University of St. Thomas, Minnesota
St. Catherine University

Social Work Master's Clinical Research Papers   School of Social Work

2018

Professional Perceptions of Youth Homelessness and Strengths Developed

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Professional Perceptions of Youth Homelessness and Strengths Developed

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University- University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

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Introduction

Homelessness expands far beyond just an individual lacking a safe roof over their head.

The experience of homelessness is complex and widespread throughout the United States.

Homelessness does not discriminate; homelessness impacts copious individuals of all ages,

genders, ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Rokach, 2005). Despite the strong and targeted

efforts to reduce homelessness, Minnesota estimates that 150 or more people become newly

homeless each week (Wilder Research, 2016).

> "The U.S. Congress defines homelessness as an individual who lacks a fixed,
> regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Someone whose primary
> nighttime residence is one of a public or private place not designed to be
> utilized as a regular sleeping accommodations for humans such as a car, park,
> abandoned building, bus, train station, airport, or camping ground; or an
> individual whose primary nighttime residence is one that is supervised and
> operated privately or publicly to provide temporary living arrangements such
> as a shelter, a hotel paid for by federal, state, or charitable organization, or a
> transitional housing program(TLP)." (Wilder Research, 2016, pg. 8)

Homelessness is experienced differently by adults, families, and youth (Holschneider,

2016). October 22, 2015, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation study of homelessness identified 9,312

homeless adults, youth, and children in Minnesota. This study is conducted every three years

and attempts to quantify the number of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. The

study found 1,463 unaccompanied homeless youth, 24 years old and younger. Of the identified

youth, 213 were age 17 and younger, 779 were 18-21, and 471 were 22-24. Even with these

already astonishing numbers, it is believed that they are an underrepresentation of the true

population. Youth who are on their own and experiencing homelessness are extremely difficult

to identify, but is the population at the highest risk of homelessness (Wilder Research, 2016).

Compared to adults and families experiencing homelessness, youth have fewer available shelter

options as well as fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs (Wilder Research,

2016). Due to this, the U.S. Congress expanded their definition of homelessness for individuals

through the age of 24 to include youth who are not with parents or guardians and participate in

couch hopping. Couch-hopping is the term coined to describe when an individual lacks

permanent and secure housing and instead of accessing services they temporarily stay with

relatives or friends (Wilder Research, 2016).

The complexities associated with homelessness makes constructing a definition

challenging. The reality is there are a vast array of ways to experience homelessness. Some

youth who experience homelessness live in shelters, others sleep on the couch of a friend or

family member, yet others ride the train all night. Some have virtually no contact with the

streets and others identify the streets as their main community (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). In the

end, it does not matter how homelessness is experienced. The fact remains that homeless

youth are at a heightened risk for victimization due to their young age, childhood history,

potential exposure and engagement in illegal activities, substance abuse, and mental health

(MacDonald, 2014).

Homeless youth are typically marginalized by the community due to their experience.

However, it's important to note that within the homeless population there are glaring and

persistent racial disparities. Nearly, 75 percent of homeless youth are African American,

American Indian, Asian, Hispanic or of mixed race. But youth in these groups only represent 26

percent of Minnesota's total youth population (Wilder Research, 2016). Historical trauma and

generational impacts pertaining to housing policies and other systemic inequities have led to

the overrepresentation and glaring racial disparities (Wilder Research, 2016).

Homelessness is not only painful, but also laced with stigmatization even within

research. The majority of previous research's focus tends to revolve around the trauma,

difficulties and, negative aspects youth experience throughout homelessness. In contrast, this

study seeks to examine the skills and resiliency youth have built through their experience with

homelessness.

Several common themes emerged from the research analyzed. These themes include

the role of homelessness pertaining to mental health, loneliness, grief, substance use,

engagement with the justice system, and education as well as themes associated with

community among family, peers, and professionals, and lastly the skills and resiliency gained

from homelessness.

Literature Review

Family Relationships

In the late 1970's as an increased recognition of child maltreatment as a public health

and safety concern for children in the United States occurred, and from here the perspective of

youth who experienced homelessness began to change (Hyde, 2005). Unlike the normative

notion of family which assumes that all families are a place of nurture and support (Hyde, 2005)

youth who experience homelessness commonly identified catastrophic family dynamics

(Auerswald & Eyre, 2002). Their family experience is characterized by conflict, poor

communication, frequent relocations, abuse and violence, lack of affection, and substance

abuse (Hyde, 2005).

This toxic home environment frequently led youth to view leaving home as the only

option to protect themselves, and although removing themselves from the home was often

meant to be a temporary solution, for many homelessness turned into a new way of life (Hyde,

2005). Often a combination of factors leads to youth homelessness. The majority of youth who

experience homelessness identify physical abuse, or intense familial conflict as primary factors

in the onset of their homelessness (Hyde, 2005)

In particular, the lack of tolerance for sexual orientation or gender identity and the toxic

home environment this form of intolerance creates has led to an overwhelming number of

youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ+) in the

homeless community (Ray, 2006). LGBTQ youth often have great difficulty finding Safe spaces

that accepts and respects them. LGBTQ individuals experiencing homelessness are often at a

heightened risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation compared with their heterosexual peers

(Ray, 2006).

Not only has family conflict been linked to homelessness but also growing up in a

chaotic home environment and the experience of emotional abuse/neglect are shown to have

significant influence on youth Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and self-

injurious behaviors (Wong, Clark, & Marlotte, 2016). The stress associated and loss of social

networks that occurs within family conflict is also particularly troubling for individuals with

serious mental illness. Individuals with serious mental illness are often reliant on support from

family relationships with daily living skills, however, they cite that deterioration of family

relationships as not only a precursor but a cause of their homelessness (Montgomery, Metraux,

& Culhane, 2013).

Although the disaffiliation from family is particularly troubling for individuals with

serious mental illness, lack of parental support, and not having a safe home to return to are

specific factors that can lead to chronic homelessness for anyone (Tevendale, Comulada, &,

Lightfoot, 2011). HUD defines chronic homelessness as

> "either an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who
> has been continuously homeless for 12 months or more OR (2) an
> unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has had at least four
> episodes of homelessness in the past three years that total 12 months of
> homelessness ." (U.S. Department of housing and urban Development, 2007, pg.
> 3)

Youth who have been kicked out of their home or "throwaways" are at an even higher risk for chronic homelessness (Tevendale et al., 2011). Not only does this deterioration of their social network impact housing, but it impacts one's sense of identity and community.

Peer Relationships

From a developmental perspective, youth are concerned with issues of identity and identity formation. From an ecological perspective, youth are concerned with activity settings, which help them achieve some resolution to their identity crisis (Slesnick, Zhnag, & Brakenhoff, 2007). These feelings are intensified with the loss of social support and the stress of housing instability.

