



Childhood out-of-home placement and dynamics of public shelter utilization among young homeless adults

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Abstract

This study determined the prevalence of childhood experiences with child welfare supervision and placement among a cohort of 11,401 young sheltered homeless adults and assessed the associations between this prior involvement with child welfare services and the risk of experiencing recurrent and extended episodes of shelter use. This study used the administrative data from two New York City agencies: the Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Homeless Services. Overall, 29% had a childhood child welfare history, and 21% (74% of those with childhood child welfare histories) had histories of out-of-home placement through the child welfare system. Childhood out-of-home placement was associated with an increased number of days spent in shelters among family shelter users and with an increased likelihood of experiencing repeated shelter stays during early adulthood in both the family shelter and single-adult shelter groups. These findings underscore the need for more extensive

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support and housing services during early adulthood for persons with childhood child welfare histories.

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1. Introduction

Research has consistently identified high prevalence rates of childhood out-of-home placement experiences among adult homeless populations, with specific proportions ranging from 9% to 39% (Bassuk et al., 1997; Burt et al., 1999; Herman, Susser, & Struening, 1994; Koegel, Melamid, & Burnam, 1995; Piliavin, Sosin, Westerfelt, & Matsueda, 1993; Winkleby, Rockhill, Jatulis, & Fortmann, 1992; Zlotnick, Robertson, & Wright, 1999). Conversely, among the children who experienced out-of-home placements, those leaving the child welfare system directly into adulthood or released to independent living have been found to be at high risk for subsequent homelessness and other negative outcomes, with recent published data showing that 34% of individuals leaving child welfare through absconding and 26% of those released to independent living or adulthood stayed in a shelter during their early adulthood (Park, Metraux, Brodbar, & Culhane, 2004).

Beyond this, little research has examined the impact of childhood child welfare services on subsequent patterns of homelessness among adults. The high rates of childhood out-of-home placements found among homeless adults has led to the widely held assumption that experiencing such a childhood placement increases the risk of adult homelessness, with two primary explanations posited for such a relationship. First is the premise that child welfare services, and particularly out-of-home placements, poorly prepare children for independent living as adults (Buehler, Orme, Post, & Patterson, 2000; Cook, 1994; Lindsey & Ahmed, 1999; Mallon, 1998; McMillen & Tucker, 1999; Mech, 1994). The second premise is that experiences borne by this group, both in their families of origin and while in the child welfare system, have left them more prone to psychosocial problems that impede, among other things, their ability to secure and maintain stable housing (Buehler et al., 2000; Courtney & Barth, 1996; McMillen & Tucker, 1999). These conclusions have gained acceptance despite the lack of studies that compare the experiences of homelessness among persons both with and without childhood child welfare histories.

Such a study would require longitudinally following a sample of low-income children into adulthood while monitoring, among other factors, episodes of child welfare involvement and homelessness. While it may be logistically difficult to construct a study to identify the initial determinants of becoming homeless, Dworsky and Piliavin (2000) pointed out that one can still gain an understanding of determinants of homelessness, in terms of their associations with both exits from and subsequent recurrences into homelessness, from studies that examine the prospective outcomes of homeless populations. An example of such a study that

incorporated measures of childhood child welfare services is Piliavin et al. (1993), which found that, among homeless persons, the amount of time that was spent homeless was greater for those with childhood foster care histories compared to those without.

More generally, the research on factors associated with the dynamics of homelessness, among both individuals and families, is also limited (Wong, 1997). Along with findings on the impact of out-of-home placements, Piliavin et al.'s (1996, 1993) studies also reported that decreased time employed and increased age were associated with increased time that people, once homeless, spent being homeless. Culhane and Kuhn (1998) and Kuhn and Culhane's (1998) studies in New York City and Philadelphia reported associations between longer and more frequent episodes of homelessness and older age, and being of black race or Hispanic ethnicity. In the latter study, they used a cluster analysis to group shelter users by their utilization patterns. Among the resulting three groups, two of them, the "episodic" (many days over multiple stays) and the "chronic" (many days over few stays) users constituted a combined 20% of the sheltered population studied but consumed 80% of all shelter days used by the study group. They found that the episodic group tended to be comparatively young while the chronic group was older, and that both groups had higher levels of mental health, substance abuse, and medical problems than the overall shelter population. Allgood and Warren (2003), using national data from 2920 formerly or currently homeless individuals, reported that the length of the current or most recent spell of homelessness was positively associated with older age, male sex, previous incarceration, and substance abuse, and their study of 706 shelter users in Georgia (Allgood, Moore, & Warren, 1997) showed that older age, male sex, substance use, and medical problems were associated with longer shelter stays.

