Impacts of early and late homelessness on adulthood consequences

Jane J. Kim1, Fiona Choi1, Kerry Jang1 & Michael Krausz1

1 Addictions and Concurrent Disorders Research Group, Institute of Mental Health, Department of Psychiatry, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Introduction
- Youth make up one of the largest and fastest growing segments of the homeless population in Canada (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002).
- Each year, a minimum of 35,000 to 45,000 youth are estimated to be homeless (Gaetz et al., 2016).
- Little is known about the long-term consequences of homelessness in youth and how it is different from an onset in adulthood.
- Our approach was to compare the differential risks by homelessness onset among a sample of currently homeless Vancouver adults.

Methods
- The At Home/Chez Soi study assessed the longitudinal effects of a Housing First intervention among homeless adults with mental illness in 5 Canadian cities (Somers et al., 2013).
- Housing First provides immediate access to permanent housing with clinical or tenancy-related support.
- Cross-sectional data from the baseline interview at the Vancouver site was analyzed using bivariate statistics and multivariate logistic regression.
- Differences between youth- and adult-onset homelessness were compared across demographic variables, mental disorders, substance use, health service use, comorbid conditions, and childhood events.

Results

Of the total 491 participants, 214 (43.6%) identified as first becoming homeless in their youth and 277 (56.4%) in adulthood. Median age of first homelessness was 28 with a range between 4 to 74.

Significant differences between youth- and adult-onset populations with links to early life, mental health, and risk behaviour were found.

Discussion

Youth-onset homelessness are more likely to be diagnosed with current alcohol abuse (18.2% v. 11.9%), epilepsy (18.5% v. 10.2%), and to report growing up with an incarcerated household member (25.8% vs. 15.9%).

Adult-onset homeless were more likely to have no high school diploma (61.7% v. 51.4%), needed help in school (51.5% v. 38.4%), been arrested in the past month (40.2% v. 29.7%), engage in injection drug use (20.7% v. 13.9%), shoplifting (15.7% v. 9.1%), and soliciting (8.8% v. 1.4%).

Youth-onset homeless were more likely at risk for adulthood homelessness. Children who show poor academic performance may be potentially at-risk. More efforts are needed to understand the cyclic nature of homelessness; the effects of chronic illnesses; ways to increase school retention; and to remove barriers in the labour market. Findings underscore the need for integrated public services and early intervention for children with experiences of homelessness.

Future Work
- Longitudinal studies following youth to early adulthood are needed to establish temporal relations.
- Replication studies are needed in homeless populations in other geographic or sheltered areas.

Contact jane1080@student.ubc.ca