Child Care & Early Education
RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

A partnership between the National Center for Children in Poverty at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan, supported by a grant from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Research-to-Policy Resource List:
Early Care and Education Supports
for Young Children Experiencing Homelessness

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Research Connections conducted a comprehensive search of its collection for resources focused on supporting children 0 to 6 years experiencing homelessness through early childhood education programs. Key words used in the search were homeless children and families, homeless children, housing instability, homeless preschool children, children experiencing homelessness, and trauma.

This Research-to-Policy Resource List includes an overview and listing of selected resources from the literature from the years 2000-2014. Resources of various types --reports, research articles, and reviews -- are included.

Based on the search results, resources are grouped into the following categories:

• *Prevalence of Homelessness among Young Children*

• *Experience and Impact of Homelessness for Young Children*

• *Access to Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness*

• *Early Care and Education Programs and Practices that Support Children Experiencing Homelessness*

• *Addressing Trauma Associated with Homelessness for Young Children*

To obtain information on resources on this topic added to the *Research Connections* collection since the publication of this Resource List, please use the following link and filter by publication and/or acquisition date: *Create Updated Search Results.*

Overview

Children experiencing homelessness experience multiple challenges which include but are not limited to unstable and inadequate housing arrangements, family financial difficulties, inadequate health care, and exposure to violence. Young children experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to experiencing developmental delays and social emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and trauma, compared to their peers with stable housing. Infants and toddlers are particularly vulnerable to developmental delays when affected by traumatic experiences, which often are associated with homelessness.

Due to the wide range of difficulties experienced by young children and their families, it is important that they are linked with comprehensive services that support the children's health, development, and learning. Families need assistance in securing safe and stable housing, becoming financially secure, and addressing health and mental health issues that may have been associated with or precipitated by homelessness. For children, supported consistent access to educational opportunities, including to high quality early childhood programs, is particularly important. Providing early care and education opportunities not only supports children's development and learning, it also increases access for both children and their families to other critical services, including developmental screening and linkages to other community resources.

Currently, Early Head Start and Head Start programs provide quality learning opportunities and services for children experiencing homelessness. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 enhanced access for children experiencing homelessness to Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and it has been found that children experiencing homelessness in these programs exhibit improvement in developmental areas after attending for two or more years. The proposed revised Head Start performance standards emphasize the importance of developing community partnerships to assist children and families experiencing homelessness and of helping families who do not have access to stable housing support their children's transitions between early care and education programs and into kindergarten.

The 2014 Reauthorization of the Child Development Block Grant program also identified children and families experiencing homelessness as a particularly vulnerable group for which states are to give priority in subsidizing early care and education services. It called for greater attention to identifying and promptly serving children experiencing homelessness by actively reaching out to families of this population. This parallels the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act - first signed in 1987 - that states must assure equal access to public schooling, including preschool, for children experiencing homelessness as well as offering services to support their enrollment, attendance, and success.

The resources highlighted in the Resource-to-Policy Resource list address the following questions:

- What are current early childhood services available for children and families experiencing homelessness?
- What are some challenges families experiencing homelessness face when accessing early childhood services?
- What are the needs of children experiencing homelessness and how should they be improved through policy?
- What are some policy recommendations to provide a comprehensive approach to meeting the diverse needs of children and families experiencing homelessness? How can these recommendations be implemented by national, state, and local levels?

Prevalence of Homelessness among Young Children

National Center on Family Homelessness. (2009). *America's youngest outcasts: State report card on child homelessness.* **Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness.**
The National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH) has created America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness to provide a comprehensive snapshot of child homelessness in America today. Updating a study NCFH released in 1999, this report shows that the problem of child homelessness is worsening. The Report Card describes the status of homeless children in four areas: extent of child homelessness, child well-being, structural risk factors, and state-by-state policy and planning efforts. (author abstract)

Experience and Impact of Homelessness for Young Children

Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. (2013). *Head Start and housing (in)stability: Examining the school readiness of children experiencing homelessness*. **New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.**
Drawing on data from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), a nationally representative sample of low-income children enrolled in Head Start, this brief examines young children's progress over a two-year enrollment period across three key indicators of school readiness: socio-emotional, cognitive, and health-related outcomes. A cohort of three-year old children was assessed in the fall of 2006, when children entered Head Start, and again in the spring of 2008, when they completed the program. This brief compares children in the cohort who are homeless or highly mobile (HHM) with the cohort's low-income but stably housed children to determine what differences in outcomes, if any, exist between housing groups. (author abstract)

