

## Chapter Six: The Pathways To Homelessness

This chapter provides a summary and analysis of the study findings of how young adult men and women become homeless in the city of Philadelphia. The interview materials from which these findings are made depict a dynamic and complex process that results in homelessness - from the perspective of the victims of that homelessness. To best re-present that material, and assess its significance for this thesis, a number of strategies will be employed. First, the primary elements of the interviews dealing with "becoming homeless" - the *places* people have stayed in the process of becoming homeless, and the *reasons* for making "place" transitions - will be extracted so as to establish the framework within which to understand the more intricate relationships among those elements. Second, a weighting of the causal factors will be given each participant in an assessment of the major and contributing sources of the sample's homelessness. Third, and perhaps most important, to understand the dynamic process that gives life to these more abstract categories, a qualitative analysis of the interviews will explore, evaluate and illustrate the relevance of family and social relations, work and income, and disability, drugs and institutional experience to the homelessness of participants. Attention to the contributions of structural factors, personal choice and personal-social characteristics, and their interplay, will be made in the explication of

the stories of survey participants.

### **Summary Framework: The Pathways to Homelessness**

#### **The Data**

The audio-taped interviews with survey participants were transcribed *verbatim*, except in the case of five interviews, where the quality of the recordings was insufficient for such a transcription. In those five cases, notes were taken. Unfortunately, two survey participants who were suffering from mental health problems were unable to give a clear or comprehensible account of their becoming homeless, and therefore their answers are sometimes labelled "unknown" in the tables of findings.

From within the many transcript pages, only those pages featuring participant responses to the set of questions on "becoming homeless" were included for the summary and analysis in this section. In other words, only those factors explicitly mentioned in the section beginning "How about you, how did you end up without a place to live?" are included here. Other potentially relevant factors, if not explicitly mentioned in response to the set of questions on "becoming homeless," are not included in this section, though the following qualitative analysis will consider the wider set of potential factors reported in other parts of the interview, such as those concerning institutional experience, disability and drug use. In three instances, participants had had prior episodes of homelessness, and in such cases, only the most recent episode of homelessness was included for this section ("homelessness" defined as residence in shelters or on the streets). Any conditions creating or resulting from a prior episode(s) of homelessness, and that were explicitly mentioned as relevant to the present episode of homelessness, will be included in this section among "context events and conditions."

### Coding Procedure

This summary framework for the pathways to homelessness was designed to outline the residential transitions which led to homelessness in the sample, and for the purpose of detecting potential patterns in those transitions. To do so, the interview accounts of becoming homeless were coded for three basic elements: 1.) the varying *places* where participants had been sleeping or "staying"; 2.) *reasons* for making place transitions; and 3.) *context* events or conditions - things that were neither places nor reasons for specific transitions, but that were mentioned in the story of how people had "ended up without a place to live." For each participant, a string of *places* up until initial entrance into the shelter system was developed (all participants had some experience with the shelter system); a string of corresponding *reasons* for making place transitions was also developed, as was a separate list of context events or conditions. Places for sleeping or staying after initial entrance into the shelter system are not included for this analysis, so that a cut-off point could be established between "becoming homeless" and "being homeless." As a reliability check on all of these classifications, a subsample of 10 interviews was randomly selected, from which two judges completed the same coding task, agreeing with the primary investigator on 93% of the coding classifications.

### The Findings

As has just been explained, three common elements have been extracted from participants' accounts of how they became homeless - places, reasons for place transitions, and context events/conditions, to establish a framework for understanding the dynamic interplay of forces that result in the pathways to homelessness. The data resulting from this procedure are limited in that they provide only a static view of the pathways to homelessness. Moreover, because these classifications have been developed

*ex post facto* they represent somewhat tenuous designations and are not fully independent categories. However, the findings do suggest important trends and issues of concern that can be later examined in greater detail through the qualitative analysis.

*Places.* Each of the survey participants began their accounts of becoming homeless by talking about a place where they had previously lived, presumably with some stability, and which is presumed to have been "home." For the purposes of this discussion, these places of earliest mention are called "places of origin." Other places, described as places for "sleeping" or "staying," before arriving to the emergency shelter system, are labelled "places of transition." Both distributions are provided in Table 17.

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Insert Table 17 about here

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As can be seen, the survey participants begin their residential stories in rather normative situations, with an emphasis on parents and family, and spouses and partners. In fact, all but 10 of the participants were in such households. Six of the remaining ten had their own apartments. The accounts given in two cases were not understandable with respect to this category due to mental disability. The only settings from which people came that could be considered "atypical" were one instance of jail, and one instance of military service.

Given the average age of this sample of adults, 30.1 years, the dependence on parental and extended family households could be understood as fitting well within the literature on delayed and thwarted independent household formation among young and poor adults. Alternatively, one could argue that this would not represent "delayed household formation" given that the age range of participants was 20 to 45 years, and

that persons dependent on parents and family could simply be a younger cohort than those with spouses and partners. However, in this sample, while persons dependent on parent and family households were a bit younger (average age 28.1 years) than those coming from spouse and partner households (average age 31.2 years), this difference was not statistically significant ( $t = 1.335$ ,  $df=31$ ,  $p > .10$ , non-directional).

The "places of transition," far from representing "normative" or stable situations, begin to reveal the deterioration of options available to persons as they become homeless. Again, there is an emphasis on parents and family, as many of those people from non-parental households go back to parents, and many from parental households move on to other family members. In fact, the parent/family grouping (18 total) is comprised of 7 returns to parents after living with spouses or in own apartments, 7 moves to extended family, and 4 moves to siblings. Those people without family, or those for whom family does not represent a continued source of housing support, must move on to other housing situations. The most common of these housing situations is "friends" (10), followed by "partners" (8) (No one got married after leaving their "places of origin," so there are no "spouses" included in this category among places of transition). The six instances of "own apartment" represent what participants described as their own places, but ones which were judged by the author as temporary, and not stable, such as renting for one month an unfinished basement, or leasing a room for a week, or squatting in a dilapidated structure. Since the "places of transition" category includes all of those places participants slept *before* their initiation to the shelter system, a significant group ended up using the "streets" or abandoned buildings as places of transition. People often had to rely on street sites for sleeping because of a lack of knowledge about the availability of shelter, or because of a desire to stay close to ones neighborhood network of resources. Only three persons reported entering a psychiatric hospital in their

pathways to homelessness, far less than would have been suggested by the literature on mental illness and the homeless. It is noteworthy that such hospitalizations are not reported by any of the participants as their "places of origin," but were used in the process of residential instability. Finally, there is a rather significant category of "other" places that people stayed before arriving to the shelter system, that dramatically illustrates the deterioration of participants' housing alternatives. Two people entered religious organizations - one a Protestant church that provided housing in exchange for employment; the other the Hare Krishna Temple. A couple people used vehicles, including a friend's car and a truck at one participant's work site. A few women had to exchange their willingness to engage in sex for temporary shelter; one through a pimp and two others through informal arrangements with men, who were either casually known to the women or unknown to them. Of course, many of the participants went to more than one "place of transition" before arriving in the shelter system.

*Reasons for place transitions.* Table 18 shows the distribution of "reasons for place transitions." Again, these are distinguished by "1st transition," meaning the reason for leaving the "place of origin," and "inter transitions," meaning the reasons for leaving the "places of transition." Reflecting the fact that the vast majority of participants were in family or spousal households, the most common reason for leaving places of origin is "family conflict or change." The remaining reasons for leaving the place of origin are more scattered. These include eviction, partner conflict or change, drug use or selling, physical or emotional abuse, drug environment, housing conditions, and job loss. Of course, some of these reasons also led to family and spousal conflict or change, but were judged as frequent or compelling enough to warrant separate designations.

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Insert Table 18 about here

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The "inter transitions," like the "places of transition," reflect the deterioration of the housing situations for people after leaving their places of origin, and therefore are more widely scattered than the "1st transitions." The most common reasons for leaving a place of transition were "housing conditions" and "choice." "Housing conditions" means that the participant judged the physical conditions of the housing to be unacceptable, or as causing a "forcible eviction," such as would be created by a fire. "Choice" indicates that the person was *expressly* dissatisfied with the housing situation and purposely left that housing for reasons not fitting within the other categories, some of which might also represent the relative "choices" of the participants. Some of those more common reasons included here as separate categories were drug use or selling, refusing to live in a drug environment, being a crime victim or perpetrator, being abused, family and partner conflict, disability and unemployment. Again, the category of "other" reveals the diversity of situations from which people come, such as receiving shelter only in exchange for sexual cooperation (hence, losing it for noncooperation), or finding religious groups dissatisfactory, or, as in one case, the friend with whom one participant was staying was killed. Of course, there were many instances (19) in which no reason for leaving a place was given, though this usually indicated a clearly upward move in housing standard, such as going from the streets to a friend's apartment.

*Context Events and Conditions.* Those factors that were mentioned by participants as linked to their becoming homeless, but that were neither places nor reasons for specific place transitions are included here in Table 19 as "context events and conditions." It is important to note that context events and conditions could be indirect sources of place

transitions, or significant factors that occurred while becoming homeless. For example, the most common context event was "job loss/unemployment," followed by "drug use." In both instances, these were either factors that indirectly influenced place transitions or the availability of housing options, or they were factors that became involved while the participant grew residentially unstable. But in neither case were they described by participants as the reason for a specific place transition. Likewise, having been in foster care as a child was sometimes mentioned in the story of becoming homeless, usually because it implied the diminished family resources of the participant. Being physically or mentally disabled was another context condition, though far less than would be suggested by the literature. Other complicating conditions or events included being the victim of abuse, attempting suicide, selling drugs, having been in jail, committing a crime or having been a crime victim. Again, the category "other" reveals the diversity of circumstances facing the participants, such as being pimped, being rejected by parents because of being gay, having a history of conflict with the family, and being a veteran of the Viet Nam War. Survey participants could have more than one context event or condition.

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Insert Table 19 about here

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### **Weighting the Contributing Sources of Homelessness**

In way of interpreting this descriptive framework for the pathways to homelessness, a "weighting" assignment was made of the "contributing sources of homelessness," as reported in the stories of how participants "became homeless."<sup>1</sup> The weighting assignment for this analysis involved a relatively simple procedure that assumed that the contributing sources of homelessness could be place on an interval scale. While not



truly representing an interval variable, an interval scale was imposed by making a judgement of the relative contributive values of the varying sources of homelessness in each participant's case. To do this, a list of "sources of homelessness" was developed after reading and re-reading the interviews and consulting with advisors familiar with the descriptive summary outlined above. Those "sources" are listed in Table 20. The sources were weighted for each survey participant according to the relative influence of sources as either a "major" source of their homelessness, or a "contributing" source of their homelessness, or "no" source. Participants could have more than one major, contributing or "no" sources to their homelessness. The numerically unweighted distribution of these sources and their sum is shown in the first three columns of Table 20. To weight these contributing sources of homelessness numerically, each survey participant was assigned a value of "2" for those sources judged to be a "major" factor in their homelessness, a weight of "1" for those sources judged to be a "contributing" factor, and a "0" for those sources judged not to have played a role. The *weighted* sum of the contributing sources is shown in the fourth column of Table 20. As a reliability check, the ten cases randomly selected to test the "summary framework" categorizations in the previous section were evaluated by the same two judges, this time for the weighting of the sources of homelessness. Judges and the primary investigator agreed on 85% of the weighting decisions in those 10 cases.

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Insert Table 20 about here

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From this weighting procedure, it appears that more than half (65%) of the variation in the weighted sources of homelessness comes from the top three categories - family problems, drug use and job loss/unemployment, with one-third of the total

accounted for by family problems alone. The remaining, yet important 35% of the variability is accounted for by those categories of less common influence such as childhood problems (being abused by parents and/or placed in foster care), the physical conditions of one's housing, eviction, mental illness and being a crime victim.

