Housed

Rapid Re-housing

Shelter

Doubled-Up

Unsheltered

Mapping the Journey of Families Experiencing Homelessness

Center *for*
Transforming Lives
From Poverty to Prosperity. Together.

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The photographic images in this document do not reflect the participants in the study.

Executive Summary

Families and children experiencing homelessness are frequently referred to as "hidden" due to the complicated approaches for defining and counting family homelessness. Social services exist to help families escape poverty and exit homelessness, including housing assistance and shelters, welfare, food pantries, food assistance, health insurance, child care, and schools. While these services exist, they may be difficult for a family to navigate during crises. As such, understanding the unique barriers families may experience during their journey to find housing is needed. The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the systems navigation for families experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the journeys of families and children when seeking shelter and housing were mapped and evaluated. This evaluation project included interviews with 24 persons who were experiencing homelessness with their children and 6 persons who were experiencing homelessness while separated from their children. Multiple strategies were used to recruit participants whose housing status included: emergency shelter (n=16), rapid re-housing (n=7), and unsheltered (n=7).

Among the 24 participants living with their children, the number of accompanying children per participant ranged from 1 to 5, with the average number of children per participant at 2.5. The ages of children accompanying their parents seeking shelter ranged from 1.5 months to 17 years old. Families seeking shelter move frequently from location to location: the number of transitions per family ranged from 1 to 8 or more transitions, with an average of 4.2 transitions.

Three key barriers were apparent for families seeking housing – child care, employment, and transportation. Without all three facets in place, a family may not be successful at obtaining and securing housing. Families experiencing homelessness also experience unique challenges, including changing school systems and child care, the fear of separating from their children, and safety and space concerns in different locations. The experiences of families are unlike those of single adults seeking shelter, confirmed in part by the interviews with six parents separated from their children.

Overall, these journeys of families experiencing homelessness shed light on the difficult path these families face as they navigate systems with the goal of providing a better future for their children.

Mapping the Journey of Families Experiencing Homelessness

Family Homelessness

Families and children experiencing homelessness are frequently referred to as "hidden" due to the complicated approaches for defining and counting family homelessness.[1] In the United States, approximately one out of three persons counted in the annual Point in Time Count is in a family and one in five persons counted is under the age of 18.[2] Of greatest concern are the vulnerable children in these families experiencing homelessness.

Scope of Childhood Homelessness in Tarrant County

According to the 2018 Point in Time Count data for Tarrant County, 269 children were documented on count night. This included 254 children in emergency shelter, 10 children in transitional housing, and 5 children identified as unsheltered.[3] This count is based on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness, which is used to determine eligibility for HUD services.

School districts also identify school-aged children experiencing homelessness in their schools in order to provide assistance with school enrollment, attendance, and transportation. School districts utilize a broader definition of homelessness to include children who are sheltered and unsheltered, similar to HUD, but also children who are doubled-up (i.e., sharing housing with other persons due to loss of housing) or children living in motels/hotels due to lack of alternative housing options.[4] During the 2017-2018 school year, 8,362 children were identified as homeless in Tarrant County school districts. This number included 70% of children living in doubled-up situations, 15% of children living in motels/hotels, 11% of children living in shelters, and 3% of children unsheltered.[5]

Escaping Childhood Homelessness

Social services exist to help families escape poverty and exit homelessness, including housing assistance and shelters, welfare, food pantries, food assistance, health insurance, child care, and schools. While these services exist, they may be difficult for a family to navigate during crisis. As such, understanding the unique barriers families may experience during their journey to find housing is needed.

Evaluation of Family Homelessness

The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the systems navigation for families experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the journeys of families and children when seeking shelter and housing were mapped and evaluated.

Methods

This evaluation project interviewed 30 persons from families experiencing homelessness. The project was approved by the North Texas Regional Institutional Review Board. Additional detail about the study methods are located in the Appendix (see Page 20).

Sample

Persons were eligible to participate in the study if they met the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years of age, (2) has children 18 years or younger, (3) currently without a permanent residence or rapid re-housing recipient, and (4) speaks English. Lack of non-English speakers is a limitation of this study. Participants were recruited using multiple strategies to sample participants from a range of location types (e.g., shelter, rapid re-housing, unsheltered).

Interviews

Prior to starting the interview, the purpose of the project was explained by trained evaluation staff, an informed consent pamphlet was reviewed, and written informed consent was obtained. Participants received a $25 gift card and $5 local bus pass for participating. The interviews included questions about the participant's journey throughout their homelessness, specifically, the types of places the family lived while experiencing homelessness. For each location, information on with whom they were living, the duration of stay, perceptions on safety, positive and negative experiences, and challenges experienced were elicited. A three-stage coding process was used to analyze the data from the interviews and report major themes and findings.

Description of the Evaluation Sample

Demographic Characteristics

Thirty people participated in the study. The average age was 36.2 years with a standard deviation of 9.4 years. Most participants were women (70%). As for race/ethnicity, most participants non-Hispanic (90%), and participants identified as Black (50%), White (43%), or multiracial/other (6%). Over half of the sample had a high school degree or GED (50%) or some college (27%). Most participants were single (57%), followed by married/partnered (20%), divorced (10%), and other (13%).

