A Framework for Developing Supports and Services for
Families Experiencing Homelessness

What is this research about?

The researchers found that without services, many families can either become homeless or fall back into homelessness after securing housing. Services that deal with trauma may be better at addressing the needs of homeless families, since most homeless children have experienced at least one seriously violent event in their lives. The children of abusive families tend to have more emotional and behavioural problems than those that have not experienced abuse. The researchers found that services that aim to keep families together and reunite them if separated, especially during stressful times, can help to curb the cycle of homelessness.

What you need to know

One out of fifty children experiences homelessness at some point in their lives and the numbers are growing. Along with the loss of a home, safety, wellbeing and the satisfaction of supporting oneself are lost when one becomes homeless. Single mother households are the poorest of all families and they make up the majority of homeless families. Most homeless mothers have been sexually or physically abused at some point in their lives and half of them experienced this abuse in childhood. Keeping the family together, while experiencing homelessness, is difficult because of a lack of services geared towards the needs of homeless families. Family separation can lead to child foster care, making the child more likely to become homeless later in life and at an earlier age than one who has not experienced foster care.

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KEYWORDS
Homelessness, families and children, support networks, systems of care, housing and supports

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Ellen L. Bassuk, Katherine T. Volk & Jeffrey Olivet (2010). A Framework for Developing Supports and Services for Families Experiencing Homelessness. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, 3, 34-40.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers studied data and information on family needs to create a three-stage system that describes the needs of all families, whether homeless or not. *Tier 1* represents the needs of all families and includes housing, jobs, health care, transportation, day care, school and safe environments. *Tier 2* represents the services of *Tier 1* plus additional services that are used by homeless families such as child services, education and employment services, and services for traumatic stress and mental health. *Tier 3* services are more in-depth, lifelong and provide support around family wellbeing and housing.

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Dr. Ellen L. Bassuk is the Managing Director of the Center for Social Innovation in Needham, MA. Her interests include poverty, trauma, mental illness and ending homelessness. She is Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School and the founder and president of The National Centre on Family Homelessness.

This research can be used to prove that more services are needed to meet the needs of homeless families since current homeless services focus mostly on helping single adults. Also, work needs to be done that defines the type, length and intensity of services available to homeless families. This research highlights the complexity of homelessness and proves that services need to be tailored to each family on a case-by-case basis.