It is not uncommon for homeless youth to identify feelings of outsiderness, an uncomfortable sense of loneliness, and an intense desire to feel included, however, for some life on the streets provides a strong sense of community (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002). Friends, partnerships, and street created families were highlighted as important aspects of surviving homelessness. Friends are viewed as invaluable in teaching the ways of the street and supporting newcomers in learning how to cope and survive (Kidd, 2003). Friends and a community to connect with assists in securing a sense of safety and reducing feelings of loneliness and depression and, an increase in self-esteem (Kidd, 2003).

Frequently, youth on the streets develop deep bonds with others who experience homelessness as well as create a "street family" that provide material and emotional support along with a sense of identity (Garrett et al., 2008). These relationships provide guidance in how to survive on the streets and greatly influence how the youth identify themselves, and what services they utilize (Kipke, Unger, O'Connor, Palmer, & LaFrance, 1997).

Despite one's effort to seek and maintain trustworthy relationships with peers, homeless youth are an inherently transient population and as such, it is difficult to build and maintain supportive relationships (Perron, Cleverley, & Kidd, 2014).

A sense of community and family is essential for youth who experiences homelessness, however, the term friendship is not used lightly. Friendship is often viewed as a double edge sword. For many youths, relationships on the streets reinforced the lesson that people cannot be trusted which was often something first taught at home (Kidd et al., 2016). Youth express the need to be very cautious about whom they trust and consider friends (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Latry, & Flynn, 2007). Youth who experience homelessness describe their fellow peers as entangled in various personal crisis, on drugs, owing others money, and failing to implement plans to leave the streets (Chung, 2012). Negative peer networks formed while living on the streets were also linked to an individual's level of engagement within risky behaviors, such as survival sex and drug use (Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Kang, & Aukward, 2007). Friendships on the streets pose a risk due to theft, mistrust, and danger, yet for many youth, the essential benefits outweigh the risks (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002).

This shared sense of community and partnership were not only demonstrated among youth who experienced homelessness on the streets, but was also strongly identified by previously homeless youth who sought safety and housing at transitional living programs (Holschneider, 2016). Youth within transitional living programs frequently identified complicated relationships with their childhood caretaker, experiences of rejection, disappointment, neglect and often violence at the hands of families, yet, they firmly held to the idea that family and community meant something (Holtschneider, 2016). Formation of familial

roles while in the program was a common experience of participants within the transitional

living program and was particularly meaningful to those whose biological family did not fill

traditional roles. A strong belief that having an environment where you are surrounded by

others, even if they didn't know them well, makes an important, and at times lifesaving

difference (Holtschneider, 2016) as well as a sense of community and identity.

Professional Relationships

Just like with support provided by peers, support in the form of mentoring relationships

with professionals as well as a connection to supportive organizations are essential for

homeless youth (Hyman, Aubry, & Klodawsky, 2011). Services that enhance the positive

internal characteristics of youth such as social competencies, as well as the external

environment, increase the potential for youth to not just survive but to transition and thrive in

adulthood (Holschneider, 2016). However, just like with peer support the type and style of

support received from professionals made the difference. Professionals who offered help

without being overly obtrusive, without imposing their personal values (Garrett et al., 2008),

allowed the youth to try, fail, and try again (Kidd, 2003), and who were consistent over time

and demonstrated that they cared in a variety of ways were deemed the most beneficial

relationships (Williams, Lindsey, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 2001). Consistency was found to be especially

essential because frequently service providers are the only consistent relationship homeless

youth maintain (Williams et al., 2001).

Due to service providers being the most consistent relationship for youth, the quality of

these relationships plays a critical role in the positive development and healthier outcomes for

the youth. When professionals form positive relationships, encourage active client involvement,

and demonstrate respect, it creates an environment of safety, trust, and empowerment that

can lead to positive outcomes for the individual regardless of their characteristics and

circumstance (Sanders, Munfors, & Liebenberg, 2017).

These types of strong relationships also assist in building coping capacities, open new

networks, and provide opportunities that are often missing in the lives of homeless youth

(Sanders et al., 2017). For many youth positive and trusting relationships with adults are built

within the educational system, however, for youth experiencing homelessness, there are often

many educational barriers.

Education

The United States is facing a dropout crisis with an estimated 1.1 million members of the

2012 high school graduating class not earning a diploma (Rumberger, R.W., 2013). A portion of

this is due to the numerous barriers to educational participation homeless youth experience.

These barriers lead to an increased likelihood of dropping out among homeless students

compared to their housed peers (Ingram, Bridgeland, Reed, & Atwell, 2017). Students who

experience homelessness identify that it is hard to maintain focus and attendance in school due

to the emotional and physical effects of homelessness such as feelings of loneliness, anxiety,

stress, and depression. These educational concerns faced by youth who experience

homelessness can have lasting implications well into adulthood.

In general, the academic achievement of students who experience homelessness is

poor. Homelessness is known to be linked to frequent absences from school, multiple changes

in schools throughout their academic career, lower test scores, and slower grade progression

(Galven, M., & Luna, J., 2014). Students who identify as experiencing homelessness are nine

times more likely to repeat a grade, four times more likely to drop out, and three times more

likely to be placed in special education programs (National Network for Youth, 2017).

Homelessness puts a student in a state of constant transition and often the student

experiences feelings of disconnect, fear, and loneliness. School may be one of the few stable,

secure, and constant places in their lives.

Educational concerns of students facing homelessness have not gone unnoticed and

strides have been made to reduce the challenges and barriers homeless students face. In 1990,

the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act was expanded. The Mckinney-Vento Homeless

Assistance Act is a federal law that provides federal funding to states and school districts for the

sole purpose of addressing and supporting the educational needs of homeless youth (Ingram et

al., 2017). Since the expansion of this act, there has been a steady rise of homeless youth

enrolled in school, however, although enrollment rates have increased youth who experience

homelessness continue to struggle with educational barriers.

Homelessness does not only negatively impact one's ability to academically succeed in

school but to interact with peers as well. A higher rate of suspension and expulsion occurs

among youth who experience housing instability (Ingram et al., 2017). Lack of high school

education and mental health are an essential social factor that tends to further strengthen the

disengagement of homeless youth from mainstream society (Hyman et al., 2011).

Mental Health

National reports have continually indicated that the rate of youth experiencing

homelessness is rising and that this population is disproportionately vulnerable to a host of

negative physical and mental health concerns. Youth who experience homelessness are more likely than their housed peers to report mental health problems, including suicidal ideation and attempts (Perlman, Willard, Herber, Cutuli, & Eyrich Garg, 2014) as well as a high prevalence of self-injuries behavior (Wong et al., 2016).