Less than half of the sample reported some form of income (43%), which included employment and benefits. Participants also reported on their current utilization of the following types of social services (Figure 1):
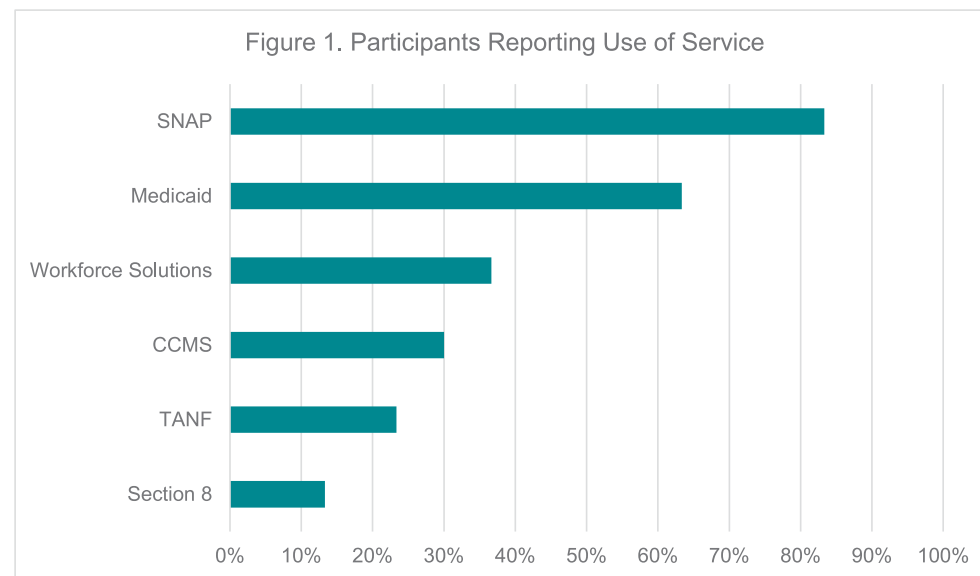
Figure 1. Participants Reporting Use of Service

Multiple strategies were used to recruit participants whose housing status included: emergency shelter (n=16), rapid re-housing (n=7), and unsheltered (n=7).

Six participants from unsheltered locations reported current separation from their children. These four men and two women's responses are summarized separately as they had different experiences shared as compared to those residing with their children.

As such, **the primary themes reported are from the 24 participants currently living with their children; 19 women and 5 men.**

Description of the Evaluation Sample

Children

The number of accompanying children per participant ranged from 1 to 5, with the average number of children per participant at 2.5. The ages of children accompanying their parents seeking shelter ranged from 1.5 months to 17 years old. Most of the participants' accompanying children were from 6 to 12 years old (n=29), followed by children 0 to 5 years old (n=24) and children 13 to 17 years old (n=7).

Journey and Transitions

Families seeking shelter transition frequently from location to location: the number of transitions per family ranged from 1 to 8 transitions, with an average of 4.2 transitions per family (Figure 2). For these 24 participants, the average length of time between the interview and their last permanent housing was 68.5 weeks. The average length of time at each transition varied by location (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Number of Transitions during Journey

Figure 3. Average Number of Weeks By Location
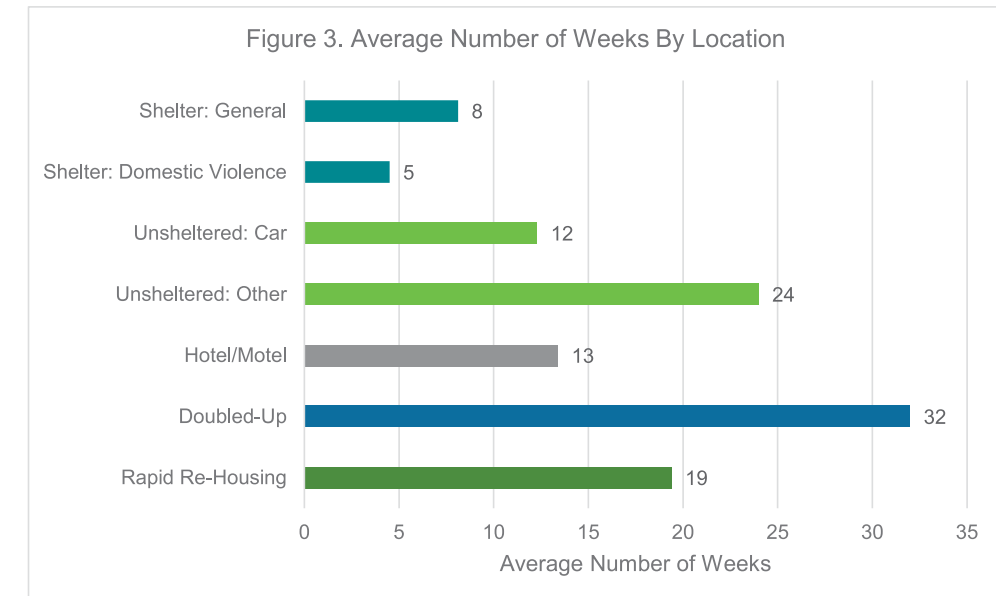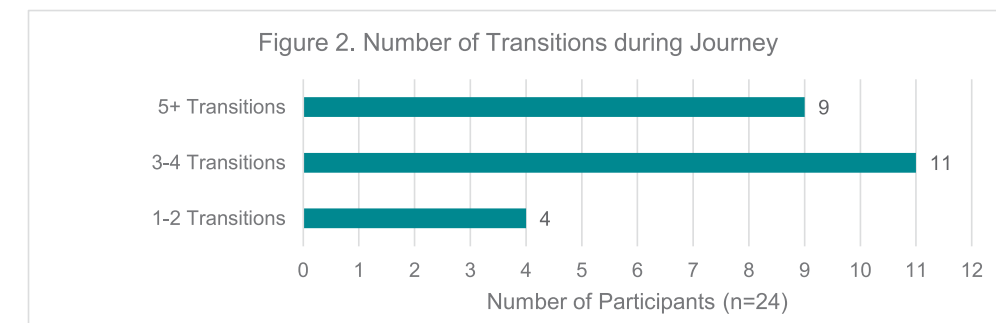
Evaluation of Family Homelessness

