

RESEARCH BRIEF

Emergency Housing, Transitional Housing, and Child Welfare in the Twin-Cities Metro

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Experiences of homelessness and child welfare involvement increase the likelihood of difficulties in school. Understanding how children engage with social systems may help policy makers understand how to invest funding and intervene with children most at risk. This study examines the temporal relation between emergency housing or transitional housing use and child welfare involvement among school aged children.

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to provide a population level understanding of how emergency/transitional housing use and child protective service (CPS) involvement are related for children living in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. We aim to identify where to best invest efforts to mitigate risk for children's involvement with both systems and reduce risk for poor school attendance and high school mobility. Homelessness and CPS involvement have both independently been related to attendance and school mobility difficulties for children (Eckenrode et al., 1995; Manfra, 2019; Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2010). Experiences of both for one child may represent a compounded risk for reduced attendance and higher school mobility.

Experiences of homelessness increase the likelihood of CPS involvement, and vice-versa (Culhane et al., 2003; Foust et al., 2019; Rodriguez & Shinn, 2016). According to the Administration for Children and Families roughly 10% (~ 27,000) of children entering foster care nationally in 2015 were removed from their families at least in part due to inadequate housing (2016). Identifying how these experiences are temporally related may represent an opportunity for intervention efforts. If we are able to identify when families come into contact with social services, we may be able to better serve families for lower costs.

Research questions:

- 1. Is there an increased risk for child protective service involvement among children who have also used emergency/transitional housing compared to demographically similar children without this experience?*
- 2. Are experiences of emergency/transitional housing and CPS related to proportional decreases in child attendance and increased school mobility?*
- 3. Does CPS involvement occur most frequently before, concurrently, or after experiences of emergency/transitional housing?*



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ACCORDING TO THE ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ROUGHLY 10% (~ 27,000) OF CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE NATIONALLY IN 2015 WERE REMOVED FROM THEIR FAMILIES AT LEAST IN PART DUE TO INADEQUATE HOUSING (2016).
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METHODS

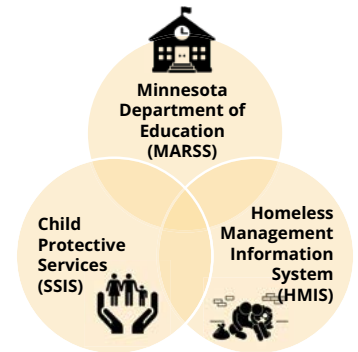
Using Minn-LInK, we identified 3,278 children aged 4-18 years who used emergency or transitional housing in Minneapolis or St. Paul during the 2014 and 2015 academic years. A comparison group of 2,613 children who did not use emergency or transitional housing was also created. We evaluated CPS involvement, school attendance, and school mobility across these groups.

Using Minn-LInK, we identified 3,278 children aged 4-8 years who used emergency or transitional housing in Minneapolis or St. Paul during the 2014 and 2015 academic years. A comparison group of 2,613 children who did not use emergency or transitional housing was created to mirror the characteristics of children who used emergency or transitional housing. The comparison group was matched on child age, sex, race, free/reduced lunch status, homeless and highly mobile school indicator status, child protection involvement before the start of the study, emergency or transitional housing use before the start of the study, and attendance at the same school.

Records from all accepted CPS cases as well as child attendance, and child school mobility from the year they first experienced emergency or transitional housing were integrated for both groups of children (Figure 1).

Descriptive statistics were used to examine type and length of emergency and transitional housing use as well as child protective service involvement. Logistic regression and generalized estimating equations were used to identify how emergency or transitional housing was related to child protective service involvement, children's school attendance, and child school mobility.

Figure 1: Data Integration



FINDINGS

Children who experienced both emergency or transitional housing and CPS attended 6% fewer days of school, and were 1.5 times more likely to move schools in a year compared to children that experienced neither.