### **Conclusion**

These findings on the self-reported pathways to homelessness strongly suggest the importance of the housing and domestic situations from which homeless people come, the income and job situations of people who become homeless, and the individual behaviors and personal choices and characteristics of homeless people. Much as was suggested by the "social selection hypothesis," it appears that a complex mix of structural factors, domestic conditions, individual choice and biographical facts (such as having had childhood problems, being disabled, or having been a victim of crime) combine to create the circumstances leading to homelessness. This section was important in being able to show the complexity of that mix of factors, as they have been described by homeless people and coded for this study.

What is lacking for giving broader meaning to this admittedly limited summary of the individual's self-report, is the dynamic movement and decision-making of those individuals, and the interplay of the varying circumstances - structural, domestic and personal - that constitute the complex social selection processes leading to homelessness. For that reason, further interpretation of the above findings will not be made here, but will be sought and established in the following section through an analysis of the interview texts. Some questions of interest that will guide that analysis are: What happens to families to create conditions of homelessness for their members or to limit their supportive value? What happens to people's jobs and incomes such that they are unable to stay "homed" without the support of their families? How does drug

abuse, mental illness and prior institutional experience influence people such that they become homeless? How much personal choice is involved in this homeless process, and how much of this process is attributable to structural limits on personal choice?

### **The Dynamics of Becoming Homeless**

This section provides a qualitative analysis of the life domains found to be most relevant in the descriptive summary presented above. By further categorizing the experiences of participants, and illustrating those categorizations with interview transcripts, the dynamic processes by which people become homeless will be given greater specificity and clarity. In presenting the interview data, excerpts are cited directly and with only minor editorial changes of respondents answers. When the following notation, (...), appears in the text, it refers to the cutting out of sections judged to be extraneous or irrelevant to the substantive focus of this analysis. This procedure is used in only a few occasions. The more common notation, ..., was used by me or the transcriber to denote the trailing off of a response, the separation of incomplete sentences or thoughts, or the imperceptibility of the audiotaped material. Also of methodological note, though the sample was selected and its representativeness assured by sampling from six shelter and three non-shelter locations, those locational differences are not the subject of analysis in this section. There was no reason to suspect any differences, and nor were any noted, regarding how people became homeless by sheltering circumstance. It is more likely that peoples' experiences and evaluations of *being* homeless are affected by and do affect their shelter location, which would be relevant to a different research problem than that reported in this dissertation.

### **Family and Social Relations**

The life domain most common to the stories of participants was family and social relations. Contrary to some images of the homeless as "disaffiliated," this sample has

Table 21. Family relations at onset of homelessness, by family of closest household tie, and by nature of family relations.

		Cases
I. Parents or grandparents		17
A. Intergenerational conflict with grandparents	3	
B. Conflict over subject's unemployment	2	
C. Conflict over subject's unemployment and drug use	4	
D. Family member(s) has drug or alcohol problem	2	
E. Perceived conflict over a sex partner	2	
F. Various family disagreements	4	
II. Spouses (and children)		14
A. Conflict over subject's drug use	3	
B. Conflict over subject's unemployment and drug use	3	
C. Victim of spouse abuse	3	
D. Marital separation	3	
E. Family separation after fire	2	
III. No family support available		10
A. Family lives outside Philadelphia	4	
B. No family contact (foster care or abused as child)	6	
IV. No information		2
		N=43

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had quite intensive relations with family and friends in the past, most of which have continued through their homelessness. Even when family disruptions are reported, and even when those disruptions have led to homelessness, with some significant exceptions, most people continue to maintain contact with their friends and family. But before

getting into the effect of homelessness on family relations, family relations will be examined for their status before or at the onset of homelessness.

Table 21 provides a distribution of where the participants have been judged according to their family relations "of strongest tie" before or at the onset of their homelessness. The most common prior family relations that were discussed by participants were with parents and grandparents, and in each instance, participants were living in the households of parents or grandparents, and left those households either seeking independence or to avoid family conflict. The second most common scenario of family relations near or at the onset of homelessness was family break-up. In each of these cases, the homeless person was a spouse in a family that broke-up, for a range of reasons to be assessed later. Finally, there is significant group of homeless in the sample whose family relations are relevant because of their relative absence. These persons do not perceive that family can or will be very supportive, and therefore the family's primary role in the participants' homelessness is their perceived lack of support.

#### **Leaving Parents or Grandparents:**

There are a number of ways in which homelessness occurs in parental and grandparental households. But generally speaking, participants report wanting to leave those households to avoid family conflict or for their own independence. The common sources of conflict varied from intergenerational conflicts, to conflicts over unemployment, drugs, and sex. For example, the most common theme for those living in grandparents' households was that there was inter-generational conflict. As Duane (age 28) reports:

Duane: First of all, it was a broken home anyways. I wasn't even living with my mother, I was raised on a different side of the family.... And, um, I was raised by my father's side of the family, in my grandmother's house.... Well, there were other people living in the home too. Like there were aunts and uncles that were living with my grandmother.

Interviewer: When did the process begin when you became homeless?

D: Alright. It's a lot of personal problems that happening. OK. Um , a lot of problems started with "mind your own business." OK. A lot of personal problems start in the social area of living. If you live in a predominantly black area of town, right, you... you know, and you don't have any, and you're poor, you don't have any money and you don't, don't have any skills... at least skills on paper. A lot of people have skills but they're not on paper.....

I: Ah huh. And what happened that you had to leave the house?

D: Well it's not so much as if you *had* to leave the house....

I: I mean that you wanted to leave.

D: Alright. I kind of, it , I was like fifty-fifty. Fifty I wanted to leave and fifty percent of me, wanted, you know, I - I had to leave. (laughter) I wanted to leave and I had to leave.

I: Can you tell me more about that?

D: It was a stress situation. Family stress situation. Space. Alright, people need their space. You're living with people of three generations. You have three generations living in the same household . You have me, I got my...there was my grandmother, and she's gonna die.... Alright you had your aunt and uncle, right, and then there was me. There was three generations living and they have different values. They all have this, right , but they have different values.... Well, people, you know, like you have what they call "generation gaps"? I mean the social things. And then you want, you have to leave the home cause you're getting older....

I: Can you be more specific?

(...)

D: Because I wasn't working. I didn't have a job. She worries too much about.... You know, old people worry about you. You know, you don't want old people sitting up there, "Oh, oh you're doing bad. I'm gonna do my best - I'm gonna give my social security to..." I don't want that. Me, I don't want, I don't want that shit. Don't give me it. No, it's your money you live your life, boom, I have mine. And you know, and, you know people, its... economically and socially... it was just time. It was time to leave.

Though somewhat evasive on the details, Duane describes a number of conflicts - interpersonal, economic, spatial and psychological. First, there is the question of describing the situation as "choosing to leave," or "having to leave." One gets the sense that trying to establish the difference strikes Duane comically, because both are so relevant. Given his age and stage in the family lifecycle, he wanted to leave. Given the

social pressures of the housing situation, he had to leave. Contributing to the spatial and social limits in the household, Duane says that he lacked skills - at least skills on paper - and was unemployed, facts which he partly attributes to his living in a poor, racially segregated neighborhood. In fact, it is the perceived impoverishment of options alongside the desires and pressures to establish independence that seems to create the psychological tension so evident in Duane's account.

Duane also describes interpersonal conflicts, both feeling "generation gaps," and living in the house while his grandmother is growing older. He doesn't want to live in the house while his grandmother is dying, especially since he is a source of worry to her, and because she has to support him on her fixed income. The dependence of other relatives on the grandmother's household - aunts and uncles - suggests that other members of Duane's family also have not established independent households. And though Duane is not specific on his relationships with them, he is more likely to talk about relations in the household as conflictual than as supportive.

Once Duane decided to leave, he went briefly with a girlfriend and relatives, and very shortly after, to sleeping on a park bench in his "old" neighborhood, and eventually to sleeping in shelters and "Goodwill" donation boxes. He describes what these "choices" were like:

I: What were your choices at the time?

D: You know, I, I stayed here and there. You know, my girlfriend, some relatives. Back and forth. You become...two months here, two months there. Two months there with family. That lasts after a while but... you relatives think a few days. You know what I mean? You know, you you can stay at this relatives house, maybe a brother and sister or a uncle or aunt or something. You jump around. You jump around a lot. And after you get through jumping around, you realize that you wanna be socially by yourself. You wanna be by yourself.

I: So what happens after relatives?

D: Girlfriend. Stay with a girlfriend. I was.... When I was doing like this, I was actually homeless. From there right, before, my, I have a, I had choices right, but my choices

weren't, weren't choices, you know, they weren't as.... I couldn't *make* these choices. I had to make these choices on the streets. Before I could make them on, you know, sit in my room (laughter), listen to my stereo and make these choices.

I: What happened the first time that you were on the streets or in a shelter?

D: First of all, you start being on the street around your home. Or around your, your relatives' homes. So you know, at least you can go in and visit.... But you can't stay there though. They all say "you can't stay here no more." You know what I'm saying? You can't even spend the night. But you can go there, they'll give you something to eat. Sit there all day until it's, they get tired of you, they go to bed or something. You know what I mean? (laughter) You can't stay there. And they cry you out they door. "I hate to see you go. But, bye" (laughter).

It is worth noting the similarity of Duane's story to the other two cases of intergenerational conflict found in the interviews. In the case of a young man, Rich (age 23), his mother recently moved out of town, to New York City, and he had to move in with his grandmother:

Rich: Because my mother, I was living in my grandmother's house. My mother figure that I was old enough to get out on my own and get a job, so she moved to New York. My grandfather moved back into the house. And my other sisters live with my grandmother. I can go stay with my grandmother. I can go stay with my grandmother but she want me stay in the house every day, all day long. She think I'm a little kid. I'm 23 years old. ...I just wanted to get out of there.

Rich keeps his clothes at his grandmother's house, and occasionally goes there for meals. But, besides not wanting his grandmother's rules, he thinks its "overcrowded," with 6 people living in a 2 bedroom house. So again, it is a combined problem of limited space, perceived social limits in the household due to different generational perspectives, and Rich's recognition that he has not been able to get a job and his own place as his mother expected. In the face of those constraints, Rich chooses to avoid his grandmother's household as much as possible, though dependent on it for occasional meals and for keeping his personal belongings. Instead, Rich has taken to living in the shelters and on the streets, working day labor and "hustling" for his income. For example, twenty minutes after this interview, Rich was found on a center-city street corner hawking



shirts from a box he had just stolen off of a delivery truck, offering \$6 per shirt.

The other person who reported intergenerational conflict, Henry (age 30), claims to have been abused emotionally by his extended family, as he was the victim of their jealousy. Henry is employed and has maintained his job throughout his homelessness, and feels that his income was a source of envy and devious overcharging for household expenses from other family members. He lived with 8 other relatives in his grandmother's four bedroom house. Not only did he feel overcharged, but that his feelings were being "played with": "I couldn't take it. I was depressed. And I felt that I should leave before I did something foolish to them. I was hurt." Henry went to a professional counsellor in the area who referred him to the shelters.

Except for these inter-generational, social and economic conflicts in grandparents' households, most family problems resulting in homelessness occur in parental households. A common example is conflict that develops over unemployment and job loss, as in Michael's case (age 23):

Michael: Actually, before I was working at a metal company. I was working at a sheet metal company. I was working there for four years. Things didn't work out. You know, then I lost my job, that's when things started to change. Things started happening bad, as far as my family and stuff. When I wasn't working.... Sometimes when you ain't working and you ain't paying them bills and stuff, you got some problems, like.... Know what I mean? Let me tell you, like in my case it really wasn't bad, cause I like life on my own, you know, cause I wanted this experience.