Transitions into Homelessness

Families attributed their homelessness to two main reasons: intimate partner violence or an event that contributed to loss of housing.

Among the 24 participants, 9 reported intimate partner violence as the contributing reason for homelessness. For persons who experienced interpersonal violence, most entered into homelessness through a domestic violence shelter.
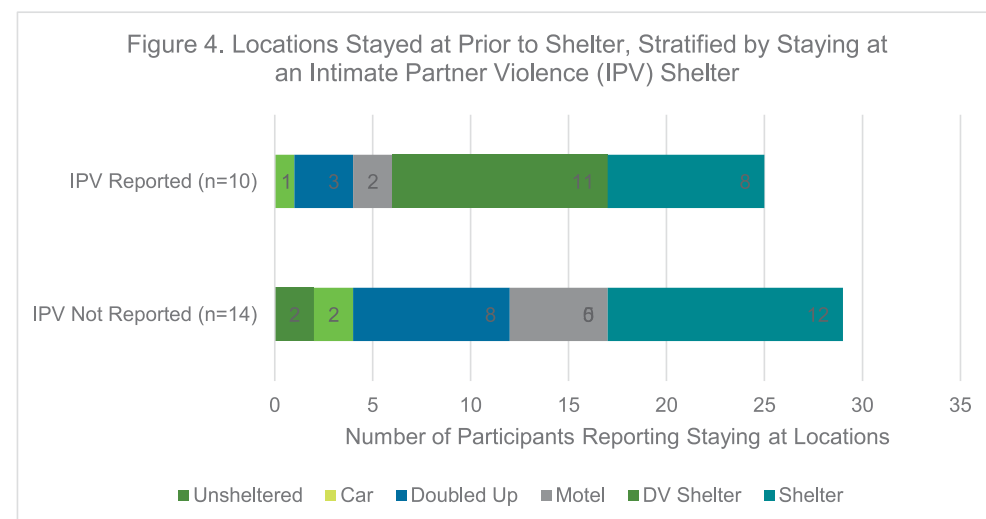
> *Even in the abusive situation, my ex-husband still took care of him [child]. That's why I was ok with staying and going back because I knew we were going to be stable and never need or want anything. It sucks. The situation that we were in, but we were stable. The kids were happy for the most part until they witnessed what they witnessed all the time, which was not good for them. He always had everything...*
>
> (Female, Age 31)

Other contributing factors were loss of employment or income to afford their housing (n=4), eviction (n=2), disagreements with family members (n=2), or health issues (n=2). Moreover, in the instances where families had a precipitating reason for losing their housing, the slide into homelessness was gradual (Figure 4). In other words, persons utilized non-shelter locations, such as doubled-up with family and friends, motels, or cars prior to utilizing a shelter facility.

> *We lived with the family because we had lost our apartment that we had. I was a student up until this last semester. So I was going to school full time and working three jobs and, needed my husband's income to make it...And my husband was working, so he got arrested for some traffic violation and then we lost his income and then we lost our place.*
>
> (Female, Age 38)

Figure 4. Locations Stayed at Prior to Shelter, Stratified by Staying at an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Shelter

IPV Reported (n=10): 1 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 9
IPV Not Reported (n=14): 2 | 2 | 8 | 6 | 13
Number of Participants Reporting Staying at Locations

■ Unsheltered ■ Car ■ Doubled Up ■ Motel ■ DV Shelter ■ Shelter

Process of Seeking Housing

Barriers to Seeking Housing

Based on the interviews with the 24 families currently with their children, the top three barriers to exiting homelessness were transportation issues, finding and keeping employment, and child care needs (Figure 5). These barriers are often interrelated and dependent on one another in order to secure housing.