Swick, K. J. (2010). *Responding to the voices of homeless preschool children and their families.* *Early Childhood Education Journal*, **38(4), 299-304.**
By utilizing all of the voices of homeless children and families we can gain a better understanding of their needs and thus be more effective in designing programs that can support them in becoming more independent. This article reviews the importance of the voices of homeless preschool children and their parents as well that of the professionals who work with them in developing responses to this problem. Strategies that empower homeless preschool children and their families are noted. These strategies include: quality preschool care, therapeutic practices that empower the entire family, case management schemes that provide support to homeless children and families, and societal changes that empower the family. Critical roles that early childhood education professionals can carry out in this empowerment process are delineated and discussed. (author abstract)

Access to Early Care and Education for Children Experiencing Homelessness

Perlman, S. M. (n.d.). *Access to early childhood programs for young children experiencing homelessness: A survey report*. **Minneapolis, MN: National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth.**
This brief presented the results of a national survey focused on understanding the barriers and facilitators of access to early childhood services among young children and families experiencing homelessness, as well as identifying strategies for addressing barriers and increasing access. Notably, transportation and variants of cross-systems collaboration were cited as the most successful strategies for increasing access to early childhood services. (author abstract)

DaCosta Nunez, R., Yang DeLeone, F., & Starkey, L. (2012). *Profiles of risk: Child care*. (Research Brief No. 7). **New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.**
This report investigates the differences in child care use patterns among groups of poor and employed single mothers experiencing three levels of housing stability: homeless/doubled up, at risk of homelessness, or stably housed. Comparisons are provided for types of child care arrangements used, reliability of child care arrangements, and use of child care subsidies. Analysis is based on longitudinal data for 1,836 low income families from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a nationally representative study tracking almost 5,000 mostly poor and urban families with young children born between 1998 and 2000.

Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness. (2014). *Meeting the child care needs of homeless families: How do states stack up?* **New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.**

Without access to child care, homeless families struggle to secure housing. Having a safe and stable child care arrangement allows homeless parents to look for and maintain work and participate in the job training, education, and other programs essential to resolving their homelessness. Yet, homeless families face many barriers to accessing child care; homeless mothers are actually less likely to receive child care subsidies than poor housed mothers. With the annual cost of center-based care for a four-year-old averaging $7,817, nearly half the federal poverty line for a family of three, the high cost of care presents one obstacle. Finding a child care provider who can accommodate homeless families' often irregular, unpredictable, and inflexible schedules can also be challenging. In addition, restrictive documentation and eligibility requirements can prevent homeless families from qualifying for--or even seeking--subsidized care. The main federal source of child care assistance for low-income families is the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). States administer this block grant using their own eligibility guidelines, which can include policies to improve homeless families' access to care. Every two years, states submit plans to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services describing how they will manage their child care subsidy programs over the subsequent two-year period. The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH) analyzed each state's CCDF plan for federal Fiscal Years 2014-15 and found that the majority of states do not have policies in place that ease and encourage homeless families' use of child care subsidies: Only six states include homeless families in the definition of those with protective-services needs, enabling them to qualify for care without meeting traditional eligibility requirements. Only nine states include homeless children as a priority population. At least 24 states require families applying for child care to provide birth certificates or other documentation that can be challenging for families experiencing homelessness to locate. All but six states provide child care to at least some parents while they search for work, but only seven states do so while parents look for housing. Thirty states waive copayment fees for homeless families or families with no countable income. Only 11 states have higher reimbursement rates for providers offering child care during nontraditional hours, such as nights and weekends. Twenty-seven states will provide subsidized care for 12 months before reevaluating a family's eligibility, offering families continuity of care, and 14 states extend eligibility while children are in Head Start. Overall, only 18 plans mention homeless families or services specific to them. No state listed programs serving homeless children as having been consulted in the drafting of the CCDF plan. (author abstract)

United States. Administration for Children and Families. Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development.   (2014). *Promising practices for children experiencing homelessness: A look at two states.* **Washington, DC: U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development.**