Two studies of shelter use dynamics among families in New York City (Metraux & Culhane, 1999; Wong, Culhane, & Kuhn, 1997) found that, along with various demographic factors (race, age of household head, pregnancy, and family size) that were associated with longer homeless spells and increased likelihood of shelter readmissions, the type of housing placement received upon shelter exit also had a significant impact on both length of stay in and the risk for a return to shelter. Specifically, placements to subsidized housing were associated with longer shelter episodes (due to a waiting period before a family was deemed eligible for shelter) and a substantially reduced risk of return to shelter.

This study combines administrative data from the New York City (NYC) shelter system with data on the childhood use of NYC child welfare services to examine the intersection between childhood experiences of receiving child welfare services and homelessness in young adulthood. By following a cohort of over 11,000 young sheltered homeless adults, this study ascertains the prevalence of prior child welfare involvement among this group, as well as the associations between receiving child welfare services as a child and the risk of experiencing recurrent and extended episodes of shelter use as a young adult. In doing so, this study assesses and expands upon commonly held but empirically under-researched associations between childhood child welfare experiences and homelessness.

2. Methods

2.1. Data

This study used administrative data from the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to select its study group. DHS uses electronic recordkeeping procedures to maintain a comprehensive database on persons staying in the network of public shelters it administers, either directly or through contracts with non-profit agencies (Culhane, Dejowski, Ibanez, Needham, & Macchia, 1997). DHS has tracked public shelter usage since 1986 through these databases, which cover both its family and single-adult shelter systems. Information on the utilization of public child welfare services came from administrative records maintained by the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This ACS database includes information about children who were in foster care or who were receiving nonplacement preventive services, and contains records back to 1981. Both homeless shelter and child welfare data contains identifiers, demographic characteristics, and dates of entry into and exit from the respective systems, and the records from these two systems were matched in order to create an integrated data set containing information from both systems for persons selected for the study group. Observations across the ACS and DHS data sets are considered to match if one of two criteria were met. Both observations must have either matching social security number and matching first name, last name, or date of birth. In the absence of matching social security numbers, the sex, date of birth, and first and last names must all match.

The study group consisted of individuals who entered the family and the single-adult shelter systems for the first time between 1997 and 1999, and who were under age of 25 at the time of first entry. The age limit also allowed for tracking each individual's child welfare service use from age of 10 and thereafter. This relative temporal proximity between their childhood child welfare history and their adult shelter use provided a more direct relationship between these two experiences compared to an older cohort. To give equal opportunity for the development of a shelter pattern, each individual's homeless episodes were observed for the 2-year period subsequent to their first stay. In a nationwide survey of homeless assistance providers (Burt et al., 1999), 25% of adults in homeless families and 10% of single homeless adults were under age 25. In New York City in 2002, 43% of adults in the family shelter system and 11% of single-adult shelter users were aged 25 years and under (NYC DHS, 2003a). The study group for these analyses included 7698 adults in the family shelter system and 3703 adults in the single-adult shelter system. Each individual's record of shelter use was augmented, when applicable, with relevant data from ACS records, and his or her shelter episodes were observed prospectively for 2 years following the initial shelter entry.

2.2. Measures

Homeless shelter experiences were measured as the number of shelter stays and total number of days in the shelter system during the study period. A shelter stay episode in this study was considered to be a span of shelter use that both follows and precedes a 30-day

absence from a shelter. Many shelter exits were followed by reentry that occurs within a few days, suggesting that an alternative to shelter housing had not been established upon exit (Culhane & Kuhn, 1998; Piliavin et al., 1993), and these proximal stays were considered to be one stay (although the number of shelter days included only those actually recorded as having been spent in a shelter). Race and ethnicity were classified as non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and a combined non-Hispanic White and other category. Age was measured both as a continuous variable and grouped as “under age 20” and “between ages 21 and 24”. Sex of each individual was also included in the analyses. The data set for the family shelter system contained further information, including number of children, number of adults, and an indicator on whether domestic violence was disclosed as a precipitating reason for homelessness. Finally, childhood out-of-home placement was measured by formal placement in out-of-home care through the New York City child welfare system. This study also identified whether homeless adults in the study group received preventive child welfare services that did not include an out-of-home placement. Out-of-home placement in this study refers to foster care services through ACS, which include placement in kinship foster homes, non-kinship foster homes, and congregate care such as group homes and group residences. Preventive child welfare services refer to in-home services administered through ACS designed to prevent foster care placement and to strengthen family functioning. These services include counseling, individual or group interventions, court-ordered supervision and housing subsidy.