Figure 5. Frequently Coded Barriers

Barrier	Number of Participants
Transportation	18
Employment	15
Child Care	13
Finding Resources	12
School	7
Space	6
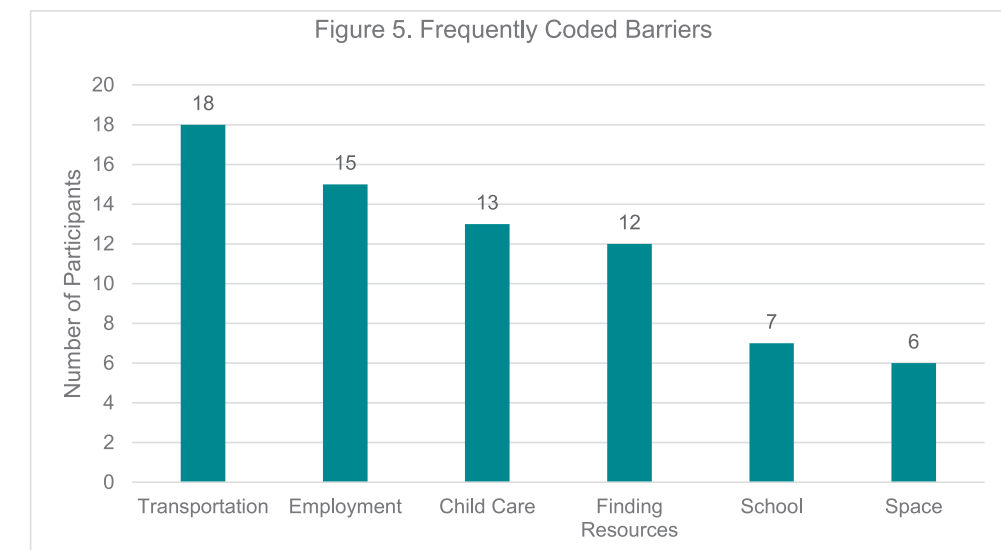
Evaluation of Family Homelessness

Process of Seeking Housing

Without transportation and child care, parents experiencing homelessness are not able to find stable employment to support their family to find housing. Child care, transportation, and employment were interconnected, as well as the most discussed barriers for families experiencing homelessness.

Without child care parents cannot work, and some child care facilities do not offer expanded hours to enable parents to find jobs.

Without transportation, parents cannot make it to work or take their children to child care. Several participants explained that they lost their job opportunities due to insufficient transportation.

According to some participants, all of the best job opportunities are in far north Fort Worth or other areas where public transit does not reach.

Factors that ease the strain on families are:

- Workforce programs that enable eligibility for child care
- School buses to transport children to school
- Family support for child care
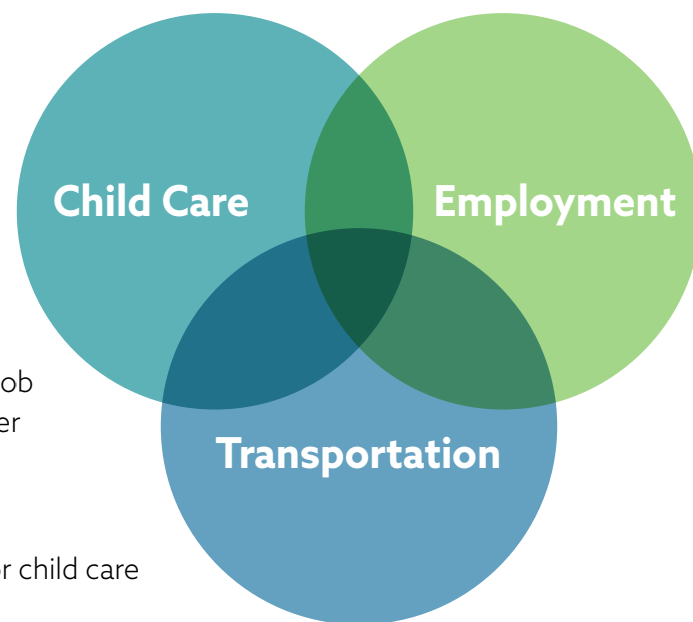
...right now my biggest obstacle is I can't get a job because I don't have child care and I can't get CCMS child care because I don't have a job.
(Female, Age 31)

...I'm willing to work, but with my kids being older, 13 and 17, they're not eligible for CCMS because they're too old. They're over twelve so I can't get daycare.
(Female, Age 35)

Evaluation of Family Homelessness

Process of Seeking Housing

Seeking child care and school transitions are unique barriers for families experiencing homelessness, compared to other homeless populations.

Lack of child care is a major barrier identified by participants (n=13). Several parents explained that it is difficult to navigate the enrollment for subsidized child care and find a child care program they are comfortable with.

I have been trying to get them on CCMS but I don't know the steps to go through to start them in there. I am still working on that, and once I get them on CCMS then I can work on getting a job. Cause then I will have a permanent thing for them to go to and they would be in child care while I'm at work.
(Female, Age 28)

Summer break and other extended school breaks make it more difficult for parents experiencing homelessness. Parents rely on public schools as a form of child care for school-age children.