As in Duane's case, we see a psychological tension in Michael's deciding whether or not he was forced out or whether he "wanted this experience." Moreover, he is a bit vague about exactly why he lost his job or what happened with his family, though it seems clear that financial problems hit the family once his income support was not available:

Interviewer: You wanted what experience? To be on your own? To be on your own or to be homeless? Which?

Michael: The experience I wanted. I wanted to be on my own cause I'm 23 years old. The

whole time I was living with my parents... Like now, I see what life is really all about.

Life ain't.... You gotta make something out of your life, you really do.

I: You've learned a lot since you've been on the streets?

M: I've learned how people...this is one of the things I've learned..when you out on the streets, you know, people don't really care about you. They don't really care about you. It seems like you have to be somebody for somebody to care about you. I know like I'm homeless and stuff, you know, but I'm still somebody and stuff.... But that's the way it is for the time being for me.

Michael doesn't say much more about his family conflict, other than to say that he lived with his mother and three younger siblings, and that he was "the man of the house." The household was consequently dependent on his \$5 an hour job at the metal factory for some of its economic survival. Once the job was lost, problems in the household developed over unpaid bills. Assessing both the economic and familial pressures, and his age and desire to be "on his own," Michael took to the shelters. He says that he misses his family, "Oh like it feels bad sometimes cause sometimes I be wanting to be with 'em and stuff. But sometimes I go over there - my mom's house on the weekends and stay and stuff like that."

Unemployment can also combine with drug abuse or drug dealing to create problems in the parental household that lead to homelessness. Will (age 30), for example, had few problems living with his mother as long as he and his brothers kept their jobs and were simply dealing drugs for extra money. Suggesting the drug dependency of their household budget, Will's mother tolerated the presence of drugs:

Will: You know, when we were selling it, that was all well and good. But when me and my brothers started using, she said no. Then we were using cocaine. She was definitely against that. You know, so then we used to try to sell it. And we was doing o.k. at that for a while, until we started messing with it, then that was that.

Will tells how he was working two jobs when things at home started to come undone; one full-time job in food service at the airport, and another part-time job as a shoe-shine - each paying just around \$4 an hour. Will and his brothers first started selling

marijuana and then cocaine as an added source of income - reflecting how drug dealing had become a supplemental income to Will's low wages. When Will lost his primary job at the airport, and started using some of the drugs he was selling, his mother's tolerance shortened:

W: Well, I , at first, we was just into marijuana. The first time. Then after that, we had got into this cocaine thing and my mom was like, "Oh no. You know, we've been through this one time [problems created by using drugs instead of just dealing], we're not going through this again." You know, so after that, she said, after I lost the job, and she found out. OK, so there was the situation. "You're not working and you're using drugs, you gotta go. It's just that simple. You got to leave here."

Will first went to living in drug houses, receiving shelter in exchange for his willingness to buy and use drugs there. When lack of money and addiction began to take their toll, Will started living in abandoned buildings. Then, Will was referred to the shelters, which he says is he is currently using as a place to stay off of drugs.

Though not "dealers," a similar story of unemployment and drugs is told by Kevin and Maurice. Kevin (age 26) says that he can't live at his parents anymore with no source of income, especially since his brother is doing drugs and he is himself starting to have a problem with crack. Kevin was living in public housing, or at "the projects." He says about his own employment and income struggle, "I was trying to build things up, but my brother was bringing people in the house and doing drugs. I started doing drugs, and missing work." Kevin decided that if he was going to get his act together that he would have to leave "the projects," which he also referred to as "the graveyard," and as "satan's real estate." Maurice (age 23) similarly described his parent's neighborhood, also in "the projects," as "not the place to be" when you're struggling to get over drugs. Consequently, Maurice was using the homeless shelters as his own drug treatment center. He says he lost his job in construction because his boss caught him "smokin'

cane on the job."

Connected to this theme on parental households, drugs and homelessness, not all of those people who left parental households do so because of their *own* drug problems. There were two cases in the sample where people were fleeing family situations because of the drug abuse of other family members. For example, Debra, eight months pregnant at the time of the interview, lived with her husband and two children in her husband's grandmother's house - in other words, at her in-laws. She explains:

Debra: We left his, um, family's house, because most of his aunts and stuff do drugs, OK. They live in a three story house. And his aunts and stuff do drugs. Only people that don't do drugs in the house is the little kids, his mother and his grandmother. OK.

I: How many people were in the house?

D: Oh my God. Like twenty. Twenty-one, twenty two.

I: In a house? How many, how many bedrooms?

D: Ha, let me see. It's two up on the third floor. There's four on the second floor, and they none downstairs except they use the basement.

I: So there's six bedrooms and you had twenty-one people living there?

D: Yes. And some of the kids had to, you know, sleep together. There was like seven kids in a bed. But my kids slept with his mother, his paralyzed mother. Cause she got two hospital beds in her room. And they slept in that bed with her - I mean, in the other bed while she slept in her bed. OK. But um, we had to get away from that, because right around the corner from his mother's, his grandmother's house, is a whole block full of drug people that sell drugs. You know, the street it just sells drugs. Every house around there, there's not one house that don't sell. So we got away from that environment....

Not only was Debra's home overcrowded and dependent on drugs, but the neighborhood around her was economically dependent on the drug trade. Debra and her husband felt that they had to leave in order stay "clean" themselves, and to avoid harassment and thievery from addicted family members. Debra and her husband were the only people in the household with jobs at the time - Debra working as a home health aide, one of the lowest paying occupational sectors in the city - so their income and food were a source of envy, and sometimes theft from other family members. Debra and her husband entered the shelter system, hoping to raise enough money quickly to get their own apartment.

Unfortunately, they felt that they had to leave their children in the grandmother's home, so as to avoid taking them into the shelter system.

Debra and her husband were placed in a boarding home, where the bulk of clients were elderly and disabled. Both eventually got jobs working at the boarding home, with Debra calling many of the other clients her "SSI patients." A few others she claimed were drug addicts and prostitutes. Her duties involved preparing breakfast and dinner, and attending to the bodily wastes of her "patients." Debra recounts a most remarkable story about her and her husband's experience with this boarding home:

Debra: OK. Well we stayed there for a little bit. I stayed there for like a month before they put me in the kitchen. And there was this guy in the kitchen, every time he cooked I was in there helping him, you know, give out the food or whatever. He drinks a lot. And I used to go in there and fix the food cause he burns it when he drinks. And you know, they got used to me being in the kitchen. And when they fired him they just put me in there. You know. Oh, and they paid me fifty dollars a week. I shared the kitchen with one of the females, you know, that that... me and her was close and she helped me in the kitchen. And that was divided between me and her. So we got twenty five dollars a piece. I mean they, they was really tripping. And my husband managed some of the house. He cleaned the house. He cleaned the outside. And it's two houses combined together, with two great big yards. He used to go out there and clean the yard every morning. He used to have it cleaned by nine o'clock every day. Clean the front and mop the porch. He used to do all that.

I: And he got forty dollars a week you said?

D: Yes. Together we got sixty-five dollars. You know, and I didn't think that was right.

I: And what did you do with this money?

D: I sent, we sent some of it to the kids. And we would buy, you know, cigarettes and things like that that we would need. You know.

(...)

I: How did you end up leaving there?

D: Well, we had went back to his mother's house three weeks ago. Due to the fact that it matters that my husband got tired of getting paid what he was getting paid. So, he um, he took some meats. And he sold it and we got money for em and we went down the house and we bought clothes and stuff for the kids and all that. And we got kicked..you know, thrown out. [The boarding home operator] wanted me to come back, because I had nothing to do

with it. Cause my husband did it. But um, he said he was gonna put the uh, warrants out for me and him and all that.... My husband calls him to talk to him about it and tell him why he did it, OK. Because he thought we wasn't getting paid enough. And plus he felt like I'm..., I'm pregnant, I'm in the kitchen. OK. And he not paying me what he's supposed to pay me. OK. Him and I should be getting paid more than that. He said he don't care about him, but me, I'm in the kitchen cooking. He wanted me to get paid more than I was. But the man just refused to do it. The man said that he was gonna fire Jerry and kick him out. That's my husband. But Jerry said he wasn't going no where. If anything, he's gonna take me outa the kitchen. You know, and they got in a real big argument. And Jerry had warned him that he was gonna take his meats if he ain't paid him. And Jerry did it. (Laughter). You know.... And when we came to talk to the man, he came down there and he act like he was gonna talk to Jerry man to man, OK. He got out the car and he swung on my husband, and they was out on the street fighting. Him, his father, and some other guy. He was trying to fight my husband. So my husband bit the manager and I scratched him and my husband ran, OK. And I was walking along. I was walking, trying to go to my uncle's house. And his father put handcuffs on me. No, first he said he would put these hand cuffs on me. See, the manager was in the car looking for my husband. And his father came over to me and told me to put the handcuffs on. And I said I'm not putting nothing on because I didn't do nothing. And I don't feel I should put nothin on. Now if you wanna talk, we'll talk. But I ain't putting no handcuffs on. And it was crowded outside. He say he had a knife. He had a knife. And he said um, if you don't put these handcuffs on, excuse my language, he said I will take this knife and cut your mother fucking eye out bitch. Like that. And I just looked at him and I said you not gonna do nothing to me. OK. He hit me with his blackjack. He's not a cop. He just have these things in his car. And he hit me with his blackjack. OK. And then they put, he put the handcuffs on me. He dragged me down the street. OK, so I called, I told the manager that if they tried to press charges on my husband I would press charges on his father. This man literally dragged me down the street, OK. and he never had no charges pressed but he threw out all of our clothes. Four months worth of clothes that we done bought. And everything. And all the maternity clothes I had in the world he threw em in the trash. All my medical cards, all my medical cards go there. And he won't give them to me. OK. And I can't go, I can't go to the clinic....

Debra and her husband moved back with his family, but, once again, she couldn't take the drugs and family problems there. So, she and her husband decided that since he had gotten another job, that he was going to save money while staying with the children in his grandmother's house. Debra, on the other hand, would go back into the shelter

system, where she felt that she would be better taken care of in the final term of her pregnancy, and where she could avoid the drug environment of the household and neighborhood.

In another case of leaving a "drug environment," Jose (age 21) felt that he had to leave his mother's home because of his brother's drug problems:

Jose: I had some problems with my brother. You know, my mom told me not to leave the house, you know, cause, she wanted me to stay cause I told her, mom, you know I can't live here with this, you know, so many problems my brother had with me and stuff like that. I only had one brother there and my two sisters. So when I left the house everybody was crying, you know, but, you know, to me, I can't hack it when my brother, my brother was staying in the house. He was a junkie and all that. He would steal my stuff and everything. And my mom used to not like me, hitting on him, stuff like that. So I told my ma I had to leave.

The relationship between drug use and homelessness will be explored in some detail later, but it should be noted from these few cases that drugs become involved in many ways, including as a source of income, addiction, escape, family conflict and family/neighborhood economic dependence. But in each of these cases, the homeless people both using and near those using drugs are making choices to deal with the problems it creates, and usually do so by leaving the locations in which that drug use and drug dealing occurs. It is important to note that the drug use linked to homelessness always seems to occur in a geographic and household location that is deprived at the outset, and which provides little in the way of support and alternatives.