2.3. Analysis

Descriptive analyses were first conducted to examine demographic and familial characteristics of the study group such as sex, age, race and ethnicity, household composition, and reports of domestic violence. The prevalence of childhood histories of child welfare service involvement and homeless shelter utilization of the study group was also examined. Chi-square and *t*-test analyses were used to compare child welfare service placement and homeless shelter utilization by sub-segments of the study group. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression was used to assess the association of childhood out-of-home placements with the duration of homeless shelter stays controlling for background characteristics. Logistic regression was employed to estimate the impact of childhood out-of-home placements on the likelihood of a repeat shelter stay.

3. Results

Table 1 describes demographic and household characteristics of the two study groups. The family shelter group was over twice as large as the single-adult shelter group, reflecting the difference in the median ages among the adults in these systems (NYC DHS, 2003a). The primary difference between the two study groups was the de facto segregation by sex that occurs, with the males overwhelmingly presenting themselves as households of one, while the females predominantly presented themselves as either pregnant or part of a household with children. Among the households in family shelters, 82% were headed by a single adult (almost always female) and approximately 80% contained either one or two

Table 1
Personal and household characteristics of the study group

	Family shelter system (N=7698)	Single-adult shelter system (N=3703)
Sex (%)		
Female	96.8	28.2
Male	3.2	71.8
Number of adults in household (%)		
1	82.2	100
2 or more	17.8	0
Number of children in household (%)		
0	11.5	100
1	57.0	0
2	23.5	0
3 or more	8.0	0
Race/Ethnicity (%)		
Black	63.0	55.9
Hispanic	35.5	31.0
Other	1.5	13.1
Age (%)		
Less than 19	16.2	9.6
19–20	35.3	27.4
21–24	48.5	63.0
Year of first entry (%)		
1997	30.6	34.0
1998	36.9	31.7
1999	32.5	34.3
Domestic violence as precipitating first shelter stay (%)	8.2	N. A.

children. Both groups were predominantly of Black race and/or of Hispanic ethnicity, and the family shelter group was somewhat younger, primarily because of the minimum age (18) for admission into the single-adult shelter system. Data on domestic violence shows that 8% of the family group listed this as a precipitating factor for seeking shelter.

Table 2 shows that considerable portions of the groups in both shelter systems received child welfare services during childhood: 30% of those in the family shelter system received some sort of child welfare service and 26% of those in the single-adult shelter system received child welfare services, with the respective proportions of each group receiving out-of-home care at 22% and 20%, respectively. There were significant differences in the prevalence of child welfare involvement by race and ethnicity, sex, and age. In both groups, Blacks and females had higher rates of childhood child welfare involvement. There were also differences among age groups, but this at least in part reflects an artifact of the data, as the younger individuals in the study group had longer periods of time in which it was possible to identify a history of child welfare involvement.³ In addition, the differences across age groups is in part due to the trends of a substantial

³ For example, an individual who had the first shelter stay at the age of 24 in 1999, his or her history of child welfare services was available since he or she was about 6 years old, while for a person who had the first shelter stay at the age of 18 in 1999, information on child welfare services was available since he or she was born.

Table 2

Prevalence of childhood histories of out-of-home placement or non-placement preventive services among young homeless adults in the New York City shelter system

	Family shelter system (N=7698)		Single-adult shelter system (N=3703)	
	Out-of-home care (%)	Out-of-home care or preventive service (%)	Out-of-home care (%)	Out-of-home care or preventive service (%)
Race/Ethnicity***				
Black	25	33	23	29
Hispanic	16	24	17	24
Other	20	28	10	12
Sex***				
Female	22	30	27	34
Male	11	20	17	22
Age at first shelter entry***				
20 or younger	27	37	25	31
21–24	16	22	17	22
Total	22	30	20	26