With me, fortunately I don't have any little babies I have a 7 and 13-yearold. So school takes care of that, I send them to school and get everything done in the timeframe. So if I'm working at the particular time, I work during school hours. If I don't work, get everything I need to do appointments or job search or whatever I'm doing, I do it during the timeframe of school hours, so school is my sitter.
(Female, Age 31)

For families seeking shelter with school-age children, reducing the number of frequent **school transitions** was difficult, and families weighed the risks of separating from their children, finding transportation and time to drop-off/pick-up at school, and avoiding frequent school changes.

- Some families delayed seeking shelter or separated from children so they could stay in the same school districts.
- Some families with transportation kept their children with them and drove further away to maintain the same schools, sometimes dropping them off very early in order to get to work on time.
- Other families had to arrange for transportation provided through shelters and case workers, but the children would have long bus rides when the schools were further away.
- Some children could not go to school, and difficulty in enrolling children resulted in delays in re-enrollment.
- Some families had to switch schools, multiple times within a year, due to housing status.

I have done everything in my power to prevent them from switching schools during the school year.
(Male, Age 38)

Process of Seeking Housing

Families seeking shelter often wrestle with potential separation from their children due to not wanting to expose children to shelters, shelter eligibility, or wanting to keep children in current school locations (n=6).

- Several families reported having to separate from their children while seeking shelter, primarily to avoid exposing their children to shelter living or fear of having CPS or police called on them.
- In instances of intimate partner violence, parents still had some children staying with the perpetrator or a family member of the perpetrator to avoid bringing them to shelter.
- Children also remained separated from parents due to wanting to stay in a particular school location and doubling-up with relatives.
- Some families noted that having multiple family members delayed shelter services or seeking shelter (n=3) due to lack of space available. Some participants reported that shelters requested that parents separate from some children to meet family size eligibility requirements.

Families have perceptions of who is homeless, which may be a barrier to seeking services.

A quarter of participants (n=6) had envisioned homeless shelters as a place not for children and that it could be a bad environment for their children. These perceptions were formed by the media or word of mouth. In some instances, these perceptions were a barrier for families to use shelter services.

> *No, [the shelter] was definitely not like I thought it was going to be. Fear is only an illusion, and in my illusion, it was my greatest nightmare. But in my reality, it was the greatest blessing, you know? I got fed three meals a day. I got fat for a little while (chuckles). My kids and I, we had our own privacy. There was a playground there, there was other kids, different resources, fun activities. There was also a camp for the kids, you know, I would definitely say it was not what I thought it was going to be.*
>
> (Female, Age 34)

A couple participants reported they wished people knew that shelters were a good resource for families and to make that more well known.

> *When you think about the homeless, you think about a drug addict, a junkie, you know, that's what you think of... But it's like there's nothing, there's no advertisements for if you need help that this is where you go. There's nothing on TV. ... if I would've known about a shelter and that they would have helped me, you know, get out, get out of the situation ...if there was something letting people know that it's not just something bad that a shelters just, it happens. It happens to a lot of people, not just junkies, then it would have been different.*
>
> (Female, Age 31)

Process of Seeking Housing

Families experiencing homelessness often rely on informal information sources to find resources, and need a centralized way to find resources.

Most families **find resources from another person** (e.g., another person experiencing homelessness, family member or friend) (n=18). Some also attempt online searching (n=12); however often have difficulty knowing where to look. Fewer participants mentioned information sources such as staff from programs (n=5), calling places (n=3), or 2-1-1 (n=2).

> *I googled it. Yep basically, I googled all of the shelters, all of the domestic violence shelters in Dallas and Fort Worth. And most of the ones in Dallas were full, so I just had to basically keep calling, keep calling 'til someone said 'hey come on'.*
>
> (Female, Age 27)

> *That's hard. It took me 7 years 'cause I was always considering my options and thinking it would be nice if I had this resource and make it easier but I didn't know where to start. All I can say is call 2-1-1 and they have a lot of resources for domestic violence or any church that has a crisis line. They help a lot with getting women out of these situations.*
>
> (Female, Age 31)

> *Yes and then you have to go and call all those people and then it's like ring around the rosey from there. You go around in circles, I'm full over here, I got resources, but I'm full over here. I got resources over here but try calling here. So to save the trouble you just come here.*
>
> (Female, Age 31)

To address these concerns regarding the search for resources, **participants requested a centralized list** (n=11) with features that could enable searching based on family criteria or facility capacity. Families experiencing homelessness also reported that having this centralized list online would facilitate access to resources (n=11).

> *A compiled list or something, you know, not just "use the people we're affiliated with", because that's how a lot of them are. Because if you go to the food bank, they just give you, oh you have five people in your home, here's what they give you. But like the one I found, they say, "Oh well how old are your kids?", the [name] Food Bank just gives you just here's food. The church I go to in Keller they give you laundry detergent for soap, you know, they give you diapers because I have kids and then they give me hygiene for my kids and wipes and stuff like that because they're trying to make sure I get something for me from each one of my kids because if you give me food for five people that don't help me when two of them need formula, you know what I mean? And now I have this whole fridge of food that has to be eaten in three days and they can't eat some of it.*
>
> (Female, Age 31)

Families' Experiences During the Journey

Negative experiences during the journey

While the participants described their housing journey, they shared their experiences from each location they stayed. Below is a figure of the negative experiences or attributes experienced during their homelessness journey (Figure 6). Families face unique challenges when navigating the homelessness journey, which include primarily safety concerns and space obstacles.