In considering other sources of homelessness and its association with parental households, there are a few other examples worth noting. First, there were two cases in the sample where women reported that the parental conflicts associated with their homelessness were with mothers. Both women's homelessness left them vulnerable to sexual exploitation by men. And both participants became homeless because of range of factors that included the mother's perception of competition for a sex partner - in both

cases over step-fathers. In Phyllis' case (age 35), she had had her own apartment with her 16 year-old son for some time, until it became unaffordable to her. She was working in a retirement home, when she accepted the invitation of her mother to move back home in order to save money for a better apartment. "I stayed for like 2 and a half years. Which was too long. I know that was too long. I knew I shouldn'ta stayed there that long." Phyllis was saving money, but claims to have "messed up" the money, which unleashed the arguments and antagonism between her and her mother:

Phyllis: I think that that could be the reason why my mother asked me, uh, to leave...you know, one word led to another. We would be saying, she would be saying things to me.... I was saying things to her that got her upset. So we, she's crying and I'm crying and everything so um, I guess she didn't like the things that I was saying. And I was upset. You know, and uh, so she told me that I had to leave. So when I left I just like took myself, I ain't take the time to get my clothes or nothing. So, I came back the next day, and it was something different the next day when I came back. She wasn't home when I came back there, and my stepfather says, uh , you're no longer staying here... So, I don't know, but this is what I feel, that she thinks that I, you know, I be wanting my step-father... Its just sickening.

I: Your mother thought that you were interested in her husband?

P: Yes. But she, she would tell me that this is not what she thinks. She would never come right out and say it.

Phyllis left her mother's and went to a girlfriend's apartment. The girlfriend was a lesbian, and her friends would come over, making Phyllis feel uncomfortable because she thought that she was the object of their attention. So she left there and stayed briefly with another friend and her son. But the landlord found out, and Phyllis had to leave or jeopardize her friend's lease. At this point, Phyllis felt she had no other alternatives, and lacking information and awareness of the shelters, spent the next three days sleeping on the streets:

Phyllis: ...I was trying those three days that I was out, I was walking around on the street and I call up my mother.... I called her three times, well, three different times. Three days straight and asked her could I come back. Will you give me another chance? She said no. That's a no no. So, after the third time I didn't bother to call and ask her could I come



stay, you know.... One of the days that I was out that I was walking around those three days, I was tired. I just wanted to go somewhere and just rest, you know. And I was hungry and everything. You know, so I had a few dollars with me and I would go get me something to eat, you know. Tired, and I was just beat.

I: Where were you sleeping?

P: Well, you know what? Uh, I just went to, I can't say where. It was just somebody's, somebody's house that I went to, uh, that I really didn't know that well. You know, and just to just to keep from being out there in the street by myself late at night. Three and four o'clock in the morning. You know, I just went to this anybody's house that I didn't even know.

I: The same place three nights in a row?

P: Yeah. No, not the same person... Well this was two different people. And uh, I asked them could I just you know, stay there and just rest up... you know.... They told me that I couldn't stay there, you know. An uh, so I just stayed the night, overnight, and I leave and I just go out and walk around again, or you know, just walk around or whatever. Just, you know, just....

I: Did these people treat you OK, that you stayed with?

P: Hm. No. No they, they just, they just, you know, they didn't want me to stay over there overnight, but I had to explain the situation to them, finally, I would say, well, you know, just for the night. To keep from walking around in the streets. Uh, cause one morning, one of the mornings that I was out, this is between two and three o'clock in the morning, I was near my mother's house, you know. Up where my mother live. And I had to go to the bathroom real bad and everything. I was tired I was, you know. I just wanted to go, to get somewhere to lay down and rest. So I'm banging on my mother's door right. I rang the door bell, knocked on the door. I knew somebody you know, was all home but they had to get up and go to work the next day. So um, I knocked on the door. I didn't get no answer. I walked around to the back door. After I had been knocking on the front I went around to the back door. And um, I hollered up to my son. My son sleeps like in the middle room but it's facing the back. So I knew that he would, you know, hear me. So I went around to the back and hollered for my son. I didn't mean to, you know, to stop by there that time in the morning disturbing him, waking him, because he had to get up to to to work hisself. You know, cause my son works every day. So, um, my son comes down and um, but it took him a while to come down because he musta had to let my mother know that I was out back knocking on the door. Because it took him a long time to come downstairs. So he comes downstairs, he says "mom, uh, what's wrong." You know, "What's up." I said "Baby, I'm tired. I'm hungry, and and I just, you know, I don't know I just wanna get me some rest." I said, um, "Would you wake your nanna up and ask her will she come

downstairs you know, so I could talk to her." She wouldn't get up out of the bed to come downstairs. She just told him to tell me uh, look, she gotta go to work tomorrow, and she don't feel like talking. She go to work tomorrow and she tired. And that for him was real bad, ... telling my son not to open the door for me.

I: He wouldn't let you in.

P: Yeah. Wouldn't let me in. Yeah, wouldn't let me in. OK. So then I just walked on away. And uh, I just started walking around some more, you know. It was getting like daybreak, getting light then. You know, and I was standing out there for like a hour, so I knocked on my mother's door and she would not let me in. Wow. So that was really bad for me. Real bad. So then I left from there, and uh, it's about 5 o'clock in the morning. OK, we start getting light about 4:30, 5. So I went to go catch the bus. I just went in right, the avenue, right. And oh. I just went just, just, riding around cause I had a transpass. I just riding around, riding around. Just to be going somewhere. I didn't go in nobody's house, nothing like that. You know, just riding around on the buses and stuff all day long. You know, just riding around. Stop in places to get me something cold to drink or something to eat, but uh, that's all I was doing those three days.

Phyllis finally reached her father in New Jersey, who let her stay with him for a week, and who helped to arrange Phyllis' placement in the shelter system. But before that, she was forced under the circumstances to accept accommodations with men, in what amounted to a subtle form of prostitution; receiving shelter, avoidance of the streets, and the use of a bathroom in exchange for her willingness to stay with men whom she did not know.

Another woman, Alice (age 22), said the same thing about a perceived sexual conflict with her mother. Alice went away to college for a semester, in part to avoid problems at home. Then her mother wouldn't have Alice back home because she claimed that Alice brought "spirits" into the house, and that she was "interested" in her step-father. Alice says that she has long suspected that she was an unwanted child. So Alice, a dancer by training, went to an entertainment employment office in Philadelphia, where she was introduced to a "Bible speaking" gentlemen who offered her a place to stay in exchange for his acting as her "agent." With no other options, Alice decided to risk it with this

stranger, encouraged by the fact that another woman at the employment office in similar circumstances agreed to the join her:

Alice: It was a nightmare on 12th Street. Um, I couldn't believe it. You know.

I: What made you finally decide to leave this place?

A: Well, we was , we were gonna stay there and help fix up the place, you know, paint and everything, and get it together. But let me tell you something. This guy, this guy had me turn on the electric. Had me turn on the phone. Had on the lease \$350 a month. And that, that wasn't what he was charging me. He was trying to get me to take a job in stripping.

I: Really?

A: Cause that's fast money.

I: Sure

A: And you can get tips on the side, you know. Stripping? I was like, are you crazy? No way. I know there's a better way to make money. So, this guy um....

I: Almost got it.

A: This guy was no good. He wasn't trustworthy. He wasn't honest. And he wasn't faithful. He wasn't, he wasn't no spiritual minded either. He just talked the Bible.

I: So what happened?

A: My roommate went out that night, Wednesday night. And uh, she told him, and he had been snorting cocaine. The same night we was at his apartment, he pulled out a gun and threatened us, that if anybody found out about what he was doing, that he would kill us.

I: Found out what?

A: That he was into cocaine. And he was, it was like he was acting like a pimp. Because he tried, you know, to make us get jobs as strippers, and he said that's all he could do for us. Nowhere else you could work. That was a lie. And that night she went out and he was drunk and he came, ok, it was like one o'clock in the morning between one and one thirty. He knew she was gone out. And he came to the house.... And he said, "I want you, darling, this is...." And I'm like. OK. You know I'm asleep. I'm sleeping you know. I'm waking up and trying to see what.... And I slipped on a long shirt and I opened up the door, and he said um, "Could I stay here? Could I spend the night here?" Me and.... I said, "I had a, me and my girlfriend had an argument. And um, I'm like, I'm sleepy. You own this house, and you're knocking on the door this time of morning asking can you spend the night here? I'm like, why are you asking me? This is your house. You own it." And this guy came here. He um, forced himself on me.

I: He forced himself on you?

A: Yeah. Um, yeah.

I: He raped you?

A: Yeah. Right.... And uh, I was scared. I was really out of my head. I mean, I was

looking down at the floor, and the next morning, I couldn't look at my roommate and tell her what happened. I was, I was disgusted. I was in pain. I was like God what is happening to me? The second time in my life. So, I'm like, I felt dead. It happened Thursday morning, and I went to the cops on Saturday. And they, I filed up everything and told them everything that happened. They wrote it down. It's reported. And they took me to the hospital to have um, what you call it.... I was so I was so very intensive, very unaware, very scared. I needed someone by my side at the time. And my friends was there.

I: And they helped you find the shelter?

A: Yeah. And um, when this had happened to me I felt very, very unclean. Very dirty. I felt like a tramp, a whore, a slut, a prostitute. I felt like everything. Unclean. I felt really dirty down. I felt like it was my fault.

In both of these women's cases, the lack of housing alternatives led to their coercion into sexual relations with men, and their subsequent rejection of those relations. This gender difference is of considerable note, as no men in this study reported similar sexual coercion. The psychological impact of being raped or being forced into prostitution undoubtedly influences one's ability to confront residential instability, and may well be a factor leading to homelessness. Moreover, as a result of their dependence on their mothers' households, both of these cases faced a mothers' accusations of sexual interest between daughter and step-father. Such a phenomenon may well reflect the increased competition between black women for available men, given the declining pool of "marriageable men" in the black community discussed by Wilson (1987). However, it may well reflect other problems in the household too, such as in Phyllis's case, where her "messing up" the money that would have gotten her out of her mother's house seemed to trigger a release of tensions. The fact that Phyllis worked in one of the lowest paying occupational sectors - as an aide in a nursing home, is also of considerable relevance, just as it is significant that Alice's housing was tied to her need for employment. But overall, it was the lack of alternatives beyond parental households which forced parental conflicts to play a role in these cases of homelessness, and their

subsequent vulnerability to exploitation by men.

There were just a few other cases of disagreements between parents and adult children that led to homelessness in the sample, but that were not generalizable to other cases in any obvious way. Each of these remaining cases will be briefly summarized here. In one case, Lisa (age 40) had had a job and an apartment with her two teenage daughters. But Lisa was "furloughed" from her job at the IRS, and two weeks later, was unexpectedly evicted because the landlord was selling his property. That combination of crises forced her to return to her mother's household. After 10 months with her mother, the personal conflicts that they had were too intense for her to bear, so she resorted to a series of rented rooms, and eventually, to the shelters. She attributed the conflicts with her mother to her looking like her father; reminding her mother of a man her mother grew to hate. Lisa, herself a black woman, had a black father, but her mother is white. Lisa says her mother always mistreated her and her brothers and sisters. The teenage daughters are no longer with Lisa, as she describes their two contrasting ways of dealing with the family crisis:

Lisa: Well, with my daughter, um, my younger daughter [age 16], she works. I see her, as while she was in here [in the shelter], she was very depressed, tired, um, angry at me cause she feel as though I can make a statement to somebody, if my children, if I have children, to get us out. I don't wanna see them in this same situation. So, you know, that type of thing. My older daughter [age 17] completely rebels. She, she would not, she will come in this shelter to take a nap. Or wash up. But she will not stay here, period. In the time we was in the takeover house [Lisa was part of a group that illegally occupied an abandoned house], her personality and, you know, mellowed out. She was nice and everything. But when she heard we had to move, and the police threw us out, her personality changed. She started drinking beer and you know, her personality got negative again. It was like, oh no, not again. "I'm not going in a shelter, OK." So I talk to her on the phone and everything like that but, she hasn't stepped in here to stay since we came here.

Lisa's two daughters show different styles of dealing with the problems facing the family. One daughter, the older of her two, has responded by rebelling against the

shelter system and by drinking. The other daughter, the younger of her two, has gotten a job and moved in with a boyfriend, though she has been emotionally upset, angry and depressed. Though different in their styles of coping, or resisting, they both are a source of concern rather than support to Lisa, who is hopeful that her six months in the shelters is soon coming to an end. As she mentioned, Lisa herself participated in a protest action with other homeless people by publicly occupying an abandoned building for several weeks. The action was ended by the protesters due to the City's concession of increasing funding for a housing program, though most of the participants remained homeless after the action.