Adolescence (or youth) is the label used to describe the stage of life that spans between the ages of eleven and twenty-one. The adolescence stage of life is well known for a time of developmental transitions, exploration, self-discovery, and challenges, (Palmer, Saviet, & Tourish, 2016) all of which are magnified when homelessness is a factor.

Although having a mental illness increases the risk of becoming homeless, mental illness is neither necessary nor sufficient as a cause of homelessness. Considering this, homelessness compounds pre-existing psychological difficulties (Martijn & Sharpe, 2005) and symptoms of mental illness are often exacerbated due to the constant state of crisis that is homelessness (Montgomery, Metraux, & Cilhane, 2013).Homelessness may also enhance poorer prognoses due to the fact that several conditions benefit from early detection and treatment, however, homelessness generally impacts one's access to optimal treatment (Castellow, Kloos, & Townley, 2015). Thus, the length of time spent homeless and prolonged exposure to potentially traumatic and dangerous circumstances can lead to poorer recovery outcomes and maladaptive coping mechanisms (Castellow et al., 2015).

Individuals who experience homelessness are often stigmatized and marginalized by the community which further increases the socioeconomic deprivation. There is strong evidence suggesting that genetic and biological factors as well as growing up in a household with

parental mental disorder, substance abuse, discord and violence that increases one's risk for

mental health concerns (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). It is common for youth who

experience homelessness to show higher rates of depression and suicide attempts due to

experiences of re-victimization in the form of sexual and physical abuse while homeless

(Rattelade, Farrell, Aubry, & Klodawsky, 2014) as well as, higher rates of depressive and PTSD

symptoms because of the threat of physical assault while homeless (Wong et al., 2016). The

higher rates of mental health symptoms can also be impacted by the feelings of isolation and

loneliness many youth face.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a multidimensional, painful, and often an unwelcome experience for many

youths. The experience of loneliness is unique and is impacted by one's personality, history,

living conditions, and age (Rokach, 2005). Loneliness has been linked to anxiety, increased

vulnerability, and suicide; it is common for individuals who experience homelessness to

perceive their causes of loneliness significantly different from that of the general public

(Rokach, 2005). This different perception could be due to stress, sense of failure and personal

inadequacy, along with the feelings of helplessness caused by the inability to secure basic needs

and shelter (Rokach, 2005).

Loneliness is common among youth who experience homelessness because they often

feel alienated from larger society, are typically estranged from family, and have an unreliable

social support network (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Loneliness can lead to higher anxiety, depression,

and suicidal ideation (Rokach, 2005). It has been suggested that it is almost inevitable that at

some point throughout a youth's experience with homelessness they will experience a sense of

loneliness and isolation (Rokach, 2005).

Not only is it almost inevitable that youth experiencing homelessness will experience a

sense of loneliness, but it is also very common that the youth will experience a sense of grief

and loss.

Grief and Loss

Adolescence is a time submerged with an innumerable amount of challenges,

transitions, and experiences of loss. However, it can be argued that among adolescents who

experience homelessness these challenges are magnified and that a powerful background of

grief underwrites their fragile process of homemaking and connection between place and self

(Robinson, 2005).

Within the nature of homelessness there are many ambiguous losses. Ambiguous losses

are losses that remain unclear or without closure and frequently occur for youth experiencing

homelessness in the respect of how they imagined their educational, work, and teenage years

would be. For many, a constant cycle of securing and losing housing, employment, and

relationships occurs and with each experience, it further produces feelings of abandonment

and loss of connectedness to place and community, all of which are losses to be grieved

(Robinson, 2005). This is especially concerning because adolescence is a period when positive

social, family, community, and cultural capacities are essential to healthy development.

However, there is limited research on grief as an element within the experience of

homelessness. This may be because society seldom identifies psychosocial events which are

losses of something intangible as losses generating feelings that require a grieving process

(Bowman, 2014). Yet, this is far from true. Although the loss of future and past, of place and innocence, may often be overlooked and challenging to identify, it does not make these types of losses any less worthy of the need to grieve.

For many homeless youths, grief is lived at the site of the body- through anger, crying, self-harm, drug and alcohol use, mental and physical ill-health (Robinson, 2005). Society often believes these expressions are due to mental health or are reactions to the trauma associated with being homelessness. This means frequently no one never questions to see if these behaviors are the coping mechanism an individual is using to mourn a loss.

Limited research has been done addressing grief within the adolescent homeless community, however, loss is an inevitable part of life and with every loss, and there is some fashion of a grieving process that occurs. This grieving process is unique to each individual and for many youth experiencing homelessness, a common coping mechanism adapted is substance use and abuse.

Substance Use

Consistently, an excess of the homeless youth population have endorsed features of chemical and alcohol misuse and abuse (Martijn & Sharpe, 2005). Substance use has often been viewed within the homeless youth community as a way to cope, a way to escape and forget the pain and stress associated with homelessness (Kidd, 2003)

Due to this view, it has been argued that homelessness is a precursor to substance abuse (Castellow et al., 2015). Yet, on the other hand, it has also been suggested that substance abuse may lead to homelessness. Either way, it has been identified that substance

use plays an integral role in the homeless community. Not only are drugs and alcohol an

essential source of income but they appear to also build community (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002).

In fact, one's substance of choice has been linked to how individuals relate to one another,

define themselves, how others view them (Kidd & Davidson, 2007) as well as, how they are

initiated and affirm their identity within the community (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008).

The impact of substance abuse is not lost on the youth, frequently they acknowledge

the barriers substance use creates in their physical and mental health, utilization of services, as

well as their housing status (Garrett, Higa, Phares, Peterson, Wells, & Baer, 2008). Drug and

alcohol abuse has been shown to predict fewer days housed compared to days spent out in the

streets (Kidd, Frederick, Karabanow, Hughes, Naylor, & Barbic, 2016) however, even with this

realization and knowledge, drugs and alcohol continue to be a large part of the homeless

community (Garrett et al., 2008).

Substance use among youth who experience homelessness not only impacts the path to

housing stability but frequently leads to engagement with the justice system.

Engagement with the Justice System
Youth who have been discarded by the community such as those who have spent time

in state care such as foster care or a correctional facility are at a higher risk for homelessness

and are often overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Esparza, 2009). Individuals in jail

have experienced homelessness in the previous year at a rate 7.5 to 11 times greater than the

general public (Fox, Mulvey, Katz, & Shafer, 2016). Frequently, individuals who experience

homelessness enter into the criminal justice system due to minor public disturbances, property

crimes, and drug charges all of which can be partially attributed to their lack of housing (Fox et

al., 2016).