Figure 6. Frequently Coded Negative Experiences
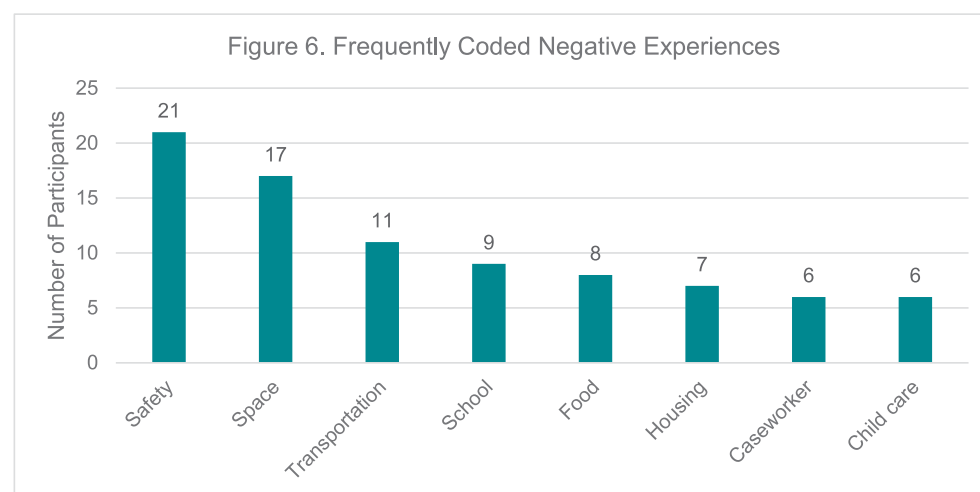
While safety is a concern for all people seeking shelter, there are unique safety challenges for families seeking shelter (n=21).

Many families reported lack of privacy as a challenge and preferred shelter locations that provided them with separate rooms. Families seeking shelter have to worry about safety and environmental exposures to their children when staying in a location. The neighborhoods where shelters and rapid rehousing apartments were located felt **unsafe outside** to families. Staying in cars also presented safety challenges for families, as seen below:

> *I basically tried to stay in, like tried to keep a shelter over our heads. Before I lost my car, there were nights when I had to sleep in my car with my kids, so I couldn't really sleep 'cause I'm, you know, have to be looking out around, 'cause we outside you know. Anything can happen. "But it was a lot of times like I felt like if something was to happen I don't know what I'd be - what I'd do. Like 'cause I'm a woman, and I can't stand up there with three kids."*
>
> (Female, Age 25)

Many families did not like the **other people** they had to share space with in the shelter and surrounding area. In general, there was a revolving door of many strangers, some behaved in inappropriate ways in front of their children and others were known sex offenders. It was particularly difficult for those who did not enjoy being in large crowds. Many parents noted sharing shelter with **single men and women** concerned them as a safety matter, and preferred they be separated. There were different opinions about whether **male parents** should share space with women parents.

Families' Experiences During the Journey

Physical space at different locations throughout families' journeys presented difficulties.

Due to the increased number of people to be accounted for in a family, many families seeking housing end up in locations that lack **enough physical space.** When doubling up, space is a particular concern for families with children and the friends and family who are providing a place to stay (n=3). In contrast, some families noted that the shelter, cars, and motels had sufficient space for the family.

Once families reached certain settings, such as shelters, they reported **obstacles in the setting** that may affect the family's daily life. In shelters, some families worried about not having space or not being permitted to store food, diapers, clothing, and other items. The ability to store and keep **food** was particularly problematic due to strict timing of meals and curfews, prohibition of snacks in the building, and the lack of flexibility to provide for sick children and picky eaters (n=8). In some shelter locations, families reported cleanliness and close shared space being problematic for their children, increasing their risk of illness and decreasing the amount and quality of their sleep (n=5).

Unlike single people seeking shelter, families seeking shelter had to identify ways to keep their children occupied due to lack of activities available for children.

Families identified the importance of child-friendly activities to help distract children from the difficulties they are going through and provide them some relief. Some suggested play therapy or other ways to help them work through their emotions, learn coping skills or just briefly escape the stressful environment they are in. They noted that some places had more kid-friendly activities, but most were for older children or located outdoors in an unsafe neighborhood. Transportation and curfew limits made it difficult for parents to take children to different activities or family and friends further away from the shelter.