Another person, Jerome (age 20), had a violent exchange with his alcoholic father on July 4th, 1988, which he attributed to his father's alcoholism. He left there that night after assaulting his father, and threatening to burn the house down, and had not returned by the time of this interview two months later. Jerome combines living in the shelters and on the streets with the use of his girlfriend's mother's house, where his two children also live, and where he occasionally "sneaks" in for a meal, a bath, or even a night's sleep:

Interviewer: When you first ended up leaving that situation, how did you deal with the immediate fact of needing somewhere to go? What did you do? Where did you go?

Jerome: I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do, and the people I turned to, thinking that they would help me, they turned their back on me. I cried like hell, cried like hell. My old lady, thank God, she was sneaking me in her house, so I would at least get 2 hours sleep, and to get a bath or something to eat. And I love her to death for it. Cause if it wasn't for her, she, I wouldn't be, I wouldn't have a lot of things I have now. If it wasn't for my kids and the responsibility that I have I wouldn't be doing the things I do now. They play a very important role.

Jerome places great emphasis on the influence of his children on his motivation and behavior; he has a strong desire to get a place for his new family:

Jerome: ...I have responsibility for a woman and 2 kids. And I'd die and go to hell for them

3. You understand what I'm saying? Uh, any money I get will go to them. Um, I can never see me letting my kids or my woman go to a shelter. No way. If I had to, if that was the only thing I had to do is I'll go back into selling drugs again.

Several times during the interview, Jerome mentions his need to get diapers for his son, and at one point strongly expresses the frustration that this and other needs cause him:

Jerome: I was losing it. I was losing it. I felt, um, suicidal. I thought about goin to the Ben Franklin Bridge and jumping off several times. But that wasn't the answer to it. I recognized that. Sometimes still to the day I think of that. Because of things is not changing. Seems like things are getting worse. You know, and um, like, like I was saying, I, I, I need pampers. And they can't even help me out on it. You know, and um, I'm fucked up because I, I don't like to see my kids go without. But I, I wasn't able, I wasn't able to see my buddy to get some money today or borrow money offa him....

Jay (age 42) left his 72 year-old mother's house after they had a fight one weekend.

He accidentally let the bathtub overflow, which flooded the dining room below.

Unfortunately, he had been laid off from his job two months before the "flood." And to further worsen his status in the household, on the same weekend of the flooded dining room, he was blamed for the running away of his mother's dog. He keeps in touch with her but hasn't been back in 13 months. In the interim, Jay had joined the Hare Krishna Temple at the suggestion of a friend. But Jay left a few months later because there was a rule for membership that stated that you could not hold outside employment. Since Jay had gotten an appealing job offer at the Navy Yard, he left the Krishna's and went into the shelter system.

And in the last case of parent-child conflict, Stephen (age 24), left his parents at the age of 17. He beat up his step-father once when he found his step-father beating up on his mother, and because his step-father denied his mother money. He retaliated that one day seven years ago, and hasn't returned since. He says his mother is more loyal to his step-father even though Stephen was sticking up for her. Stephen has had a long seven years of hustling for survival between the streets, shelters, and girlfriends, ever since.

**Leaving Spouses: Family Break-Up**

Of course, not all of the people in the sample came from parental households, nor was their parental household the "family" of strongest household tie. Fourteen of the forty-three participants underwent marital and family dissolutions either at the onset of their homelessness, or just prior (includes some of the unmarried partners<sup>3</sup>). A range of reasons were offered for family break-up, from drug abuse, physical abuse, separation and fire. But the most common scenario of marital dissolution was over drug abuse. In each case, the drug abusing spouse was the one who became homeless. Here's the story of

Clarence (age 33):

Clarence: Three years ago, OK, I was, OK, I was married. I'm married now. But we're not together. We've been separated three years. And um, I just, ever since then, well, I had gave up. And I just, I went on a binge. I've slept in abandoned trucks. Alleyways.

Interviewer: Was this separation with you and your wife a long time in coming or was it just a fight or how did it happen?

C: Well, there was my addiction.

I: She just got tired of it?

C: Of, of, of me hurting me.

I: Yeah?

C: OK Yeah. And, and she said well, before I watch you hurt you, I'll leave.

I: She left?

C: Yeah.

I: Were you working at the time?

C: Periodically. And she works at the School Department. You know, I, I mean, it's like, it's like this here, right. I'm not what you would call a real bum, you know.

I: No, you're not a bum.

C: (laugh) At all. You know.

I: How long had you been on the pipe [smoking cocaine] before you ended up....

C: I'm not on the pipe. It's spike [injecting heroin]. It's not every day. Because I don't have the money every day. You know. But um, any time I want to I go and I get me some. If I want to. And then I've been doing it for so many years until if I have it I do, if not, I just don't mess with it.

Clarence left the family's one-bedroom apartment soon after his wife left with their two children, and he starting sleeping in abandoned buildings and vehicles, and alleyways. He



claims to have had no relationship with his parents since he left them as a troubled teen.

Ray (age 39) has a similar account of substance abuse undermining the family, but in his case, it combines with job loss:

Interviewer: So you've been in this situation for about 3 months now?

Ray: Right. Well a little bit longer than that. I say give it off and on maybe six months.

I: What happened?

R: See I have a tendency to drink a little too much and I found myself in the situation where I created some negative situations for myself, so to keep from getting into the personal concept of it - what brought this on - I'll just say I created a negative situation that my wife felt that she wasn't gonna put up. And I have to respect that so I chose to leave until I can improve myself rather than be hinder or create more negative situation by being there. So that's why I found myself here.

I: Were you living in an apartment or a house?

R: No, we have our own house. I had a good job and I got laid off from my job.

I: What had you been doing for work?

R: Like I said, I'm a professional painter. I've been doing that for 17 years...

I: And you got laid off?

R: Well, I would not say I got laid off. I got fired.

I: Why?

R: Like I said, I was drinking too much, personal problems. I found myself taking a bottle away and not being on the job when I should have been and call in. I wasn't complying through the rules. So therefore, when you don't comply to the rules, they're gonna terminate you. That's what happened. I created that situation.

I: And then shortly after that it got to be too much at home too?

R: Yeah, it definitely, you know, man of the house, you ain't bringing in no income and the little woman out there workin, ah...that's gonna create a negative situation, know what I mean? That's gonna say - hey - she coming home and it wasn't getting no easier. I played the role, the reverse role. I was the mom at home. I took care of my kids.

There are a couple points that distinguish Ray's story from Clarence's. While both acknowledge their own addiction and its affect on their marital situation, Ray attributes some of his leaving to his own "choice," and for the best interests of the family and himself. Ray's story also includes the fact of losing a job over his drinking. There were also some conflicts created at home with Ray's unemployment and with his coming to

occupy the role of "homemaker," with which both he and his wife were uncomfortable. But both Clarence and Ray attribute the primary responsibility for their homelessness to their own addictive behavior.

It is worth noting some of the biographical context for both Ray's and Clarence's addictions. Clarence started using heroin at age 13, when his family moved into the housing projects in 1962:

Clarence: Well I grew up in West Philly. And then we moved and uh, in the projects. And that's where I learned how to use needles all that at. I was a kid, you know. And in those days I thought it was being hip, ok. You was being hip, ok.

I: One of the crowd.

C: Everybody, yeah. Everybody else was doing it. Yeah, and, and a large amount of my life uh, like every other child in the ghetto, you know, I mean, I got into.... Well like, um, um I stole cars and all that stuff like average individual would do. Hooking school.... And uh, I grew up. I grew up real fast. Cause I always hung around the older guys, you know. I never hung with nobody my own age. So therefore, right, I grew up real fast. And you know. That was it.

Again we see an attribution of how the public housing environment has an impact on the behaviors of those who live there, with Clarence describing stealing cars and hooking school as what "an average individual would do."

Ray too has a biographical context to his alcoholism. Ray served two tours in the Viet Nam War, an experience from which he has periodic nightmares and intense emotional remembrances. His heavy drinking began during the war. Ray says that both he and his wife think that his alcoholism may be related to his pattern of coping with the problems that the Viet Nam experience created in his adult life.

One additional example of drugs causing marital break-down, and eventually leading to housing conditions that led to homelessness, is the case of Gary (age 35). But in this case, it was drug dealing that led to marital breakdown more than drug addiction:

Interviewer: Do you think that drugs had anything to do with your homelessness?

Gary: Oh yeah, most definitely. Cause that basically was the reason me and my wife broke

up. It wasn't that I wasn't doing what I was supposed to do, you know, because she still got the money she needed, the bill money. But it's just that I was up on my money. And the point that I was, you know, selling drugs and working. So, so how much time would that leave for her?

I: Not much at all.

G: Yeah. At first I thought that all she wanted was money, so I was getting it to her. You know. But then I find out, you know, you don't spend enough time with me. You don't do this. You don't do that. You know, and I couldn't do all of it. Work all day, sell drugs at night. You know, there wasn't too much time for nothing.

Gary did get involved in using the drug that he sold - heroin, but he doesn't attribute as much of the family breakdown with the use, as the selling. In fact, he said he kicked his use of heroin before he came to Philadelphia, following the separation. It appears that the drug selling was done primarily for the money. Moreover, when asked about how he became homeless, Gary never mentioned the drugs at all until prompted by the interviewer, as that was more of a direct reason for family breakdown than for homelessness. This is the story that Gary linked to his becoming homeless:

Interviewer: I'd like to talk if we could about your own personal story. And how you ended up without a place to stay.

Gary: Um, basically, like I said, I left home about fourteen months ago. I was married. Three kids. House. OK, me and my wife broke up. And I basically just wanted to get away. So I came up [to Philadelphia] to live with my sister. I basically stayed with her about six months. And it was a house, it was a old raggedy house. No plumbing or anything. And the landlord most definitely needed to fix it up. And then she moved into her apartment. One bedroom. Her and her old man. And I decided to come downtown. You know, so I went to the Adult Center. I and tr., like I said, I tried the shelters. It didn't work. So, I basically need the solitude so I decided to try the streets....

Gary's sister's home was a dilapidated dwelling, and after she moved, he had no alternatives but the shelters, which he decided were too crowded and lacking in privacy for him.

Other marital problems developed in households apart from drug abuse, one category of which is physical abuse. In the three cases found in this sample, all three of the

homeless persons interviewed left their former homes because of a spouse's (or partner's) abuse. Two cases were of women, Ruth (age 36) and Karen (age 29), and one case was a man, Chris (age 25). As found in some of the earlier cases, residential instability for the women led to their sexual exploitation by men. Ruth didn't have much to say about her former home situation, other than to say that her husband was "hurting me mentally and physically," and that she "got separated from my husband and went into deep depression. So I started to use drugs." Ruth arrived at Adult Services after her break-up, and for two days sat in a chair, black and blue from a beating from her former husband, before she was finally placed in the shelter system. After using up her allotted time in one of the city's shelters, and rejecting the conditions of the boarding home to which she was then assigned, Ruth took to the streets, and like one of the women mentioned earlier, began to find shelter by sleeping with men who were unknown to her. It should be noted that Ruth terminated the interview because it was emotionally upsetting for her to discuss her past as a sexually abused child in foster care.

The other woman, Karen (age 29), stated that she herself was not the victim of physical abuse but that her young son was being abused by the man with whom she and her son were living (not the father): "...the guy I was living with in North Philly had beaten my son. Blackened his eyes. You know." In Karen's case, she has no family of her own, which limited her range of support after leaving this man:

Interviewer: What other choices did you have besides going to Adult Services at the time? Was there any where else you could go? Anybody you knew?