With the increasing degree of inadequate housing or shelter options available

throughout the United States, many individuals who experience homeless are forced to live in

places not meant for habitation such as abandoned buildings or under bridges (National Law

Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017). Many local governments have taken measures to

criminalize activities that individuals who experience homelessness are forced to partake in to

survive, for example camping or sleeping in public locations.

In Minneapolis, MN it is illegal for individuals to use a "camping car, house trailer,

automobile, tent, or other temporary structure" as a temporary housing anywhere in the city

(National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017). Many communities have gone further

and have defined camping as "sleeping-out-doors" (National Law Center on Homelessness &

Poverty, 2017).

Along with laws prohibiting camping, laws prohibiting loitering, loafing, or vagrancy are

commonly used to target and criminalize homelessness. These laws criminalize harmless

activities such as sitting, standing still, or lying down in public places. Individuals who

experience homelessness do not have the luxury of private places where they may rest. Due to

this, most frequently utilize common areas to sleep because it is impossible for human beings

to forego sleep/rest for a lengthy period of time (National Law Center on Homelessness &

Poverty, 2017). Commonly, a citation or arrest for loitering will be accompanied by a warning

that returning to the same location will result in trespassing. These types of laws create safety

concerns for homeless individuals and further outcast them from society.

Lastly, laws prohibiting panhandling can impact homeless youth greatly due to lacking

sustainable employment opportunities. Panhandling may be a person's only option for

obtaining money for survival. Even in communities with robust homeless service network,

individuals need cash to purchase food, clothing, personal hygiene items, and for transportation

(National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017). Camping, loitering and panhandling

laws put individuals who experience homelessness at a constant threat of arrest/engagement

with the justice system for performing necessary, life-sustaining activities (National Law Center

on Homelessness & Poverty, 2017).

Not only does imposing these laws further create barriers for individuals who

experience homelessness by impacting their criminal records which in return impacts ability to

find employment and housing, but it also impacts one's sense of identity and the identity

formation process.

Identity and Sense of Self

Adolescence is characterized by an unpredictable and complex time of crisis inducing

change. It is a time when adolescents are concerned with issues of identity formation (Slesnick,

et al., 2007) and developing a stable sense of personal identity. It is also a time to separate

from family in a healthy manner, form appropriate relationships with peers, and begin to

process and dream about the future (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). For youth who experience

homelessness, often their identity is built on isolation and abandonment by the mainstream

society. However, because adolescence is a time when one fervently searches for their identity

it is predominant that youth who experience homeless connect and create a shared identity as

an outsider with others in similar situations (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002).

Youth not only create shared identities through the experience of homelessness, but

also discover and create a sense of self, identify, grow as a person, and find pride in their ability

to survive (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). For some, the experience of homelessness leads to a sense

of personal control. For some, life on the street creates an opportunity for a life of travel, which

leads to meeting interesting and similar people, and an independence from the past (Bender et

al., 2007). All of these different aspects form a sense of identity and belonging within the

homeless community that is craved during this stage of development.

Conversely, identity formation throughout homelessness can lead to challenges when

transitioning out of homelessness. For many, transitioning out of homelessness can mean a

whole shift in identity, meaning, perspective and trust towards people (Kidd et al., 2016) and

adjusting to a mainstream society that at one point rejected them (Garrett et al., 2008). This

feat requires that homeless youth adapt, cope and ultimately become resilient individuals.

Coping and Resilience

Often society views the strategies and coping mechanisms utilized by homeless youth as

maladaptive in comparison to the alternative strategies and coping mechanisms (Kolar,

Erickson, & Stewart, 2012), however, for youth who experience homelessness many live in

dangerous and stressful environments which require extraordinary coping skills (Bender et al.,

2007). Youth who experience homelessness develop a unique skill set specific to the needs of

living on the street such as developing a proficiency in locating resources and coordinating

times to best utilize services as well as, problem solving techniques for dealing with insufficient

resources (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002), transportation, safety, and networking with services and peers (Bender et al., 2007). Youth who have learned the street coping skills and are knowledgeable about where to find resources, as well as have established who can be trusted, and have adapted to the social culture and structure may be viewed as maladaptive to society but ultimately this is what allows youth to survive (Bender et al., 2007). Learning the specific behaviors, attitudes, and culture of the street greatly enhances the youth's ability care for themselves in a safe manner (Williams et al., 2001).

Another commonly viewed maladaptive and delinquent behaviors are the act of running away and leaving home, however, this can be a protective measure. Leaving allows one to remove themselves from an emotionally and physically dangerous situations (Hyde, 2005). In fact, youth feel more emotionally stable once they have escaped unsafe and abusive home life even if it means they are on the streets (MacDonald, 2014).

On the streets, trust is often perceived as a way to be victimized and exploited (Chung, 2012) and thus youth frequently demonstrate traits of being guarded, hesitant to form relationships, and lack of trust towards others and society. Rather than being maladaptive, these behaviors can help youth avoid unsafe and exploitive adults or peers (Bender et al., 2007). Without reducing their trust in others, many youths could have potentially faced more harm and exploitation due to simply relying on unstable resources (Kolar et al., 2012).

Additionally, another commonly viewed maladaptive coping mechanisms are the violence often associated with street life, however, on the contrary, exhibiting toughness and fearlessness can be considered an important safety and survival techniques (Chung, 2012).

Countering violence with violence may be necessary for self-defense (Kolar et al., 2012) and could be viewed as a protective factor within the homeless community.

While youth who experience homelessness identify many horrific and challenging experiences while on the streets, they also identify that these experiences taught them strength, helped develop who they are within their beliefs and values, as well as, assisted in creating a sense of independence, and taught them life skills (Kidd, 2003). Though society may perceive a deficiency in these skills, homeless youth utilize these adaptive skills and thus demonstrate resiliency (Chung, 2012).

Resilience has been defined as a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development (Chung, 2012). Resilience is a dynamic process in which psychological, social, environmental and biological factors interact to enable an individual to develop, maintain, or move forward despite exposure to adversity (Kolar et al., 2012). Homeless youth exhibit remarkable strength at being self-reliant and self-protective which are qualities that can easily be classified as resilient (Chung, 2012). It has also been found that youth who perceived themselves as resilient are less likely to feel hopeless, lonely or engage in risky behaviors (Bender et al., 2007), and more frequently view the future with hope and actively seek change (Kidd, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

Youth make choices based on emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual development. Youth experiencing homelessness typically have had little to no power over their lives and many have experienced exploitive and hurtful relationships (Catholic Charities, 2016). To positively move forward individuals need to feel competent, useful and have a sense of belonging, and the Positive Youth Development Theory attempts to address all these factors.