> *Maybe keep their mind off the fact that we're struggling because my seven-year-old, he's not crazy. He knows what we're going through, so, you know, maybe something... like TV or something for him to keep his mind busy and not focused on the fact that mom and dad is struggling trying to get things in order.*
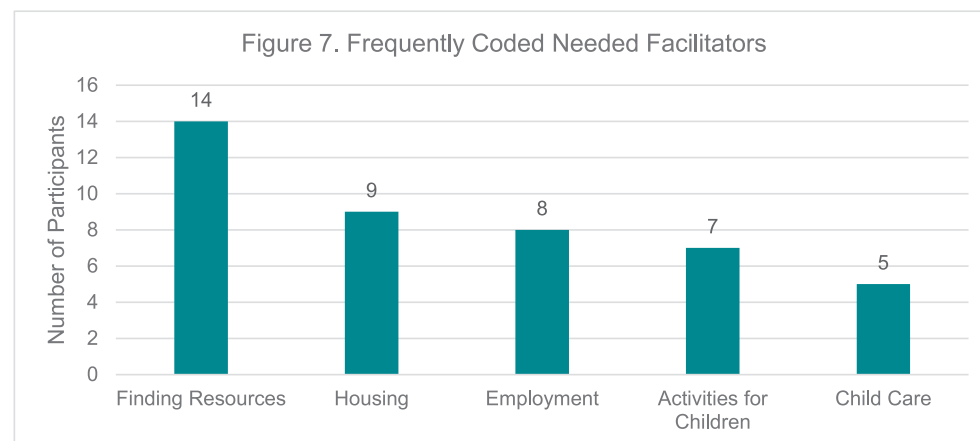>
> (Female, Age 25)

> *I believe kids need, I want to say a safe place, an escape, just for a little while. Because for, especially for kids who understand what's going on, it's got to be tough. If it's tough on you, and you barely can hold it together, just imagine ... so I don't know what that would be. You would have to ask a kid, but I believe an escape.*
>
> (Female, Age 38)

Evaluation of Family Homelessness

Parents' Reflections from the Journey

Participants described what would help families either seek shelter or exit homelessness.

Based on the frequencies of axial codes, the most needed facilitator for exiting homelessness for families was **finding resources** (Figure 7). Descriptions of the needs for housing, employment, and child care were previously described as primary barriers for families.

Figure 7. Frequently Coded Needed Facilitators

Finding Resources	Housing	Employment	Activities for Children	Child Care
14	9	8	7	5

Number of Participants

Families reflected on their journeys with their children.

Many participants stated that homelessness would be an **easier journey without having children** (n=12). Children can also hinder the family's options to move, many stated it was more difficult to stay in a doubled up situation with children than it would be if there on their own. Parents also expressed that without children they would be able to work more easily or that they would not be homeless if they did not have children.

> *You know what I mean, me having to fend for myself, not having to carry as many bags, not having to think about what are we going to eat today, how am I gonna wash clothes, I got to hurry up and make orders because I gotta go feed them. You know, it would have been a lot easier."*
> (Female, Age 27)

Families were asked to share advice to other families experiencing homelessness and service providers.

Advice to other families experiencing homelessness centered on **asking for help early** (n=4) or **utilizing resources** (n=6).

Additionally, participants described **needed services as advice for service providers**, such as, workforce training, transportation services, child care services, and counseling.

> *Have it [child care] more open. Child care is a big issue, especially for a single parent. You know. Make it more accessible.*
> (Male, Age 26)

Evaluation of Family Homelessness

Parents without their Children

A sub-group of participants were unsheltered and living without their children at the time of interview (n=6). These parents are classified by homelessness counts as "single adults."

The experiences for parents seeking shelter without their children differed from parents who have a child during their journey. The six participants were predominantly male (n=4) and all were unsheltered (n=6). Reasons for homelessness among these participants varied, including familial issues, loss of income or housing, and criminal issues.

Child care, one of the biggest barriers described by parents with children with them, is not a primary issue for parents without their children. All 6 participants reported that their children were with their child's other biological parent (n=3) or with a grandparent (n=3). The average number of children reported by these parents was 1.8 (lower than the average for families with children seeking shelter), and 4 of the 6 participants had children under the age of 1 year. However, these six participants were similar in stating that their biggest barriers were transportation and employment, in order to secure housing.

These parents who experience homelessness without their children note that separation from their children was a choice made in their children's best interests. Similar to parents with children during their journey, preconceived notions about shelters and perceived lack of safety for their children drove these parents without their children to separate.

Most parents experiencing homelessness without children held onto hope and optimism to reunite with their children once more stability is established. Similar sentiments were shared with some parents experiencing homelessness with children who had been separated from other children.

It is important to note, that these parents, when interacting with housing services, will be noted as single adults rather than as part of a family unit.

Limitations

This project aimed to understand families' lived experiences as they navigated the journey through homelessness. However, this study should be considered within the context of its limitations.

First, given the varied nature of each individual's journey, some participants had difficulty recalling all aspects of the journey, such as the length of time at locations or the number of transitions. For example, some people reported transitioning to different locations but did not specify or know the length of time; for these length of time calculations the reports were not included. Similarly, some participants were unable to count the number of transitions during certain periods. For transition calculations, the lowest possible number of transitions were used for more conservative estimates.

Secondly, to qualify for the study, a person must have been currently experiencing homelessness and had at least a child. These inclusion criteria did not specify if family dyads could participate, and thus, it is possible two parents from the same family could have participated. Moreover, these inclusion criteria permitted persons who were not currently living with their children, and as a result a separate analysis was conducted to assess these parental journeys and beliefs. Lack of non-English speakers is also a limitation of this study.

