

Measuring quality of life for adults and youth experiencing homelessness

What is this research about?

Those who are experiencing homelessness have different needs, and understanding of their needs, than people who are housed. Perceptions of homelessness are often based on stereotypes. This can be difficult for both adults and youth who are attempting to overcome difficult situations, with little support and lots of resistance.

Quality of life measures attempt to understand self-perceptions of wellbeing. In order to understand how quality of life can be improved, it is important to understand the different themes that are highlighted by individuals in similar circumstances.



What you need to know:

Youth and adults who are experiencing homelessness connected quality of life to feelings of respect and acceptance. Those experiencing homelessness frequently do not feel like they have full citizenship within society. This is partly due to media and advertising portrayals that reproduce negative stereotypes of homelessness.

The Canadian Homeless Research Network (CHRN) has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization (KMb)** Unit at York University to produce Research Summaries on the topic of Youth Homelessness in Canada. The CHRN focuses on education, networking and knowledge mobilization in order to move towards effective long-term solutions to homelessness.

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adult homelessness, youth homelessness, quality of life, hard-to-house, stereotypes, access to services

Image by Dan Cronin

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What did the researchers do?

A total of 140 people were chosen from agencies in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver. Participants were aged between 15 and 73. Participants took part in a 45-90 minute focus group each with 3 - 8 other people. Out of the 140 participants, 48 youth were from the Montreal street youth cohort.

Each group was asked to write down anything that was important to their quality of life. This was done to attempt to see common themes between the groups. These themes were used to create a measure for quality of life for people who are marginally housed or experiencing homelessness.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Dr. Anita Palepu is a Professor of Internal Medicine at UBC. Dr. Palepu conducts research her research at the Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcome Sciences, with a focus on urban health and homelessness.

Dr. Anita Hubley is a counselling psychology affiliate at UBC and the director of the adult development and psychometrics lab.

Dr. Anne Gadermann is a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Health Evaluation & Outcome Sciences at St Paul's Hospital, Department of Medicine at UBC.

Mary Chinni is a research assistant with the health and housing in transition study at UBC.

What did the researchers find?

Six major themes emerged that affect quality of life.

- Access to mental health, fitness and addictions programs.
- Living conditions within homeless shelters or quality of housing.
- Having enough money to survive.
- Relationships with family and friends.
- Stable employment, which was harder to gain due to stigma.
- Activities that provided a break from street life. This includes watching T.V., listening to music, travelling or reading.



Youth and adults reflected on feelings of exclusion as a result of the reproduction of stereotypes, sometimes by the same agencies providing services. Exclusion and stigma led to a feeling that they lacked full citizenship within society. Youth found personal growth was important to their quality of life. Participants wanted to feel respected and recognized by others.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

In order to design programs that are meant to benefit street involved youth and homeless adults, it is important to understand their specific needs. This means designing programs that address the factors that affect their quality of life.

Ads and fundraising campaigns can use imagery that is hurtful to people who are homeless. Prior to posting ad campaigns, agencies should make sure they are not recreating stereotypes.

In addition to clean, safe, private and secure housing, funding should be made available for programs that provide access to recreational programs. The goal of these programs should be to provide a break from street life.