*** $p < 0.001$.

increase in the overall foster care population in New York City since the mid-1980s, for the younger individuals in the study group had a higher likelihood of ACS exposures than the older counterparts.⁴

Table 3 shows the frequency and duration of homeless shelter use among the study groups in the 2-year period following their initial shelter entry. Family shelter users, as a group, spent an average of 176 days, nearly one-quarter of the study period, in shelters. However the subgroup of individuals with a history of out-of-home care spent, on average, 194 days in a family shelter-representing a statistically significant difference between this subgroup and the other family shelter users. Similarly, there were statistically significant differences in the number of discrete stays used by those with and without out-of-home placements. The average number of episodes among the overall group, 1.2, includes 21% of this group who experienced multiple shelter stays, while 26% of the subgroup with out-of-home placements had multiple shelter stays (average of 1.3 stays among this subgroup). The single-adult shelter users, with an average total of 101 shelter days over the course of the study period, consumed less shelter days on average than those in the family shelter group. Within the single-adult shelter group, although individuals with a history of out-of-home care had a higher average number of shelter days than those with no history, the difference was not statistically significant. Looking at stays, however, the subgroup of single-adult shelter users with a history of out-of-home placement had a statistically significant difference in the number of shelter stays over the study period, with 30% experiencing multiple shelter stays (average of 1.4 stays per person) as compared to 22% (and 1.3 stays per person) for the overall group. There is no significant difference across the two study groups in terms of average number of shelter episodes.

⁴ The foster care population in New York City was 16,618 in 1985, reached its highest level of 49,163 in 1991, and then declined to 30,644 in 2000 (NYC ACS, 2004).

Table 3

Public shelter utilization of the study group during the study period of 2 years

	Family shelter system			Single-adult shelter system		
	Out-of-home care (N=1660)	Non-out-of-home care (N=6038)	Total (N=7698)	Out-of-home care (N=736)	Non-out-of-home care (N=2967)	Total (N=3703)
Number of days in shelter*	194	170	176	111	99	101
Number of episodes*, **						
1	74%	81%	79%	69%	78%	76%
2	21%	16%	17%	22%	15%	17%
3 or more	5%	3%	4%	8%	7%	8%
Mean	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.3
Average days per episode*	177	159	163	84	77	79

* Indicates statistical significance at 0.001 level for the family shelter system.

** Indicates statistical significance at 0.001 level for the single-adult shelter system.

As shown in Table 4, among those with histories of out-of-home placement, public shelter utilization differed by type of exit from the child welfare system. In the family shelter user group, those who “aged out” of out-of-home care when they reached adulthood spent an average of 214 days sheltered, compared to 178 days for those whose childhood out-of-home placement ended with family reunification, 180 days for those who absconded from out-of-home care, and 158 days for those who were adopted. The average numbers of homeless episodes were similar across the groups. In the single-adult shelter user group, those who exited out-of-home placement through absconding had, on average, significantly more shelter stays than the other subgroups shown in the table. While the aging out group had longer average stays, the differences between the four subgroups was not statistically significant.

Table 5 reports the results of the regression models. In the OLS regression model for the family shelter group, out-of-home placement had a significant, positive coefficient, indicating that having been placed in out-of-home care was associated with an increased shelter stay of 25 days. Among the other factors, none of the demographic covariates had a significant effect upon total shelter days, while, among measures of household

Table 4

Public shelter utilization of those leaving out-of-home placement by type of exit

	Family shelter system (N=1531)		Single-adult shelter system (N=696)	
	Number of days in shelter	Average number of episodes	Number of days in shelter	Average number of episodes**
Family reunification	178	1.3	101	1.4
Absconding	180	1.4	120	1.7
Adoption	158	1.2	88	1.1
Aging out	214	1.3	130	1.3
Total	194	1.3	111	1.4

** $p < 0.01$.

Table 5

OLS regression of total number of shelter days and logistic regression models of a repeat shelter stay during the 2-year period