CHILDREN'S CHARACTERISTICS AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSES

Children in the study were 9.6 years old on average, 50% female, and disproportionately Black — 73.3% of children in the current study were Black compared to 12.4% of the general population of Minneapolis and St. Paul Schools. This suggests that Black children used emergency/transitional housing disproportionately to that of their peers (Table 1). Of all school aged children who experienced emergency/transitional housing (n=3,278), 68% (n=2,241) used it once in the study time frame, 20% (n=649) used it twice, and 12% (n=388) used it three or more times. The average length of a single stay was 51.21 days with a mode of one day (n=824 instances). This suggests that most families using emergency/transitional housing services did so for a single night and only once. Of the children who experienced CPS involvement, the majority (74%) experienced it once (n=960), followed by two instances (19%, n=254), and then three or more (7%, n=92) during the study time frame.

Table 1. Children's Characteristics

	Emergency or Transitional Housing		Matched Comparison Group		Eligible Comparison Population	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Male	49%	1,616	50%	1,306	51%	363,990
Native	8%	247	6%	157	3%	18,615
Asian	1%	44	2%	52	7%	52,261
Hispanic	7%	240	7%	183	9%	62,183
Black	73%	2,401	76%	1,987	12%	86,286
White	11%	348	9%	236	69%	493,063
Disability	26%	851	26%	679	15%	105,936
Free Lunch	90%	2,937	90%	2,361	7%	226,787
HHM^a	73%	2,390	65%	1,709	2%	11,478
CPS Involvement before AY14^b	38%	1,249	39%	1,019	9%	64,080
Emergency/Transitional Housing before AY14	18%	598	14%	365	<1%	1,550
Total	56%	3,278	44%	2,615		712,363

^aHomeless and Highly Mobile Flag from education data

^bCPS: Child Protective Services

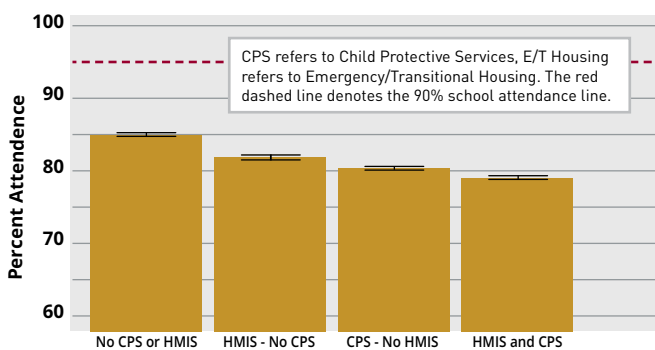
AIM ONE: LIKELIHOOD OF EMERGENCY/ TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND CHILD PROTECTION INVOLVEMENT BOTH OCCURRING

Approximately 26% (n=860) of the children who stayed in emergency/transitional housing also experienced CPS involvement, compared to 17% (n=446) of children in the comparison group. Children who experienced emergency/transitional housing at any point in the study time frame were 1.58 times more likely than the comparison group to experience CPS (OR=1.58, SE=0.12, z=6.16, p<.001). This suggests that the experience of emergency/transitional housing for children and CPS were related to each other, and is in line with theory that suggests that experiencing one adversity (e.g. poverty) increases the likelihood of experiencing other adversities (e.g., child maltreatment; McEwen & McEwen, 2017) and are indicators of family instability/stress. Further, if parents believe that they will be at risk for a referral to CPS upon using emergency/transitional housing services, this may decrease family's willingness to seek that much needed support. Hesitancy to use these services could potentially put children in more risky circumstances.

AIM TWO: EMERGENCY/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND CHILD PROTECTION RELATION TO SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND MOBILITY

Both CPS involvement and emergency/transitional housing use represented individual and independent risk factors for reduced school attendance. Children who experienced both were at an increased risk for reduced school attendance (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attendance Rates by Emergency/Transitional Housing Use and Child Protection Involvement



Children who experienced only emergency/transitional housing attended 3% fewer days of school on average, as compared to children with no experiences of emergency/transitional housing or CPS involvement ($\beta=-0.23$, SE=0.04, z=-5.19, p<.001). Children who were involved with CPS but did not use emergency/transitional housing attended 5% fewer days of school on average ($\beta=-0.37$, SE=0.07, z=-5.19, p<.001) compared to those with neither experience.