Positive Youth Development has roots ranging from academic research in comparative psychology, evolutionary biology, life-span developmental psychology research, as well as bioecological development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). These models stress the relative plasticity of human development and argue that potential for systematic change in behavior exists because of a mutually influential relationship between the developing person and their biology, psychological characteristics, family, community, physical and design ecology and history (Lerner, et al., 2005). Positive Youth Development originated within the field of prevention, however, as time progressed the youth development field began examining the role of resiliency and the protective factors in an individual's environment and how these factors could influence one's ability to overcome adversity. Factors included, but were not limited to, family support, positive peer groups, positive adult relationships, strong sense of self, and future aspirations, and engagement in school and community services.

Positive Youth Development is described as an intentional, prosocial approach that

engages youth within their communities, schools, organization, peer groups, and families in a

manner that is productive, constructive, and enhances their strengths as well as promotes

positive outcomes for youth by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and

furnishing the support needed for growth (youth.gov, 2017). This positive orientation to

understanding and working with youth advocates aligning the strengths of the youth with

resources found in their physical and social ecologies as well as emphasizes the youth's skills

and capacities to adapt among challenges and highlights the strengths gained rather than the

negative impacts (Sanders, et al., 2017).

Methods

Design and Methodology

This research examined the perception professionals have about the strengths and skills youth utilized and developed through their experience of homelessness. Due to the complex nature of the subject matter, a qualitative interview research design was implemented to ensure that the narratives of professionals working with youth facing homelessness were captured. The qualitative design method allowed for exploration of professional narratives and the ability to extract current themes and make additional recommendations to advance the field.

In this study, professionals were defined as individuals who were currently working with youth lacking safe and permanent housing within the seven-county Twin Cities region and had either a social work licensure or had a minimum of five years of experience working with the youth population.

For the purpose of this study, the term youth was used to define individuals between the ages of 16 and 25 and homelessness was defined as an individual who lacked safe and permanent housing. This could mean an individual was living in a homeless shelter, couch hopping, stayed in a place not meant for habitation, or resided in a time-limited housing program often referred to as Transitional Living Program.

Sampling

This study examined the perception professionals have about the strengths youth utilized and developed through experiencing homelessness. The sample consisted of eight in-person interviews with professionals who worked in the youth development field throughout

the seven-county Twin Cities region which is comprised of Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Carver,

Dakota, Scott, and Washington County. The author compiled a list of homeless youth specific

agency throughout the seven-county region and participants were recruited from within these

agencies. Participants were recruited through utilization of professional networking and a

snowball sampling. Snowball sampling technique is a type of nonprobability sampling technique

where existing participants are used to recruit future participants (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau,

2016). For this study participants were asked to provide the name of two other potentially

eligible professionals with a minimum of one eligible professional outside of the current

participant's agency of employment for the study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Interviews were administered by the author who is a Master of Social Work graduate

student from Saint Catherine University/University of St. Thomas. Interviews were conducted in

private locations within the agencies participants were recruited from or at community

locations such as libraries where private areas were available. Before interviews occurred

participants were informed of their rights, and a consent form was reviewed and signed. See

Appendix B for the consent form. All procedures were approved by Saint Catherine

University/University of St. Thomas professor of Social Work Practice Research course GRSW

682, Dr. Rajean Moone, a committee of master level social work professionals, and the

Institutional Review Board. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed on to a password

protected devices. Audio-recordings and transcriptions from interviews were destroyed by June

30th 2018.

Data Collection Instrument and Process

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight professionals. Interviews were

conducted in a variety of private locations by the author. Interviews consisted of six open-

ended questions (see Appendix A for interview questions) and were conducted in the time span

between February 1, 2018 and April 3, 2018. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed

onto password-protected devices.

Data Analysis Plan

All qualitative interviews data was transcribed verbatim onto a password locked

computer no greater than two weeks from the date of the interview and deleted from the

audio recording device. Transcriptions were analyzed and significant statements were identified

and coded. Codes, analysis of transcriptions, and literature review were then used to inform the

creation of a textual description of the findings (Grinnell et al., 2016).

Strengths and Limitations

This research was conducted to bring awareness to the extremely vulnerable and

hidden population of youth experiencing homelessness as well as respond to the significantly

limited research pertaining to homeless youth and strengths. The research providing an

opportunity to gain insight and analysis of how Professionals view youth experiencing housing

instability. Besides the awareness the study hopes to bring, strengths of the study also lie

within methods of conducting the research. The utilization of the snowball sampling technique

allowed for broader recruitment and a more diverse sample population, as well as assisted with

collecting efficient data within the limited research time frame.

Limitations can be expected within all research and for this particular study, a few of the

limitations are the narrow sampling area of the Twin Cities, as well as the limited time frame for

the research to be conducted. The research experienced limitations due to the fact that youth

experiencing homelessness are a hidden population who frequently do not access services, and

tend to be distrusting of adults and professionals which will likely impact the knowledge

professionals have on the experience youth face while homeless as well as strengths gained.

Findings

The following is a presentation of the findings from this qualitative study of

Professionals Perspective on Youth Homelessness and Skills Developed. The purpose of this

research was to examine youth homelessness and the strengths and skills utilized through the

experience of homelessness.

Description of Participants

In this study, professionals were defined as individuals working with youth lacking safe

and permanent housing within the seven-county Twin Cities region and have either a social

work licensure or have a minimum of five years of experience working with youth. The sample

for this study consisted of eight professionals, two identified as male and the remaining six

identified as female. All participants currently work with youth facing a housing crisis and had

five to 25 years of experience and a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a social service field.

Participants worked at various agencies within the seven-county Twin Cities Region that

included youth homeless shelters, drop-in centers, county human services, and a rapid re-

housing program. Participants ranged in roles within their agencies from Youth Counselors,

Case Managers, Intake Assessor to Program Supervisors.

Semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted with all eight participants.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of private locations. Interviews consisted of six open-

ended questions (see Appendix A for interview questions). Interviews last 15 to 45 minutes and

were be audio-recorded and transcribed onto password-protected devices and from this

themes were identified.

Through the interviewing and coding process for this study, several major themes were

discovered. Themes include: Complex Barriers that Impact Youth Homelessness, Resilience

amongst Youth, Resourcefulness, Confidence, and Hope are Bountiful, Community Bonds Formed,

Skills Developed to Survive and Meet Basic Needs, and Lack of Awareness within Communities.

Theme 1: Complex Barriers that Impact Youth Homelessness

Although, the research question was directed at skills and strengths utilized by youth

while experiencing homelessness, each participant passionately identified multiple barriers

youth face while homelessness. Common barriers identified were accessing county services and

the stigma associated with being labeled homeless.

The challenges of understanding and accessing services was frequently identified as a

common barrier.