Finally, the interviews captured an abundance of information about a participant's journey. Given the unique nature of each journey, not all the data are presented; however, the key themes from the participants are represented in this report..

Summary

This evaluation project aimed to map the journeys of families experiencing homelessness to elucidate the barriers to seeking housing and the experiences they encounter during that journey. These interviews unveiled that families encounter multiple transitions across multiple locations (e.g., cars, doubled-up, motels, shelters), which may contribute to the hidden nature of this population. Moreover, the instability children face in these circumstances may negatively impact their growth and development.

Families underscored the difficulties of securing child care, transportation, and employment in order to escape homelessness. This triad of need means all of these items must be in place for families in order to successfully secure and maintain housing. Moreover, families reiterated that there are specific and unique needs for families in the homelessness system. Examples of specific needs include activities for children, safe and adequate spaces for families, and the ability to filter through available resources that align well with their family.

General perceptions about homelessness are of single adults who may have extreme instability, and it was clear that families in this study held similar beliefs. As a result, families may delay seeking shelter due to misgivings about the environment and safety within shelter systems. Overall, families also shared that their journeys with their children were harder and unlike those experiences of homeless persons without children.

Overall, these journeys of families experiencing homelessness shed light on the difficult path these families face as they navigate systems with the goal of providing a better future for their children.

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Appendix: Evaluation Details

The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the systems navigation for families experiencing homelessness. Specifically, the journeys of families and children when seeking shelter and housing were mapped and evaluated.

Methods

This evaluation project interviewed 30 persons from families experiencing homelessness. The project was approved by the North Texas Regional Institutional Review Board.

Sample

Persons were eligible to participate in the study if they met the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years of age, (2) has children 18 years or younger, (3) currently without a permanent residence or rapid re-housing recipient, and (4) speaks English. Lack of non-English speakers is a limitation of this study.

Participants were recruited using multiple strategies: (1) on-site recruitment at shelter locations, (2) referrals for the study from rapid re-housing and other housing service staff, (3) on-site recruitment at resource centers, and (4) flyers shared with representative from social service organizations. The evaluation team attempted to sample participants from a range of location types (e.g., shelter, rapid re-housing, unsheltered). Interested participants could either participate in the interview at the time of recruitment, or schedule a time and location.

Interviews

Thirty persons participated in the interviews. Prior to starting the interview, the purpose of the project was explained by trained evaluation staff, an informed consent pamphlet was reviewed, and written informed consent was obtained. Participants received a $25 gift card and $5 local bus pass for participating. Two evaluation staff members were present at the interviews; one as an interviewer and one as a note taker.

The interviews used a semi-structured interview guide to ask questions about the participant's journey throughout their homelessness (see Table 1), specifically, the types of places the family lived while experiencing homelessness. For each location, information on with whom they were living, the duration of stay, perceptions on safety, positive and negative experiences, and challenges experienced were elicited. To assist in the development of this journey, the interviewer used a white board to draw the map indicating the different types of locations, length of time, and presence of family members. The participant was asked to verify all map drawings to the best of their ability. Participants also completed a brief survey describing their demographic characteristics.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Notes taken during the interview were used to supplement the transcription.

Table 1. Selected Questions from Interview Guide

We'd like to build a map or drawing of where you are today to where you started at __[describe from last question]_____. Let's start by talking about where you are today. (Repeated until complete)
- Where are you currently living, I don't want the address but just a description are you staying with a friend or at a shelter or something like that?
- Who are you living with?
- How long have you been at this location?
- How did you get to this location?
   ◦ Was it easy to get to?
   ◦ Was it hard to get to?
   ◦ How did you find out about this resource? (if applicable)
- Are your children at this location?
   ◦ If not, where are they?
   ◦ If so, what was it like getting them to this location?
- How do you feel at this location?
- How safe do you feel at this location?
- What were some challenges you faced at this location?
   ◦ Probe: violence, space for children, safety, transportation, employment
- What would make it easier to get to this location?
- Throughout this journey, how did you find resources?
- How would you prefer to find resources? What would make that easier?
- Can you please talk about how having children impacted your search for housing?
- What is your life like now? Walk me thru a typical day.
- Now, I'd like to make sure we covered everything. As you look back on your journey, is there anything we are missing? Is there anything that really stands out for you?
- Think back to yourself when you were first starting this journey. What advice would you give that woman? What advice would you give the city?

Data Synthesis

All interviews were transcribed and entered into Excel for analysis. A three-stage coding process was used: (1) open coding to assign a distinct idea or thought about a segment of text, (2) axial coding to categorize open codes into larger groups, and (3) selective coding to identify overall themes and patterns of the codes. Additionally, the location described by the participant (e.g., shelter, apartment) was coded for each segment of text, where applicable. Fifty-three axial codes were generated to describe the experiences of families. Thirteen selective codes (e.g., barrier, facilitator, needed facilitator, positive, negative, reason for homelessness, reflection) were generated to describe overall themes for families.

Data from the mapping were entered into Excel to aggregate average length of time in locations and number of transitions for families. Additionally, the demographic data were entered into Excel and descriptive statistics were estimated.

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