Karen: No, nobody else. Nobody I could turn to.

I: You said that your family's all gone?

K: I got, I don't know where they at. Brothers and sisters are scattered all over the place.

I: Could you tell me how you finally decided or realized that you had to go to Adult Services?

K: Its just that I have a choice. I, either to go there, or be in the streets. Heh.

Karen and her son stayed briefly in an unfinished basement apartment, in a neighborhood

over which she was distressed. Soon after their arrival, Karen was raped in that neighborhood, and consequently decided to place her son with child protective services because "I didn't want him on the streets with me. I want him to be somebody. Not like me. I failed." As a result of placing her son in foster care, Karen lost her AFDC benefits and had no income to support a new apartment. Karen then went into the shelter system, in part to avoid the neighborhood in which she was raped. Her own family was broken up when she was five years old, "abandoned," as she described it. She was raised by adoptive grandparents, and does not know the whereabouts of any other family members. For that reason, she was forced to depend on the shelters rather than other family members during her housing and personal emergencies. Again, the sexual vulnerability of both of these women amidst their residential instability should be noted as a significant gender-linked factor in their homelessness.

The other victim of spouse (partner) abuse was that of man named Chris (age 25). Chris was living with his gay lover of 5 years, when they had a fight - after which Chris was hospitalized for injuries induced by the fight. Chris had "cheated" on his partner, and blamed himself for the ensuing fight. He was very frightened about the prospect of returning home and facing the wrath of his partner, and felt he had no other choices:

Interviewer: What happened after you got out of the hospital?

Chris: My own family don't want me with them unless I change my lifestyle, and...I'm a very proud person. I just didn't want to.... I felt that if I couldn't live my life the way I wanted to then I didn't want to live at all. I didn't want to go to Adult Services - I walked past the place and it was just so filthy, it was rude, I mean people in there was like taking from each other - You may not have anything but they taking from each other.... And um, it just hurt me so bad I just walked right on back out the door - and it was cold, it was sleeting, hailing that night and I just went underneath the subway around City Hall, its a part called, I think its Suburban Station. I went underneath there and I took about 7 valium, 10 valiums, and then... something made me call on one of my girlfriends. She a friend of mine, been my friend for over ten years. And I called her up and she told me - and I explained everything to her - and like when I was in the hospital I was so embarrassed that

my old man beated me like that, I didn't tell no one that I was in the hospital. I was in the hospital for over 8 days. I couldn't see out of this eye. They had to do surgery on my eye and I had my ribs fractured, so after I got out of Willis Eye Hospital, I went to Pennsylvania Hospital - stayed in there for another 9 days. So my body was tired, you know, and I was in pain, it was cold outside. But at least I had proper clothes.

Chris had no family support because of his sexual preference, which he refused to deny, and he felt that the circumstances at Adult Services - his last place of refuge, were horrifying enough that it warranted the attempt at taking his own life. Without the buffer of family support in the event of such a housing emergency, as in both Ruth's and Karen's cases, Chris was alone, and thus he did not want to accept the only alternative available to him - the shelter system. Chris ended up staying with his woman friend for two days, after which he went back into the shelter system, where he had been staying for six months at the time of this interview. He was using one of the shelters as a base of operation while he went to school and worked, hoping to earn enough for an apartment. The shelter in which Chris was finally placed, the Volunteers of America, was known for having many gay men living there, and so there is greater perceived security in that setting for gay men, though Chris reported being harassed there by men antagonistic toward his and others sexual orientation.

There were other marital separations in the sample that were linked to neither drug abuse nor spouse abuse, but that are involved in varying degrees in the stories of becoming homeless. In an example of its secondary involvement, Agnes (age 28) merely mentioned that she and her husband had separated 2 years ago, but that the separation forced her and her children to move into a house with her brother and his family, a house which she described as barely habitable. In fact she states: "The house was coming down on us, so we had to leave. My brother stayed...The conditions was unfit. The walls was falling in and the roof. I didn't want the kids dying in there." Agnes stayed in

the house - 8 people to three bedrooms - for a year before finally going to the shelters. After several months in the shelters, Agnes took her children out, and placed them in foster care, because "They was having setbacks. My son whose 12, he didn't want to stay cause some of the things that was going on in there. Also, I didn't like the way the children was getting treated." Agnes lost her AFDC benefits as a result of placing her kids in foster care. Now Agnes is living in a shelter for single adults, and calls her children daily from a pay-phone in the shelter. She visits her children three or four times a week.

Christine (age 37) describes an incident forcing her separation from her husband 15 years ago, that left her mentally unstable, homeless, and vulnerable to sexual exploitation:

Christine: Uh, my husband brought another woman in the house. And um, they went to bed while I was there. And it just.... We were very close.... We had problems. Yeah, because he was a construction worker. And he used to drink on weekends. He never drank during the week while he went to work, but he used to drink all weekend. So that was our problem. But other than that we were very close. I couldn't understand it. And I went off.... My mind got very fogged out. No one would hire me.

Christine has had a very long struggle trying to gain some stability since her separation from her husband, largely due to a mental illness that developed after their separation, a condition that affected her ability to get employment. Following her separation, she lived briefly with another man, whom she claims beat her, and then with her mother, where she said that she was not welcome. Because of her mental state, Christine's mother successfully sued for custody of Christine's children, and as a result, Christine lost her AFDC benefits. This series of events, combined with her mental condition - "I was very sensitive, my nerves bad" - eventually resulted in Christine's sleeping on the streets for several years, and in being hospitalized for her mental illness. During the period of her living on the street, Christine was raped. She claims to have lost all of her

memories during her mental illness, which the hospital helped her to regain with "needle injections." She was staying in a boarding home at the time of the interview.

Finally, there was one other reason in the sample given for a family break-up that led to homelessness - fire. In each of these cases, Marcus (age 37) and John (age 27), their families broke up over a fire that destroyed their homes. For Marcus, the displacement caused by a fire one year ago led to great difficulties in resettling the family:

Marcus: You know, I tried to get assistance to get another house and this and that. That's how we first started going through the shelter. And its been like, downhill. It's been, it's been a hard fight. Downhill, uphill, downhill, uphill. You never know where you're going or coming. Uh, sometimes now, I think about just giving it all up. Cause it seems like its no hope. I just keep saying my prayers and just keep pushing in there because I have other people you know that you be ... I'm responsible for. You know, I have a wife. I have, I have two kids of my own. She have five kids of her own. Now five of her kids is in the shelter. You know. I have two that's staying with relatives.... All I needed was another house. You know, all I needed was my family to come back together. But see being financially and um, really having nobody's support you know, nobody to come to support me, to help get a house or this and that and no insurance, we had to take the shelter life.

I: So what happened immediately after the fire?

M: Well, I was living with, you know, some family, but, there wasn't enough room. And you know family's, staying with family leads to a lot of frustrations and you know, things like that. And they just, you know, didn't have the money, didn't have the room you know, for us to really live in. So we have to move on. And well, you can't find no other living relatives, cause I don't have that many living relatives here. It's hard to, you know, to do it on your own.

I: Did you own this place that burned down?

M: No, well, we was renting to buy. You know, the guy, the landlord that we was renting it from, to buy, I don't know, he just split. I think he got some insurance money and he's gone. But we never heard nothing from him again.

I: Right.

M: So it was just money that we lost.

I: You said that the family broke up?

M: Well, five kids, well, I got one daughter, she's seventeen. She's out there on her own somewhere. But she, she's making it. She don't look back on we all. I think she, she found a little boyfriend or something like that. She's getting on with her life. And we got other



kids that's in the shelter. Then I got two of my kids that um, staying with relatives. So everything's like this. And if I could, just change in little ways.... If I could just get a home, I can get a job. But the way things lookin right now, I feel like I'm all alone.

Marcus, his wife and their children had to leave the relatives with whom they stayed following the fire because of limits on that household's space and money. Lacking further support and finances for resettling, the family had to go into the shelter system, with some of the children going to other relatives. Marcus was separated from the rest of his family by the shelter system, because as an adult male he is not allowed in the family shelter in which his family is placed. Therefore, he has had to go into the single adult shelters on his own. The separation has had an impact on his frame of mind and his relationship with his wife, "You know, we missing the kids you know, and my lady about us being separated, you know. I ain't count. The relationship is starting to go dull.... Cause you know its a lot of emotional strain." Like many of these stories, Marcus and his family tried to rely on relatives, but the strained resources and overcrowding that often results forced the family to less desirable alternatives. And with the social and economic pressures of shelter life pervading the family, emotional strain and stressed relations developed. Marcus seems, however, to have remained hopeful, though he admits to many continuing moments of hopelessness.

Another fire victim, John (age 27) was living with his partner and her family in her family's home. John tells the story of how the fire began as a result of income problems in the household, and how the fire led to his estrangement from the family:

Interviewer: What happened to you so that you ended up without a place to live?

John: Well, I was living with my girl. And what happened was - she was pregnant, and we had a fire, you understand....

I: A fire?

J: Yeah we had a fire and the house burnt and she had a miscarriage - so after that point, you know, it was a lot of things that went down. I was kinda messed up in my head from this like a long time. I don't even talk about it much because that was gonna be my first

child. I was just messed up about it man, and then the irony of it is, the worst of it is, that she blamed me. Because she said... it was just deep man. I didn't know that the kerosene heater was gonna, you know.... It was just deep man.

I: Why did you have kerosene heat?

J: Well because we didn't have the money to pay the gas bill.

I: So you had a kerosene heater?

J: Hey man, you know what? Seriously. I was gonna make a lawsuit out of that but you know what the gas company told us? They said you couldn't make a lawsuit out of it because of the fact it's against the law to have kerosene heaters in the house, you know. So they had a loophole.

I: You couldn't pay your utility bill so you were using kerosene?

J: Using kerosene heating. And it caught on fire, and the place burned down. Yes. Yeah, cause I was messed up about that man.... Cause for real, it wasn't my fault. But you know I was sleeping downstairs. She always used to tell me, don't have it on. But I mean, man, this particular night, it was cold, it was real cold. And the thing just caught on fire. Everybody got out of there - her mom, her sister, her brother, but they blamed it on me.

I: How many people were in the house?

J: Five people in three bedrooms.... Man it was deep. When I first left there that's when I became on the street, you know, because it was just deep. I got blamed for a lot of stuff cause people was telling me that they were saying - "she told you not to have that thing in the house" and this and that. I don't even want to get into it man, cause it was really deep. But that is why I'm inside the situation I'm in now. And I always said if I had the money I was gonna go to her Mom - cause her mom even had to come down to a shelter. Her mom is staying in a shelter, for real, cause you know....

I: After the fire....

J: Yeah, everybody was fucked up by it. They lost everything. At one time they had people looking for me man...as far as.. cause her brother, he couldn't beat me.... He was like the same age as me but he couldn't beat me. I mean, that's why right now I'm in North Philadelphia.

John can't help but feel some blame for the loss of the home and the baby, though he is clearly trying to resist seeing this problem as only "his fault." He sees that some responsibility should be borne by the gas company, though such an attribution of blame would not apparently provide him or the family with any compensation. As he stated, it was the lack of money that led to the home's loss of heating, though he doesn't dwell on either the condition of poverty or the denial of heat as primarily responsible for the

fire. The personal guilt from the fire seems to linger, especially in his apparent unwillingness to talk about it much anymore.

**No Family Support Available:**

Finally, in considering family relations and their place in the lives of people who become homeless, there is one category yet to be discussed in its relation to the onset of homelessness - a lack of any family support. To varying degrees, each of the family stories reviewed thus far have led to diminished support from family members. In many cases, family support has been used up, because of unemployment, lack of social and economic resources, domestic conflict, drug abuse, or living conditions - and in most cases because of a combination of these. But there is a significant subsegment of the sample (ten cases) for whom there was never any family support available to begin with, and for whom there was no family of "strong tie" at the onset of homelessness. In other words, they didn't have a family support network available to fall back on or to "use up." For this group, it is the relative absence of family relations that is linked, though typically indirectly, to the onset of homelessness. There were two primary reasons for which there was no family support - either the homeless person's family lived in another geographic region of the country, or as a child, the homeless person was abused by parents and/or grew up with a foster care family.