> *"A lot of it is the system. The day to day systems that we navigate. So it's like if you're born into the system, well it is designed to keep you in the system." – Participant 004*

> *"The system is often set up in a way that doesn't make it easy for people to navigate it. It doesn't make sense."- Participant 005*

> *"Recently I helped someone apply for emergency assistance and the amount of paperwork that the county was asking for was ridiculous… I mean the two youth I was just helping, thirty pages I had to fax over... it's a huge barrier and financial workers of the county don't seem to recognize that somebody that is either street homeless or looking for a deposit through emergency assistance where are they going to find something to print off the thirty pages and then fax it over."- Participant 006*

A second barrier addressed several times by many participants was the difficulties associated with the label of homeless. One participant identified how frequently individuals don't label their housing crisis as homeless.

"Not wanting to be misunderstood or not wanting to identify with labels. Not all kids I sit down with identify with being homeless because they are scared of that label and are at a friend's house and it feels safe and good. "- Participant 007

The barriers associated with labels created by society were also identified:

"For one they are the invisible people, so to speak of in society. How they are perceived by the rest of society as less than a person, when actually they are fantastic individuals creates a barrier." – Participant 001

The barriers identified by each participant highlighted a small fraction of the systematic and societal barriers that largely impact a youth's ability to survive and thrive. Despite all these barriers participants identified youth experiencing homelessness demonstrate great resiliency and strength that help them overcoming barriers such as the above daily.

Theme 2: Resiliency amongst Youth

After participants were able to express frustration and the barriers associated with homelessness it appeared to help them focus on and identify numerous strengths developed and utilize while experiencing homelessness. One strength mentioned by each participant in some fashion was the concept of resiliency.

Resilience was defined by one participant as:

"The resilience piece is just being able to bounce back. Being a seventeen-year-old child with lack of supervision, or direction or support in life and they are still able to just bounce back from any situation. They might get kicked out of school because of truancy

or might be kicked out of school due to behavior issues, but they are going to bounce back and find a new school." That's resilience- Participant 002

Resilience was also described as:

"If I was caught in the middle of anywhere I would want to be with a young person, because they are resilient, they are almost like chess players without even knowing that they are playing chess. The hustle is strategy and right now they don't know how to name that or acknowledge that it's a strategy but they are resistant and with resilience, they can do anything."— Participant 004

Lastly, resilience was identified by another participant as:

"Resilience looks like they are here. That they aren't dead, they are still here even considering some of the things that they go through and not only are they still here but they are standing and they are still okay, they are able to mentally function, and they are still hopeful and have goals."— Participant 008

Resilience was used as a way to describe a youth's ability to overcome barriers and thrive in a system that has been set for them to fail. For many participants, it was the only way they could encompass and put meaning and language to the strength and ability youth demonstrate throughout the continual hardships and setbacks.

Theme 3: Confidence and Hope are Bountiful

Not only was it identified that youth are resilient, but many participants noted youth's ability to have confidence and hope in themselves and their dreams as an essential to their ability to thrive. Confidence and hope were seen to be the driving force behind resilience and was what assisted the youth to continually face the barriers and tough situations.

One participant stated that:

"Even though their situation is really dim they do really have a lot of hope. They may talk negative and say ' oh that's BS' and whatever but I think they have a lot of hope that it could be better and that it will be better and just need support to do so"— Participant 003

Participant 008 mentioned the role of confidence and how it impacts youths drive and ability to

thrive:

> *"They develop the ability to advocate for themselves and they build confidence. Once they achieve one thing they feel like they can achieve other things." – Participant 008*

Theme 4: Community Bonds Formed

A common theme throughout the research was the importance of community bonds

and the youth's ability to form a bond with both peers and supportive adults.

The community formed among peers experiencing homelessness was noted to provide

support and enhanced a youth's ability to thrive by providing a sense of community, safety, and

belonging.

One participant described the community bonds formed between peers as:

> *"I just really think they are incredibly supportive of each other and I think that they build these small communities. It's almost like an unnamed society that they have in these communities that they build together. They build their little pseudo family units and often there are roles they fill such as the role of the caregivers, protector or the provider."—Participant 002*

Although, it was noted by participants that the relationships built by youth facing

homelessness as not always the healthiest, the bonds created were still a vital part of a youth's

sense of belonging.

> *"When family really sucks badly but yet you have a strong need for community and belonging, I think it creates a really gaping hole. I think that is why within the homeless community there is a pretty sufficient cultural of friends. Having that community*

connection whether it's functional or not is better than not having a sense of family or connectedness to someone else that makes you feel affirmed as a person, that wants to be with you."—Participant 005

Many participants also noted the importance of positive adult relationships and the need for youth experiencing homelessness to seek relationships with a professional whether it's a teacher, a peer, worker, and a coach. Often youth seek professional adult bonds because they crave healthy stable relationships.

Theme 5: Skills Developed to Survive and Meet Basic Needs.

Homelessness is a state of crisis and youth who are experiencing homelessness live inconsistent state of survival. Daily they wonder where will I lay my head tonight, how will I get my next meal, etc. While they are experiencing a state of crisis and are constantly forced into survival mode they utilize and developed numerous skills to help them meet their basic needs and remain as safe as possible.

One participant noted that youth experiencing homelessness build skills that the average teenager will build and utilize, but unfortunately youth experiencing homelessness have to develop these skills too soon and at often due to really harsh and unhealthy situations which in return impacts the development and implementation of the skills. Common skills identified among participants were resourcefulness and people skills.

Resourcefulness was linked to one's ability to survive and noted as the ability to find what they need when they need it.

"Just very creative, like some of the life hacks that these kids come up with I'm like 'that was really smart. Way to go, man, I would never have thought of that, that's awesome.'

Really like just the way they figure out how to make the most out of what it is that they do have."— Participant 007

Resourcefulness was also associated with knowing and utilizing multiple services.

"The young people are extremely intelligent in ways that might not be traditional. One might not be terribly book smart but they could tell you how to get anywhere in the city via bus, they know how to get resources and how to kind of get by because they know where they can go to get an extra bus token or a meal or to earn an extra couple bucks to get them by."— Participant 001

Along with resourcefulness, many identified the youth's ability to communicate and work with people. Although, it was also noted that communication didn't always occur in the most effective manner it generally helped a youth secure resources and meet their basic needs.

" one of the big things is these young people continually interacting in positive and negative interactions but they learn what works and what doesn't because they have to talk with so many different people and services providers as well as other peers who are also homeless in ways to leverage to get their basic needs meet."— Participants 001

A youth's ability to communicate in a persistent manner was also identified as skill utilized to get their needs meet.

"The skill of learning to be just really persistent. So its ask ask, ask, go to somebody else for the same things, go to a different location, kind of accumulate tokens and other resources, maybe go to multiple providers and see what different agencies can offer"— Participant 005

Lastly, although people skills were noted as important to a youth's survival it was also identified that the youths' communication styles were not always the most effective.