Variable	OLS regression model		Logistic regression model ^a	
	Family shelter (<i>N</i> =7698)	Single-adult shelter (<i>N</i> =3703)	Family shelter (<i>N</i> =7698)	Single-adult shelter (<i>N</i> =3703)
	Coefficient (S.D.)	Coefficient (S.D.)	Odds ratio	Odds ratio
Out-of-home placement	25.0*** (4.6)	7.7 (6.0)	1.29**	1.52***
Black	6.3 (3.9)	22.8*** (4.8)	1.54***	1.58***
Female	3.6 (11.2)	10.7* (5.4)	1.41	0.65***
Under age 21	6.9 (3.8)	−14.8** (4.9)	1.76***	0.91
First entry in 1997	8.2* (4.0)	13.0* (5.1)	1.20**	1.07
First entry in 1998	88.5*** (3.7)	68.5*** (4.8)	1.73***	2.19***
Number of children	26.0*** (2.2)	N.A.	1.32***	N.A.
Number of adults	54.6*** (5.0)	N.A.	1.28**	N.A.
Domestic violence	11.7 (6.8)	N.A.	0.94	N.A.
<i>R</i> ²	0.12	0.06	N.A.	N.A.
Likelihood Ratio	N.A.	N.A.	395*** (<i>df</i> =11)	162*** (<i>df</i> =6)

N.A.: not applicable.

^a The correct classification rates for family shelters and single-adult shelters was 79% and 76%, respectively.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

composition, increased numbers of either adults or children in the household were both associated with increased numbers of shelter days consumed. Year of entry, with 1999 as the reference category, also had a bearing on shelter days consumed. In the logistic model regressing on the occurrence of a second, discrete shelter stay, history of out-of-home placement again had a statistically significant effect, increasing the odds of experiencing a repeat shelter stay by 29%. This comes after controlling for the effects of the other covariates in the model, many of which also had significant effects. This includes demographic variables, where blacks and younger adults had substantially higher odds of a repeat shelter stay, as well as the covariates that were statistically significant in the previously described OLS model—additional numbers of children and adults in a household and first-time entry cohorts for 1997 and 1998 as compared to the 1999 entry cohort. The presence of each of these covariates increased the odds of experiencing a repeat shelter stay.

The two corresponding models for the single-adult shelter group show a somewhat different set of dynamics associated with shelter stays. In the OLS model, in a finding consistent with the univariate results, the coefficient for out-of-home placement did not have a statistically significant coefficient. Black race, female sex, and increased age were all associated with the consumption of more shelter days. And, in a manner similar to the family shelter model, the younger cohort tended to stay longer in shelters. However, in the logistic regression model for single-adult shelter users, out-of-home placement was associated with a 52% increase in the odds of a repeat shelter stay. Blacks and males were associated with higher odds of experiencing a repeat shelter stay, as was being in the 1998 entry cohort.

4. Discussion

These results support the existence of a salient connection between childhood child welfare history and subsequent adult shelter use based on data from 11,401 young adults from the New York City shelter system. Overall, 29% had a childhood child welfare history, and 21% (74% of those with childhood child welfare histories) had histories of out-of-home placement through the child welfare system. Childhood out-of-home placement was associated with an increased number of days spent in shelters among family shelter users and with an increased likelihood of experiencing repeated shelter stays during early adulthood in both the family shelter and single-adult shelter groups. Among those sheltered adults with out-of-home placement histories, those who exited out-of-home care directly into adulthood stayed longer in shelters, as a group, than those who exited the child welfare system through other means, including adoption, family reunification, and absconding.

These results found a prevalence of out-of-home care among these young sheltered adults comparable to the prevalence rates of psychiatric hospitalizations (Culhane, Averyt, & Hadley, 1998) and incarcerations (Metraux & Culhane, 2004) among shelter populations. This suggests that the magnitude of child welfare system involvement among the homeless population can be comparable to their involvement in the mental health and criminal justice systems. It also raises questions related to how the four systems interact to provide the underpinnings for what Hopper, Jost, Hay, Welber, and Haugland (1997) has called the “institutional circuit.” Under such a framework, people in one institutional system are at increased risk for spending time in other institutional systems, and examining people’s histories across multiple institutions would show a more fundamental residential instability than is shown by their involvement within any one system.

The study group for this study differs from those examined in most other studies of institutional crossover in that it is predominantly female and sheltered with their families. In general, the median age for women while in shelters is substantially younger than that of men (Culhane & Metraux, 1999), and women’s experiences with homelessness are much more likely to involve their families, and particularly their young children, than men (Burt & Cohen, 1989). This also means that, in early adulthood, women with a history of childhood child welfare services have a substantially higher risk of entering shelters (Park et al., 2004). This provides a more salient link between out-of-home care and shelter use among women, as less time typically separates the two experiences, particularly for those who aged out of or absconded from out-of-home care. It is also common for women’s shelter experiences to provide an early institutional experience for their children, which then continues the aforementioned sequence of institutional stays across a new generation (Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, & Culhane, 2003).