An example of the first of these types, where the family is out of town, is the case of Rachel (age 45). Rachel lived in Los Vegas, Nevada for many years, working in a casino there. She pre-arranged for a job placement at a casino in Atlantic City, and her elderly parents in California (both in their 70's) bought her a car that would take her to the East Coast. This desire for a life and job change didn't work out, however. Rachel was misled into believing that she would be immediately placed in a position of employment

at a casino owned by her former employer, but she found that a residency requirement in New Jersey for casino positions would forbid her that employment for six months. With little money and no friends or family to fall back on, she stayed in a YWCA in Philadelphia, where she claims to have had her TV stolen. She was eventually evicted from the YWCA and started living in her car. By piecing together Rachel's sometimes confusing story, it seems that she began to have emotional problems somewhere in the middle of this process. Once her car was stolen, along with all of her belongings - an event to which she continually refers in her account - she apparently lost her psychological hold of things. She went to a women's shelter for 12 days, the maximum time allowable at that particular site, and spent the next 11 months living between other shelters and the streets. After her stay on the streets, she admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital voluntarily, and was placed in a boarding home, where she was interviewed for this study. When asked why she didn't call her parents and tell them of her situation, she said "Oh, I tried, but they ran out of money too. See, my parents are retired. They're in their seventies. So they don't have that much money.... They didn't know what was going on. I contacted them and told them what was happening, and they were a little upset." Hence, some combination of factors, including her unsuccessful attempt at securing employment, limits on her family's money, age and geographic location, the theft of her car, and her psychiatric disability, led to Rachel's becoming homeless.

Other examples of family being out-of-town were more clear. For instance, Frank's family (age 29) lives in Georgia, where he too lived while growing up. He has lived in Philadelphia for several years, where he came following a divorce. After living briefly with a girlfriend in Philadelphia, his work and housing arrangements grew increasingly unstable:

Frank: I winded up in an apartment of mine for a while, and the work that I was doing

ended, so I winded up not being able to support that and I winded up into a room - from a room to another room and then another room and then series of rooms until I wind up finding a house that someone had moved out of, left all of the furniture in it....

I: Left all the furniture in it?

F: They just moved out one day. Left. Front door was open. They was what you call squatters. So I lived there. I only lived there in the sense of when I needed to go to bed. I only used it for sleeping.

I: Yes?

F: During the day I was out working, trying to make money, anything from handyman to construction work. Carpentry, painting, anything like handiwork. You might need the house painted. You might need the basement cleaned out.

Frank chose to leave his "squatters" dwelling after an incident in which he was a victim of crime; Frank was jumped and robbed 2 months before this interview, and suffered a broken arm. He was unsure whether he could take care of himself at the "squatter" house in his injured condition, a house that sounds nearly abandoned by his description, and on the recommendation of the social worker at the hospital, he went to the emergency shelter system for its steady supply of food and shelter. But Frank says he wouldn't contact his family for help because "I wouldn't want to trouble them with what I see as temporary." A combination of job loss, disability, deteriorating housing conditions, family's geographic location, and these self-protective choices, has limited Frank's housing options to the shelters.

There are a few other cases of homeless people whose family is out-of-town, and where the homeless person didn't perceive that the family would be helpful, or the homeless person was too proud to call on family and admit to this level of need. But another significant group who experienced little family support was that group that was abused as children and/or grew up in foster care families. Many of these people were runaways from foster care as teenagers, and eventually fell into the shelter system, and others were abused by foster parents, and lack any contact with their biological parents.

For example, Randy (age 24) was "state-raised" from age five, and got into a lot of delinquent activity. He blames his homelessness and his delinquency on being "state-raised," which left him with few resources to deal with adult life, and with an anti-authority attitude. Describing himself as a "rebel," Randy was released from jail one month before this interview, and since he had no family to rely on, he was back in the shelter system, where he has lived off and on since the age of 18.

There are other examples of homeless people formerly raised in foster care, including one man's case of suffering physical abuse from a foster parent, which led to his running away permanently as a teenager. Though he eventually joined the military, when he left the military a few months before this interview, he had no family to which to return, and has consequently taken to using the shelters and the streets as his home. There was also one case of sexual abuse from a foster parent which led a woman to her running away as a teen and subsequently in her being sent to detention for several years. Another person mentioned the emotional and physical abuse he suffered from his own mother for most of his childhood, which led to his living with a grandmother, after whose death he was "alone in the world." Hence, there are several instances in this sample of child abuse and insufficient child protection that have an indirect link to homelessness, though through the relative absence of a family support network, and not through direct involvement with the immediate precipitating circumstances. When incidents of residential instability eventually occurred in the lives of these people, for varying reasons, such people moved quickly into homelessness without that family buffer.

Since the lack of a family is usually not a direct link to the precipitating circumstances of becoming homeless, it should be noted what some of those more direct circumstances were. As has been said, one case included discharge from military

service; another was released from prison; one woman suffered a fire at her apartment; two persons had serious drug problems that combined with deteriorating housing; one person broke up with a girlfriend, and his father's recent move out-of-town left him with nowhere to turn; and two persons lost jobs. Hence, like the people who had family to whom to turn, this group came from a variety of circumstances that created conditions of financial and social instability, and ultimately to their reliance on the shelter system and the streets.

#### **Family Relations - Summary:**

In summarizing this examination of family relations and homelessness, it is now apparent how many peoples' eventual homelessness is linked to the disruption of community and family ties. The most common case is when adult children leave parental or grandparental households, seeking greater independence from that household and/or an avoidance of family conflict. The interplay of other dynamics along with pressures for independence, such as unemployment, low wages, drug use, drug dealing, sexual abuse, physical and social housing conditions, and neighborhood instability, show the complexity of factors that make independent household formation such a difficult, if not formidable task for many impoverished young adults.

The second major family involvement in the pathways to homelessness was found to be family breakdown. In this case, the same pressures that limit opportunities for new household formation, create exacting pressures on existing families, and when those pressures lead to family breakdown, the problem of new household formation returns for the remaining broken segments of that family. Families become unstable and eventually broken as a result of a complex combination of factors, including drug abuse and household-economic drug dependence, physical abuse of family members, unemployment, infidelity, and other domestic problems. The people who remain face the

limited resources of other family members, dilapidated housing conditions, vulnerability to sexual exploitation, and their own psychological struggle in dealing with their marital dissolution. And once again, the decisions of those who remain become critical. People have to decide whether or not to leave confining housing situations, whether or not to take children into the shelter system, and how they will personally adapt to their changed family status - not to mention their limited economic status.

And finally, the last means by which family relations were involved in homelessness was by their relative absence or inadequacy. People who had been the victims of child abuse, either from parents or foster care providers, and people whose family members were out-of-town, perceived that they had no family to whom to return in the face of personal crises or life changes. Many took to the streets and the shelters for survival; a system with which some of these people were very familiar because of their previous life experiences as runaways and as wards of the state. Such persons had similar choices to make as the others regarding their own economic and social survival, and consequently often turned to drug dealing, "hustling," and to living in dilapidated structures, in order to survive. For many, their biographical history as abused children and wards of the state made them vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as children. And when household social and economic crises hit this group as adults, each had the common bond of no resources on which to fall back, particularly family resources, and the shelters become their last haven, both dangerous and safe. Without a social safety net for its orphans, these children of society were also left to the bitter economies and vulnerable relations of street life.

Hence, as a combined result of domestic pressures, housing space, housing conditions, neighborhood/household economic and physical drug dependence, family history, employment status, the deterioration of the social and economic stability of



households and their family members, and through the behaviors and choices of persons acting within the limited range of alternatives available to them, individuals become homeless, and forced to "choose," or rely, on the emergency shelter system. Most importantly, in addition to the shelter system and family instability, what most connects all of these stories is the sometimes unspoken options and choices that were *not* available to these people due to limits on their income, including the option of forming new households when there is a disruption of their former households. Exactly what income and employment circumstances faced this sample as they became homeless, and how those circumstances were involved in becoming homeless will be the subject of the following analysis.

#### **Work and Income In the Pathways to Homelessness**

Many of the complex accounts of how people became homeless according to family relations included instances of losing employment or lacking sufficient income to maintain or establish independent households. And since many of those instances have been discussed, a complete consideration of how people became homeless will not again be required here. However, it will be helpful to show the distribution of the work/income situations that participants faced at the time of the onset of their homelessness, and to analyze and illustrate those situations with a few examples. But again, this discussion will be more limited than the former in its depth of discussion on the social contexts in which income problems and homelessness develop. Moreover, this section will not fully explore participants' work histories prior to their homelessness, or their work experience while homeless, as such an investigation would require another entire study. This section will only consider the work and income situations of persons when their homelessness began, and its relationship in the development of that homelessness.

As shown in Table 22, there are several categories in which the survey participants

Table 22. Labor force status at onset of homelessness.

	<u>Cases</u>
I. Lost job	17
A. Job was directly linked to housing	5
B. Fired from job because of drugs/alcohol	5
C. Quit job because of becoming homeless	4
D. Laid-off	2
E. Other (reason not given)	1
II. Intermittently employed (transitionally unemployed)	9
- combined with drug dealing in 6 cases	
III. Maintained job	4
IV. Not in labor force	13
A. Disabled	7
B. Other	6
1 - just released from jail	
1 - just released from military	
2 - formerly AFDC recipients	
2 - no reason given	

N=43

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have been placed according to their status in the labor force at the onset of their homelessness. The most common is the group who lost their job, for reasons ranging from being laid-off, to being fired, to losing ones job because of becoming homeless. The second largest group was those not in the labor force at the onset of their homeless, either due to disability, or inability or unwillingness to be in the labor force. The third group is those who were intermittently employed, usually at low-waged jobs in which there is a lot of employee turnover, and which included a significant group who sold

drugs as an income supplement. There was a small group of people who maintained their job from before they became homeless throughout their period of homelessness.

### **Experiencing Job Loss:**

Interestingly, more than half of the job loss that occurred in this sample along the pathways to homelessness, occurred as a direct result of becoming homeless. For one group, the housing situation in which they lived was also the site of their employment, or the networking of their employment. For the other group, their job was not sustainable while they became homeless, and they therefore quit their jobs. Considering the first of these types, readers might remember the case of Alice (age 22) who was a dancer by training, and whose mother thought she brought "spirits" into the house, and was "interested" in her step-father. Alice resorted to an entertainment employment office in Philadelphia, where she and another dancer met a "Bible-speaking" gentleman. This "gentleman" agreed to provide both women with housing at a cheap price while acting as their agent. Alice described him as a "pimp" who only got them stripping jobs. Late one night, the Bible-speaking gentleman returned to rape Alice, after which she reported him, was treated at a hospital, and sent to an emergency shelter. Alice consequently lost her "dancing" job as it was linked to her abusive pimp-agent.

Other cases of job loss linked to housing loss include the case of Rich (age 23), who might be remembered for leaving his grandparents' home after his mother moved to New York City. Rich felt his grandmother "treated me like a little kid," and he wanted more independence. Well, Rich used to work in roofing with his grandfather. And once he left his housing with his grandparents, he left his job with his grandfather. Though he says that he continues to do occasional work with his grandfather, it is no longer a steady source of work or income.

And there is the yet to be reported case of Ben (age 27) who had a job working in a metal factory, banding scraps of metal; a job which he describes as most strenuous and with little financial reward. Ben quit his job at the metal factory to join his father in a "vending repair" business. When the business fell through, so did his relationship with his father. Ben's father began "pestering" him about quitting his former job, and putting stress on the business venture. So Ben left his father's home, and left his potential source of employment.

