The Cycle of Homelessness: The Link between Homelessness and Foster Care

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Cycle of Family Homelessness & Link to Foster Care

- Risk of homelessness when aging-out of foster care
- Birth parent and child(ren) at-risk of homelessness
- Parent w/histories of trauma, substance abuse or mental illness
- Child is in foster care and at risk for homelessness
- Child of homeless family is placed into foster care/group home

The diagram illustrates the cyclical nature of family homelessness and its link to foster care.
Birth Parents and Risk of Homelessness

Birth parent and child(ren) at-risk of homelessness

- Histories of abuse (physical and sexual)
- Histories of poverty, transiency, and/or homelessness as children
Birth Parents and Their Histories

Homeless Adults with Histories of Childhood Foster Care and Out of Home Placements

- Susser et al., 1991: 24.9%
- Piliavin et al., 1993: 38.6%
- Koegel, Melamid & Burman, 1995: 10.2%
- Bassuk et al., 1997: 19.6%
- Zlotnick, Robertson & Wright, 1999: 32.9%
- Burt et al., 1999: 27.0%
Parents’ Risks for Family Homelessness

Trauma, substance abuse and mental illness are all related to one another, and all three are related to having a child in foster care among homeless mothers.
Foster Care/Homeless Children

• Approximately 24-26% of homeless mothers have children in foster care. This prevalence rate suggests that childhood foster care is 34 times higher in homeless children compared to same-aged U.S. children.

• Homelessness is a stronger predictor of a child in an out of home placement than substance abuse or other problems.
Foster Care, Homeless, Runaway Youth

Child is in foster care and at risk for homelessness

In a national sample, 11.1% of a shelter sample and 33.6% of a street sample had lived in foster care. Similarly, 12.0% of a shelter sample and 31.9% of a street sample had lived in group homes.
Major Concern - Disparities

- Disproportionately higher prevalence rates of homelessness in families who self-identify as ethnic/racial minorities.

- Disproportionately lower prevalence rate of foster care placement for children who are identified as white than for children of color.

- Disproportionately higher prevalence rate of reunification after foster care placement among parents who are white than parents of color.
A Framework to Consider

Precepts of Life Course Epidemiology

- Some childhood events are related to adulthood sequellae.
- There are critical periods in life when an event has a greater impact.
- Intergenerational transmission of risk from childhood to adulthood is possible.
Association/Link versus Causality

CAUTION
DO NOT Make Assumptions About Causality!

• The cycle illustrates associations or links **NOT** causality.

• Children in foster care or homelessness are **NOT** doomed to have problems – however, they do have a greater odds of experiencing the problems found in the cycle.
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