"Smooth talkers and they can talk their way into a lot of places but then again, they burn a lot of bridges super quick."—Participant 006

Theme 6: Lack of Community Awareness

Homelessness is not a new epidemic, however, it still can be a belief that homelessness

is not a concern in many communities and the stigma associated with homelessness is rampant

and detrimental.

Numerous participants quickly identified the need for awareness and common stigmas

held about youth experiencing homelessness. Many of these stigmas were believed to be

misconceptions among participants and pertained to the cause of homelessness, chemical use,

involvement with the justice system, and mental health.

One participated described the stigmas associated with the cause of homelessness as:

> *"Youth experiencing homelessness is not a character flaw. It's something that happens to people and it is not always by the fault of their own. They are typical teenagers they want the same things as everyone else they want to have a job, they want to go to school, they want to have nice clothes and shoes, and they want to go to college. But, they have just been dealt a more difficult hand and haven't always had the same opportunities as other teenagers their own age"—Participant 002*

Participants also addressed chemical use as a stigma associated with the homeless youth

community.

> *"They are not all useless drug users because that seems to be a common belief and that they are not working and just using drugs. A lot of people believe that and their answer to ending homelessness is why they don't just go get a job. In fact, many of my youth are employed and some even work three jobs and still can't afford rent"- Participant 006*

Due to lack of understanding and fear among communities many participants identified that

individuals experiencing homelessness are over-represented in the justice system due to a lack

of understanding from the community members. Many states have implemented laws against

several survival crimes such as loitering or sleeping outside in a car.

> *"So I see a lot of criminal history coming up. Not even like malicious criminal history, it's a lot of survival crime. There was one youth I worked with that had breaking and entering on his record but it wasn't breaking and entering per say. He didn't cause any property damage, he didn't hurt anybody it was an apartment building where the back door was unlocked and open so he just opened the door went in, went down to the basement and slept on the floor in the laundry room. It was winter time and had if he not done that he could have had frostbite, hypothermia, he could have died outside. So to me, I think when a police officer approaches someone with a survival such as when a youth gets picked up for stealing a sandwich or for some kind of like petty crimes. The police should type be asking/talking about why is this happening. "Participant 007*

The high percentage of youth experiencing homelessness also lacking appropriate mental

health services and the stigma associated with mental health was also noted by a few

participants as something that needs more community awareness.

> *"I think that mental health kind of gets exasperated by homelessness and that can be tricky whether it's like the barrier to a person being housed or the barrier to them remaining successfully housed. Once they get housed then it's like you're starting to exit out of survival mode, you start to feel everything again, you start to remember like all the things you did while you were surviving. So it's like if we had some better mental health services while a person is homeless then maybe they wouldn't have to go into that survival mode and it might be that much easier to mentally and emotionally unpack while you're unpacking you know into your new place"-Participant 007*

The passion, commitment and genuine care for working with youth experience

homelessness were apparent in each interview. The desire to bring awareness to homelessness

and change the misconceptions by sharing the stories of resiliency and strength of youth was

evident. Although, all agreed that the fight to end youth homelessness is far from over, there

was hope that barriers and stigmas could be eliminated.

Discussion

Youth homelessness is widespread, complex and expands far beyond just an individual

lacking a safe roof over their head. Youth who are on their own and experiencing homelessness

are extremely vulnerable (Wilder Research, 2016). There are fewer available shelter options as

well as fewer legal provisions for housing and other basic needs placing them at a high risk for

victimization (Wilder Research, 2016). Experiencing homelessness at any point during

adolescence stage can have a significant impact on the youth's development physical, mentally,

and emotionally that can persist into adulthood.

This research explored strengths and skills utilized by youth experiencing homelessness.

Much of the research conducted on youth homelessness has illustrated the trauma and

negative outcomes of homelessness on all aspects of one's well-being: physically, emotionally,

and mentally.

The current study correlates with this information in the finding that homelessness is

complex and has numerous causes and impacts. However, this study focused on a strengths

perspective by identifying positive attributes and skills utilized by youth how have experienced

homelessness. This perspective was taken to assist in bringing a broader understanding of

youth homelessness and reducing stigma.

Complex Barriers

Findings from the present study were consistent with existing research when pertaining

to the barrier of mental health, and involvement with the justice system. It was identified by

both past and current research that homelessness compounds pre-existing psychological

difficulties (Martijn & Sharpe, 2005) and symptoms of mental illness are often exacerbated due

to the constant state of crisis that is homelessness (Montgomery, Metraux, & Cilhane, 2013).

Although, participants from the study mentioned mental health far less emphasis was placed

on mental health when compared to existing research.

As for involvement with the justice system, again, it was strongly identified within both

existing research and the current study. Existing research noted that individuals who experience

homelessness enter into the criminal justice system due to minor public disturbances, property

crimes, and drug charges all of which can be partially attributed to their lack of housing (Fox et

al., 2016). In fact, many local governments have taken measures to criminalize activities that

individuals who experience homelessness are forced to partake in to survive, for example

camping or sleeping in public locations.

This mirrors what one participant mentioned when addressing youth experiencing

homelessness. The participant identified that many youths experience frequent interactions

with law enforcement and become labeled as a criminal due to survival crimes such as sleeping

in one's car or riding the bus all night long.

Community Bonds

Youth who experience homelessness commonly characterized their family experience

by conflict, poor communication, frequent relocations, abuse and violence, as well as, lack of

affection, and substance abuse (Hyde, 2005). Participants in the study also identified that youth

experiencing homelessness often had poor family experiences, but noted that youth

experiencing homelessness create a pseudo-family among peers to replace their dysfunctional one.

As for bond with peers, research from literature and this study aligned. It was identified that youth experiencing homelessness created strong bonds and communities among peers (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002) and that friends, partnerships, and street created families were essential aspects of surviving homelessness. Several participants indicated that a youth's ability to build such bonds and a community is a strength of youth developed out of necessity during homelessness.

Education

Within existing research education was a focal point relating to both barriers and strengths. In general, the academic achievement of students who experience homelessness is poor. Homelessness is known to be linked to frequent absences from school, multiple changes in schools throughout their academic career, lower test scores, and slower grade progression (Galven, M., & Luna, J., 2014). However, it was only briefly mentioned in current research by one participant did identify that one aspect of resiliency among youth experiencing homelessness is that even when youth are removed from school due to truancy or behavior, they go and find another school where they can continue their education.

Resiliency amongst Youth

The focus of this research study was to identify strengths and skills utilized and developed by youth experiencing homelessness. Although there was limited research with a strength focus there were notable similarities that arose especially relating to resiliency.

