

“We’re Locking the Door”: Family Histories in a Sample of Homeless Youth

What you need to know

Our society often stresses personal success, often unrealistic standards of achievement, and little tolerance for those who fail to measure up. This emphasis on individual responsibility ignores the structural forces that shape the lives of vulnerable populations. Childhood abuse, family conflict, mental health and addictions are the forces that can have an influence on the lives of youth. Still, homeless youth are largely considered, by mainstream society, to be responsible for their misfortunes.

What is this research about?

This research is about the impact that family and caregivers have on youth who may be at risk of becoming homeless. It studies the social and cultural environments that shape the way children are raised in Western society. This research explores the negative effects that strict discipline, neglect, and punishment by parents and other caregivers can have on youth, and how this style of parenting can force youth from the home and on to the streets.



KEYWORDS

family, youth homelessness, relationships, abuse

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ARTICLE SOURCE

The article “We’re Locking The Door”: Family Histories in a Sample of Homeless Youth by Alvi, Shahid; Scott, Hannah and Stanyon, Wendy was published in The Qualitative Report, 15(42): 1209-1226, in 2010.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers collected data from interviews held with 15 homeless males and females between the ages of 16 to 24 in suburban Southern Ontario. They prepared thirty-five interview questions, and student nurses conducted the interviews with the homeless youth participants. The researchers relied on the expertise of shelter staff to help locate the homeless youth participants, as their whereabouts were often difficult to find.



What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that negative relationships between parents or caregivers, and youth, can often be a reason for youth to leave the family home.

Strict parenting was a common theme in the lives of the youth interviewed and this type of parenting often led to negative

"Many of the homeless youth experienced parental neglect and rejection, and there were often few alternatives for shelter, care and support."

outcomes. The researchers found that, in many cases, the parents expected the participants to take care of themselves. The researchers also found that the participants were expected to take care of their parents, as many of them were unable to cope with their

own struggles with substance abuse, mental health issues, and physical and mental abuse. The researchers found that many of the homeless youth experienced

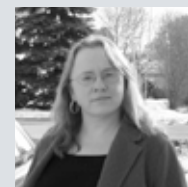
parental neglect and rejection, and there were often few alternatives for shelter, care and support. What was extremely

clear in the study was the amount of participants who reported being held to high standards of behaviour regardless of their dysfunctional family settings. The participants reported that they were often forced from their home when they failed to live up to their parents' high expectations.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used to advocate for policies that aim to intervene with struggling families to help lessen and resolve ongoing difficulties. The researcher also suggests helping families reunite, provided the youth is not returning to an abusive home. Service providers can use this research to gather information on family abuse, strict parenting and rejection to develop services geared towards this vulnerable group of youth. This research can also be used to change a common misconception that youth homelessness is a result of the combination of lazy youth who do not want to work, and lenient parents who have lost the upper hand in their relationships with their children.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS



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