Children who experienced both CPS and used emergency/transitional housing attended 6% fewer days on average ($\beta=-0.41$, SE=0.05, z=-7.91, p<.001) compared to those with neither experience.

These results also suggested that CPS involvement and emergency/transitional housing are individual and independent risk factors for school mobility. Children who experienced both were at an increased risk for additional school moves. Children who experienced only emergency/transitional housing (OR=1.3, SE=0.08, z=3.93, p<.001) or only CPS (OR=1.3, SE=0.16, z=2.36, p<.05) were 1.3 times more likely to move schools in a year compared to experiencing neither of these risk factors. Children who experienced both emergency/transitional housing and CPS were 1.5 times more likely to move schools in a year (OR=1.5, SE=0.13, z=4.44, p<.001).

AIM THREE: TEMPORAL RELATION BETWEEN EMERGENCY/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AND CHILD PROTECTION

The average length of time from the first experience of emergency/transitional housing and CPS report was 46.15 days. The mode was zero days, suggesting that children were most often referred to CPS the same day they entered emergency/transitional housing.

Timing effects were then tested using generalized estimating equations. Children's experiences of emergency/transitional housing as well as CPS involvement were categorized by month (coded as 0 if it did not occur in a month and 1 if it did). Results revealed that children were 1.9 times more likely to experience CPS if they were using emergency or transitional housing services in that month than if they were not. Children were 1.6 times more likely to experience CPS if they had experienced emergency or transitional housing in the month prior, compared to if they did not. Children were 0.3 times less likely to experience emergency/transitional housing if they experienced CPS in the month prior compared to if they did not. A two month and three-month delay in both directions was also evaluated, but results were non-significant.

Results suggested that emergency/transitional housing occurs concurrently or one month prior to CPS involvement. Families may be experiencing a period of elevated instability and risk during the period they are involved with CPS services. Families involved with CPS appear to be less likely to enter emergency/transitional housing during the following month. Timing of system involvement and clear histories of previous system involvement may be important to understand family's current level of stress and functioning, and ultimately the child's risk for decreased school attendance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how experiences of emergency and transitional housing use were related to child protective service involvement. Further, we aimed to evaluate how experiences with both systems may confer risk for school adaptation. Results suggest that experiences with emergency and transitional housing as well as CPS are compounding risk factors for lower school attendance and higher school mobility for children in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Findings align with previous research conducted at Minn-LInK (Renner et al., 2018) and studies in other populations (Eckenrode et al., 1995; Manfra, 2019; Perlman & Fantuzzo, 2010). There appears to be a risk for experiencing both adversities during the same time period, suggesting that these two risk indicators may both reflect family stress and instability.

Given that experiences of emergency/transitional housing often proceed or occur concurrently with CPS involvement and increase the likelihood of CPS involvement, additional assistance may be essential for families at risk for emergency and transitional housing. Currently there are efforts in Minneapolis and St. Paul Public schools to provide permanent and supportive housing services to school aged children experiencing homelessness as a way to increase school attendances and success. Given the relation between emergency/transitional housing and CPS, these interventions may also be able to reduce children's experiences with CPS by providing families with stable housing and resources as well as reducing familial distress. Further, offering preventative services such as the Parent Support Outreach Program may give families needed supports and reduce CPS referrals. Emergency/transitional housing use, and CPS involvement place families in contact with social service providers who are able to help families navigate finding services to best support their and their children's needs. Assisting families across social services in finding stable housing and consistent forms of support, may help stop a cycle of negative adverse events for children by enhancing resources and ultimately family and children's adaptive success across contexts.

LIMITATIONS

The administrative data available to this study do not include all risk factors relevant to children. Data underrepresent emergency or transitional housing use and do not represent all forms or experiences of homelessness. Additional research is necessary to understand the relationship between homelessness and child protection, especially in early childhood.

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