

RESILIENT OUTCOMES:

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT BY YOUTH WITH HISTORIES OF HOMELESSNESS

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What do you need to know?

Many homeless youth do not have a high school diploma for a variety of reasons, such as frequent moves between home and school, significant life stress, and a lack of family support. Without a basic education, homeless youth are at risk of limited employment opportunities and poverty during their adult lives. Yet despite experiencing homelessness, some youth are able to continue participating in school, demonstrating resilience. Educational resilience refers to continuing education despite adverse circumstances, such as homelessness.

What did the researchers do?

This research examines factors that promote school participation among youth with histories of homelessness. Youth who were initially homeless were invited to participate in two interviews over two years. At the beginning of the study, all youth were homeless. Educational resilience was measured by participation in school. Based on existing research in the fields of resilience, high school

dropout, and youth homelessness, factors examined to predict resilience at follow-up were: duration of homelessness, empowerment, coping, gender (as research has shown some sub-populations of males to be at particular risk of school dropout), a positive mentor, size of and satisfaction with social network, use of community services, and rehousing.

WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?



This chapter draws on findings from a larger research initiative called the Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa. This research examines pathways in and out of homelessness by following participants for two years in Ottawa. This chapter is based on data from youth participants, aged 16-19, and examines the factors that promote school attendance among homeless youth. The research uses an ecological model, examining factors that contribute to educational resilience in individual, social and community contexts.

ARTICLE SOURCE

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What did the researchers find?

Similar to other research, youth participants in this study had high rates of school dropout. At the time of the second interview, only 9% had completed high school or received a general equivalency diploma (GED), and 6% had some post-secondary education. The majority (53%) reported grade nine and ten to be the highest level of education obtained. In addition, at time two 79.3% were living in stable housing, defined as living in the same residence for 90 days or longer. The key factors of academic resilience were duration of re-housing and gender. Youth who were housed for longer periods of time were more likely to be in school at time two, as being homeless clearly makes school attendance difficult. Females were also twice as likely as males to be in school at time two. Finally, change in satisfaction with social support was also found to be a significant predictor examined, with youth not in school at time two reporting an increase in satisfaction.

How can you use this research?

“The key factors most strongly related to academic engagement were re-housing and gender.”

As education is pivotal to the long-term ability of youth to secure meaningful employment and escape poverty, this research can be used to inform program directors and policy makers of the supports that are necessary to foster educational resilience in homeless youth. The importance of addressing homelessness in a holistic manner and providing stable housing to support the educational engagement of homeless youth was underscored in this research. This research supports advocacy for national legislation similar to that in the United

States. The USA’s McKinney Vento Act has programming dedicated to the education of homeless youth, which includes consideration of barriers that make educational participation difficult. Educators must become aware of the complex issue of youth homelessness so that early interventions can be made. Finally, this research can be used as an example of an ecological model that investigates factors at different levels, and which supports the facilitation of educational resilience among youth who have experienced homelessness.

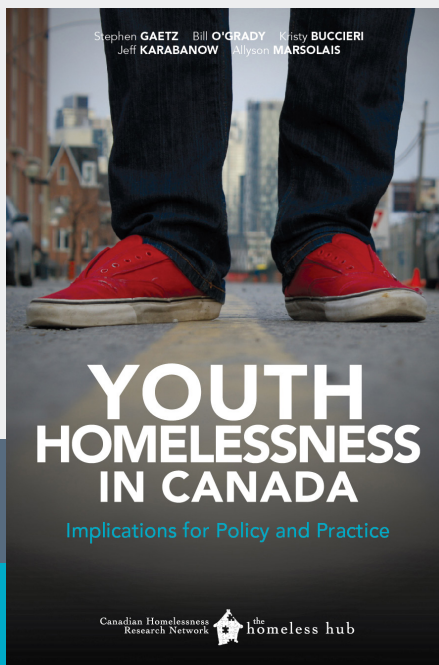
About the researchers

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