmental delays after 18 months
  - Influences later behavior
  - Causes emotional problems
Preschoolers

- Often homeless children are separated from their parents causing long term negative effects
- Receive fewer services than other children their age
School Aged

• Affects social, physical and academic lives
  - Frequent relocation: Lack of relationship building
  - Intermittent, perhaps prolonged, bought of not going to school
  - Health and psychological problems continued from early childhood
“WITH EARLY AND CONSISTENT INTERVENTION, CHILDREN CAN OVERCOME MANY OF THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS.”

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Support Services Should Treat the Family

• Should receive at least the following services:
  - Long-term supportive housing
  - Drug/Alcohol treatment for the parent, if applicable
  - Parenting education
  - After school tutoring for child