Existing literature identified resilience as a dynamic process in which psychological, social, environmental and biological factors interact to enable an individual to develop, maintain, or move forward despite exposure to adversity (Kolar et al., 2012). Participants of the study noted resiliency as the remarkable strength and determination of youth. Participants also highlighted and linked the youth's ability to maintain confidence and hope as an aspect of resilience.

While youth who experience homelessness identify many horrific and challenging experiences while on the streets, they also identify that these experiences taught them strength, helped develop who they are within their beliefs and values, as well as, assisted in creating a sense of independence, and taught them life skills (Kidd, 2003).

Skills Developed to Survive and Meet Basic Needs

Finds from existing literature and current study were consistent when discussing the development of survival skills among homeless youth community. Existing literature reported youth who experience homelessness develop a unique skill set specific to the needs of living on the street, such as developing a proficiency in locating resources and coordinating times to best utilize services as well as, problem solving techniques for dealing with insufficient resources (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002), transportation, safety, and networking with services and peers.

These findings were parallel to responses by participants. Participants identified skills utilized by youth such as their ability to communicate with others and being persistent when seeking resources, the amount of knowledge and resourcefulness utilized to know where and how to access resources and services, as well as the youth's ability to be creative with the resources and supplies they have available to them were all noted skills.

Implications for Social Work Practice and Research

Social Work is a profession devoted to social justice, service, dignity, and worth of the person, importance of the human relationship, integrity, and competence. Social Workers strive to continuously implement these values into all aspects of professional roles (National Association of Social Workers, 2008) While Social Workers have been a solid voice in addressing and advocating for policy changes related to housing stability and homelessness, there is still more that must be done.

Youth experiencing homelessness are an extremely vulnerable and hidden population and are in need of services tailored to their current stage of life and developmental needs. Adolescence is a time characterized by unpredictability and crisis-inducing change and discovery (Slesnick, et al., 2007).

A better understanding of the uniqueness of youth homelessness is imperative. Continued research not only on youth homelessness but a strengths-based perspective on a homeless youth's strengths and skills can assist in bringing awareness and change not only for social workers but for communities. Increasing awareness can assist in reducing the stigma and labeling often created due to fear and unknown.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this research was that it allowed for further explorations into the extremely vulnerable population of youth experiencing homelessness. This was done by recruiting from professionals from urban and suburban agencies that worked with youth at an assortment of professional levels. This allowed for an added depth of understanding and how strengths and skills were utilized and developed a broader field.

Limitations of the research were the limited time frame for the research to be conducted. This limited time created barriers in recruiting and scheduling interviews with participants. The research also experienced limitations with the questions. It took some directing to have participants address strengths and skills rather than barriers, need for policy change, and awareness.

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Appendix A:

Qualitative Research Topic: Perceptions of Service Professionals on Youth Homelessness and Strengths Developed.

1. What kind of work do you do with youth who are experiencing homelessness?
   a. How long have you worked in the field?
   b. What brought you to working in the field?
2. What would you say are some of the most prominent causes of youth homelessness?
   a. What are common barriers youth experiencing homelessness face?
   b. What challenges youth experiencing homelessness face obtaining and utilizing services and/or housing?
   c. What perceptions do you believe society holds about youth who are experiencing homelessness?
3. What skills have you witnessed youth experiencing homelessness develop?
   a. How did they develop these skills?
   b. How did these skills help them cope with experiencing homelessness?
4. Describe a time when you observed a youth utilizing past homeless experiences as a tool for learning or development.
5. How has the development of skills while experiencing homelessness helped youth…
   a. Overcome barriers?
   b. Positively impacted utilization of services?
   c. Progress towards individual goals?
6. Thinking about a youth growing up into adulthood. What, if any, positive outcomes or skills would you identify that help the youth succeed as an adult?

Appendix B:

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for a Research Study

Study Title: Perceptions of Service Professionals on Youth Homelessness and Strengths Developed

Researcher(s): Joelle Bellows, LSW

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called Perceptions of Service Professionals on Youth Homelessness and Strengths Developed. The study is being done by Joelle Bellows, a Masters' student at St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. The faculty advisor for this study is Rajean Moone, Ph.D., Graduate School of Social Work at St. Catherine University.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception professionals have about the strengths youth develop because they have experienced homelessness. This study is important because it brings awareness to the extremely vulnerable and hiding population of youth experiencing homelessness as well as respond to the significantly limited research pertaining to homeless youth and strengths. Eight to ten people are expected to participate in this research. Below, you will find answers to the most commonly asked questions about participating in a research study. Please read this entire document and ask questions you have before you agree to be in the study.

Why have I been asked to be in this study?

You have been selected for the study because you are a professional who currently works in the with youth experiencing homelessness within the seven-county Twin Cities region which is comprised of Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Scott, and Washington County. As well as either has a Social Work licensure or has been working in the homeless youth field for a minimum of five years.

** If I decide to participate, what will I be asked to do?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 30 to 60-minute in-person interview.

In total, this study will take approximately 45 minutes over one session.

What if I decide I do not want to be in this study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate in this study, please feel free to say so, and do not sign this form. If you decide to participate in this study, but later change your mind and want to withdraw, simply notify me and you will be removed immediately. Your decision of whether or not to participate will have no negative or

positive impact on your relationship with St. Catherine University / University of St. Thomas, nor with any of the students or faculty involved in the research.

What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?

There are no identified direct risks to participating in this study.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research.

Will I receive any compensation for participating in this study?

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What will you do with the information you get from me and how will you protect my privacy?

The information that you provide in this study will be audio recorded on a password protected device. Recordings will be transcribed and shared with a faculty advisor. Identifying information will be removed from transcriptions and in any final papers. I will keep the research results on a password-protected computer and only I and the research advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by May 15, 2018. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Audio recordings will be destroyed by June 30, 2018.

Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, which means that you will not be identified or identifiable in the any written reports or publications. If it becomes useful to disclose any of your information, I will seek your permission and tell you the persons or agencies to whom the information will be furnished, the nature of the information to be furnished, and the purpose of the disclosure; you will have the right to grant or deny permission for this to happen. If you do not grant permission, the information will remain confidential and will not be released.

Are there possible changes to the study once it gets started?

If during the course of this research study I learn about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, I will inform you of these findings

How can I get more information?

If you have any questions, you can ask them before you sign this form. You can also feel free to contact me at 952-454-1668 or bell6331@stthomas.edu. If you have any additional questions later and would like to talk to the faculty advisor, please contact Rajean Moone at rpmoone@stkates.edu. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or jsschmitt@stkate.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I consent to participate in the study and agree to be audio taped.

My signature indicates that I have read this information and my questions have been answered. I also know that even after signing this form, I may withdraw from the study by informing the researcher(s).

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Researcher   Date