The high prevalence rates of child welfare history and out-of-home placements among this sheltered population are noteworthy, as are the findings that out-of-home placement histories are associated with extended bouts of residential instability. For persons staying in family shelters, those with out-of-home placements are more likely to both stay longer and to return for a subsequent shelter stay, while for those in single-adult shelters, out-of-home placement is associated only with an increased risk of repeat shelter stays. This

suggests, across both systems, that upon leaving homeless shelters out-of-home placement is either associated with a greater likelihood of exit to situations leading to subsequent homelessness, or with a diminished ability to successfully maintain the housing arrangements. The particular dynamics of either process, and how having had an out-of-home placement impacts this process, calls for further research.

Because of the data available for this study, only young sheltered adults were included. This means that this study focuses on a group whose need for shelter has occurred during a time when they are transitioning to adulthood and the independence this entails. This reflects a time in which both familial and other supports are particularly critical, and policymakers seem to be recognizing the need for child welfare services to extend its support into early adulthood to compensate for the absence of family support in the lives of many of the children who were part of its system (Collins, 2001). This appears to be particularly true for those who “aged out” of or absconded from their out-of-home placements as these subgroups had longer average shelter stays than the other subgroups among those with out-of-home placement histories.

Targeting housing and social services to this population appears to be key to providing the supports necessary to preclude their need to resort to homeless shelters. Children in out-of-home placements who turn 18 already may opt to remain in care if they are participating in approved programming, and are otherwise supposed to continue to receive supervision until they are 21. Providing more extensive support services under the framework of this supervision process and providing more choices for housing options when these children reach adulthood are two steps towards reducing the number of young adults with childhood child welfare histories who are in the DHS system. DHS recommends, given the special circumstances and needs of young adults who are homeless, that they be provided with targeted housing separate from the general sheltered population (NYC DHS, 2003b). Such housing options include transitional living programs as well as permanent supportive housing (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2002). In New York City, both ACS and the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, working in conjunction with non-profit housing providers, have provided a limited supply of such housing and ACS has a program providing rent supplements and Section 8 rental vouchers for pregnant and parenting youth on trial discharge from foster care (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2004). Such housing represents a promising start, but would need to be available on a much larger scale, if these measures were to substantially reduce shelter use among this population.

This need for housing and other support services in early adulthood is particularly striking among the group who enter shelters with children. Compared to single adults, homeless families as a group consumed more shelter days per stay and require more resources during their shelter stays. Given this, a good portion of the higher costs of providing housing and services for these families is likely to be offset by reduced demand for shelter and other services.

Conducting this study using a sheltered homeless population in New York City will raise questions related to the generalizability of these findings. New York City has the most extensive shelter system of any US city and a court-mandated charge to provide shelter to any family or individual adult claiming to be homeless (Culhane, Metraux, & Wachter, 1999). New York City’s large shelter system is in part due to the city’s

large population. Metraux et al. (2001) have demonstrated that the prevalence of shelter use in New York City, after adjusting for city population size, is comparable to shelter use in other cities. The focus of this study on sheltered individuals also limits generalizing the findings to non-sheltered homeless individuals, and in considering shelter dynamics it must be noted that shelter exits do not necessarily mean exits from homelessness. This is particularly true for young single adults, who are more likely to use other sleeping arrangements in lieu of shelters when they are homeless, than homeless families, who are more likely to use shelters. Measures on economic conditions, health status, behavioral disorders, and family resources were not available for the analysis. Such measures can mediate the association between out-of-home placement and homelessness. Further research incorporating these elements is needed to enhance our understanding of the specific dynamics of the interaction between the two events.

Using a much larger study group than previous studies, this study provides further confirmation of the link between experiences in the child welfare and homeless shelter systems, and also presents evidence that involvement in the child welfare system is closely associated with subsequent shelter use patterns in terms of higher likelihood for experiencing both multiple and, in the case of family shelters, longer shelter stays. While more research is needed to understand the specific dynamics of this relationship, the high rates of childhood child welfare involvement among the young adults in shelters studied here underscore the needs for more extensive support and housing services to be made available for this population through early adulthood.

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