This brief will provide an overview of the effects of homelessness on young children; federal initiatives that have expanded access to early care and learning for young children experiencing homelessness including Head Start and Early Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund, Early Childhood State Advisory Councils, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education programs, and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge; and how two states--Massachusetts and Oregon--have implemented innovative policies to improve early childhood outcomes for young children experiencing homelessness. Lastly, this brief will present recommendations for how states can learn from the policies established in Massachusetts and Oregon to develop their own interventions. (author abstract)

Boylan, E., & Splansky, D. (2010). *Access to pre-k education under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.* **Newark, NJ: Education Law Center.**

Under federal law, states are required to ensure that homeless children have equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths. This policy brief provides an overview of the law and its limitations and describes policies that can help increase the number of homeless children included in pre-k programs. (author abstract)

Early Care and Education Programs and Practices that Support Children Experiencing Homelessness

United States. Administration for Children and Families.   (n.d.). *Building partnerships to address family homelessness***. Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.**
This promising practice resource focuses on the way Head Start and Early Head Start grantees are effectively using partnerships to serve homeless children and how other service providers can build relationships with their local Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Evidence from partnerships around the country has shown that these reciprocal relationships help foster an environment of healthy development for young children experiencing homelessness and help move families out of homelessness. This resource will: -Provide background information on Head Start and Early Head Start programs; -Share highlights of how strong partnerships have addressed family homelessness; -Offer resources to encourage Head Start grantees and housing service providers to work together to expand services for children experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness; and -Present resources to help providers connect families to other services they may need. (author abstract)

National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE & National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (U.S.). (2013). *Early care and education for young children experiencing homelessness***. Greensboro, NC: National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE.**
This brief provides information and suggests best practices to facilitate collaboration between schools, service provider agencies, and early childhood programs, and to increase the enrollment of and provision of services to families with young children experiencing homelessness. (author abstract)

DaCosta Nunez, R., Adams, M., & Harris, S. (2011). *Head Start's positive impact on homeless families.* **New York: Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness.**
This brief provides state-by-state and national figures related to homeless families' enrollment in Head Start. Data are depicted for: 1) The percentage of Head Start families in 2010 who are homeless, 2) the percentage change of homeless families served by Head Start from 2008 to 2010, and 3) the percentage of homeless families served by Head Start in 2010 who acquired housing. Also included is a graph displaying the nationwide percentage of homeless young children enrolled in Head Start programs for each year from 2007-2010.

McDonald, S., & Grandin, M. (2009). *Early education home visiting: Supporting children experiencing homelessness.* **Newton, MA: National Center on Family Homelessness.**
This brief provides a rationale and recommendations for extending the benefits of established home visiting programs to children in families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It recommends two strategies for reaching this population: intentional outreach to homeless families and coupling home visiting programs with other supports such as housing assistance. Examples of programs and initiatives in Philadelphia, New York City, and San Francisco are highlighted. The brief also features discussions of the potential for both legislative support and public funding for programs.

Addressing Trauma Associated with Homelessness for Young Children

Holmes, C., Levy, M., Smith, A., Pinne, S., & Neese, P. (2015). A model for creating a supportive trauma-informed culture for children in preschool settings. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(6), 1650-1659.
The all too common exposure of young children to traumatic situations and the life-long consequences that can result underscore the need for effective, developmentally appropriate interventions that address complex trauma. This paper describes Head Start Trauma Smart (HSTS), an early education/mental health cross-systems partnership designed to work within the child's natural setting--in this case, Head Start classrooms. The goal of HSTS is to decrease the stress of chronic trauma, foster age-appropriate social and cognitive development, and create an integrated, trauma-informed culture for young children, parents, and staff. Created from a community perspective, the HSTS program emphasizes tools and skills that can be applied in everyday settings, thereby providing resources to address current and future trauma. Program evaluation findings indicate preliminary support for both the need for identification and intervention and the potential to positively impact key outcomes. (author abstract)

Harden, B. (2015). *Services for families of infants and toddlers experiencing trauma*. (OPRE Report #2015-14). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.

We briefly summarize what is known about the impact of trauma on infants and toddlers, and the intervention strategies that could potentially protect them from the adverse consequences of traumatic experiences. We focus on interventions that support parents in providing the stable and nurturing caregiving that is responsive to the child's general developmental needs and that promotes children's sense of safety and security. Such interventions may reduce or provide a buffer against infants' traumatic experiences. Finally, we consider how child care, Early Head Start, home visitation, and child welfare can become trauma-informed infant/toddler service delivery systems. (author abstract)