And of course, readers will remember the story of Debra (age 20), who along with her husband, did the majority of meals and maintenance at a boarding home in which they lived. Disgruntled by the miserly pay, Debra's husband stole some meats and sold them, leading both he and his wife to leave the boarding home, and to an altercation with the boarding home operators.

The other group that lost their job because of homelessness was the group who quit their employment because of the pressures of becoming homeless. An example here is the case of Phyllis (age 35) who, along with her 16 year-old son, moved back home with her mother in order to save money for another apartment. When thrown out over a disagreement and over suspicion of "interest" in the step-father, Phyllis jumped around from one friend to another, and then to the streets where she was forced to sleep with men who were strangers to her. Phyllis had worked as a nurses' aide at a nursing home, and quit when she was thrown out of her mother's house, because she couldn't handle the stress of not having a place to live, trying to secure meals and sleeping space, working 8 hours a day, and trying to get to and from work.

And there is the case of Ruth (age 36), who also worked as a nurse's assistant at a nursing home before she became homeless. Ruth fled a physically and emotionally abusive spouse, spent two days sleeping in a chair while waiting for a shelter placement,

and after two shelter placements, eventually started sleeping on the streets and with men who were strangers to her. Ruth lost her job because she couldn't go to work at the peak of her husband's abuse, and while she was seeking emergency shelter. At the time of the interview Ruth had just returned from a two month employment placement as a maid at a Pocono's resort, which she described as a "scam" between the agency and the employer. She now occasionally works on the farms of New Jersey as a day laborer.

And there is the case of Gary (age 35), whose spouse left him because of his drug dealing and his not spending any time with her. In reaction to the separation, Gary left Baltimore - the site of his former home - and moved in with his sister in a dilapidated structure in Philadelphia. Well, when Gary left his home in Baltimore, he also left his job of 13 years in shipping and receiving at a local company. Therefore, Gary is another case of someone quitting a job due to pressures while becoming homeless.

Though not a group who lost their jobs *because* of becoming homeless, there is another group who became homeless, partly because of losing their jobs. This group is fully comprised of people who lost their jobs because of substance abuse. Readers might remember the case of Ray (age 39). Ray drank too much and missed work as a painter as a result. Consequently, Ray was fired from his job of 17 years, which combined with his continued drinking, led to problems at home with his wife. Ray decided to leave the family for the best interests of himself and the family.

There is also the yet to be reported case of Curtis (age 31), a cocaine user, who was a bill collector for several years, and whose employment performance was steadily worsening as his drug use wore on, until his company finally discharged him. Curtis claims that his earnings were "going up in smoke." He received an eviction notice from his one room apartment one week and four days after he lost his job, because he was having a relationship with the landlord's teenage daughter. This combination of events

led Curtis to move in with a girlfriend, but when "she started to make her bills my bills, I left." Curtis has been homeless for 5 months.

And there is the case of Barry (age 41), also not yet discussed, who was randomly tested for drugs at his job of 9 years for the Railroad. They found cocaine and cannabis in his system, and he was discharged. After entering a drug treatment program, Barry returned to his old neighborhood to live with his mother, which he said led him to "succumb." His mother threw him out of the house because he had agreed to give her some of his unemployment check, and one month did not do so. Barry still proudly wears his belt and hat from the Railroad that feature emblems of the engines on which he has worked. He has been living in the shelters for 3 months.

There were two cases of persons who were laid-off in their pathways to homelessness. One was the case of Lisa (age 40), who worked for the IRS, and was "furloughed." Lisa, a black woman, then moved herself and her two daughters in with her white mother, where the conflicts grew intense and unbearable. Lisa then went to the shelter system. The other case was Jay (age 42), who was "furloughed" from the Veteran's Administration, and who then moved out of his mother's after flooding the dining room with an over-flowing bathtub. He then joined the Hare Krishna's, until he found a job at the Navy yard, which required him to quit the Krishna's and after which he went into the shelter system.

And finally, of those people who lost their jobs on their way to homelessness, there was the "other" case of Michael (age 23), who might be remembered as working in a metal factory for four years while helping to support his mother and two sisters. He "lost" his job, for reasons he did not specify, and that loss of income created tensions in the home over unpaid bills. But wanting to experience some independence from his mother's household, he left his home, and went into the shelter system.

**The Intermittently Employed:**

A significant group of people in the sample did not lose steady jobs, but reported that at the time of their becoming homeless that they were in the midst of a job transition (or were transitionally unemployed). All of the people in this group had been employed in varying low-waged jobs at a time very near their becoming homeless. These jobs typically did not offer sufficiently satisfying rewards to the survey participants, and were abandoned with little concern because of the relative availability of other equally low-paying employment opportunities. A subsegment of the intermittently employed sold drugs as a supplement to their income. All of the people who reported selling drugs were among the "intermittently employed."

Readers might remember the case of Jerome (age 20) who left his home after a fight with his alcoholic father on the fourth of July, and who has expressed a strong desire to establish a household with his girlfriend, who is the mother of their two children. Jerome describes the work he was doing at the time of the fight with his father, and why he quit:

Jerome: I was working at the airport, for ARA food service, down in South Philly. I was making um, four something an hour. And um, I was managing. They liked my work cause I worked my ass off. Um, I would make ends meet sometimes, uh, at the least I would bring in two hundred and seventy dollars per week. Uh, then they started using me. And they started talking to me any way they want. And I didn't appreciate that. And I talked to em about them, they gonna have to talk to me better than that. They didn't. And they gave me threats about the mafia owning them, and if I fucked up, what they can have done to me. And I quit 'em.

Jerome perceived that he did not have to put up with the way he was being treated on the job, and so he quit; a fact that probably would not hurt his chances in securing other jobs in the same pay range. In fact, since he became homeless, Jerome has now found two other jobs, one as a cook and another washing dishes. He poignantly describes the manner in which he has had to assemble and manage his family and personal resources,

while trying to work and live through the shelter system:

J: The job I'm working is a personal insult to me but I, uh, a little something is better than nothing. I'm a licensed chef. I went to school for it for three years, and I'm only making three dollars and sixty cents a hour, to cook. At a Mexican restaurant down in, down in Center City. Two twenty, two twenty five Essex Street. You know, and uh, then I'm only paid every two weeks. I don't, I walk everywhere I have to go because of the simple fact I don't have money to travel. They give tokens but they won't give em to us. I don't have money for cigarettes. You can't eat really there [in the shelter]. They'll throw you a damn doughnut and you eat that or you starve. I eat the doughnut and I starve the rest of the day. I went up to my old lady house, uh, couple, about five o'clock. She gave me a pound of Italian sausage. I ran from up Twentieth and Corinthea all the way down to 10th and um, Mount Vernon and had my mother to cook it for me. And walked, ate it and walked back up here [20th and Spring Garden]. You know, I been walking all day.

It might be remembered that Jerome mentioned selling drugs for money in the past, and that he may resort to that again if he continues to be unable to afford diapers and other necessities for his two sons.

Others also had extensive work histories, but again, were sporadically attached to their low-paying jobs because of the lack of rewards and the plentiful supply of such opportunities. Therefore, their loss of particular jobs, or quitting from certain jobs, were not seen as critical factors in their homelessness, though they might be seen as part of the overall problem. For example, John (age 27), who will be remembered for the fire that started from his use of a kerosene heater, has this to say about his past employment, his unemployment and what faces him now:

John: ...Like I said, I'm not used to being unemployed. But at this point I wouldn't even take a job that's just gonna have me doing dishwashing or mediocre stuff. I don't want it. I would like to have some type of job training, you know, and I have been to different agencies and no one has actually offered any type of training. All people are offering me is referral to different jobs.

Interviewer: And what kind of jobs are they referring you to?

J: Dishwashing. I had one guy that referred me to Arrow Employment. This was at the VOA shelter. I go to Arrow Employment and they offer me a window cleaning job at minimum wage. If I wanted that, I could do that. But at this point in my life, I've done all



that. I would like to have something - a real job, so I can really feel comfortable - hey, this is my profession. "Yes. I'm a tractor-trailer driver." And the point I'm saying is, you see them type of programs on the commercials but they're not in access to a homeless person, you know what I mean? But I'm talking about a person that don't have no job. What about a person that don't have no food, no meals....

(...)

But as far as the urban cities and what-have-you, the drug problem is the way it is because of the fact, it all stems from unemployment. It stems - all this crisis that's goin on stems from - you don't have nothing that gonna make people employable. Meaning that they are turning to using drugs instead of taking a job at Burger King. It is a blessing that these people even strong enough to work here [Burger King was the interview site]. But for the most part who's gonna work for these minimum wages, you know.... It's not fair. A person can work 8 hours and get \$3.50 an hour when that same person can work selling drugs and make like 100 dollars a day.... And I say it again, I refuse to take a job at Burger King because I have more potential than that. I refuse because of the fact that I'm 27 years old. If I took a job at Burger King - sure I could do it - but all I'm gonna do is be in the same rut maybe 6 months from now. When is it gonna stop? You still gonna be in the same rut. Working at Burger King, quitting it, and going through the same thing again....

Other people explicitly report combining sporadic work at low wage jobs with drug dealing. Such is the case with Gary (age 35), whose wife left him because he had no time for her between his work and his drug dealing. Gary worked in various "menial" jobs, and sold heroin on the side. Such is also the case with Will (age 30) who sold drugs out of his mother's house in order to supplement his income from two low-waged jobs, one in food service at the airport and another as a shoe-shine. Another, yet to be reported case, Malcolm (age 25), has worked temporary jobs (day labor) while selling crack. And in retaliation for what he sees as the exploitive arrangements of the temporary labor industry, which he described as a "trap", he regularly steals from work sites, including food and tools. When he goes to different agencies and they don't send him out on jobs, "I steal." Malcolm deals crack by buying a slightly larger quantity than what many others whom he knows can afford, like \$50 or \$100 worth, cuts it up, and then deals it for a profit, or to supply himself with more to sell or use.

Of course, many of the survey participants, particularly these "intermittently employed," engaged in illegal activities to get money, especially since they've become homeless. Surprising as it may be to some, most of these same people continue to seek legal ways of getting money as well, such as through work. But because there is a range of scams, hustles and thievery that goes on, it can't really be described in the detail it requires here, and actually needs further study. But it should be noted that these "intermittently employed" have worked in many different places, though all in low-waged, "disposable" occupations. Therefore, while "work" is a consistent background theme, specific job changes don't receive a lot of prominence in their stories of how they became homeless.

#### **Maintained Job:**

There were four cases of people who maintained their jobs, even with the enormous pressures that they suffered while becoming homeless. Included here is the case of Bill (age 32), a cocaine addict, whose family broke-up over his cocaine use. Bill still works at a job he has in "pallet repair," and occasionally sleeps either in a truck at work, with relatives, or in the shelters. Also included here is the case of Henry (age 30), who might be remembered as having felt taken advantage of by his extended family, while living in his grandmother's house. He was one of the few in the household who had an income, and therefore was the subject of their envy, and sometimes overcharging and thievery. Another person who kept his job through the process of becoming homeless was Charlie (age 35), who is a computer programmer, and who was part of a housing co-op deal that went bad. Not surprisingly, he was soon to be out of his homelessness, and was using the shelters only for a week; after which he could move into his newly located apartment. Finally, there was the case of Earl (age 26) who worked for a demolition company, and became homeless after a fight with his girlfriend. His father

had recently moved out of Philadelphia, leaving him with no family on whom to rely other than a sister who lived in a "violent drug area." One month homeless, Earl was working five days a week at the time of the interview, though he reported that there are many times when work is slow and there is no work available.

**Not In the Labor Force:**

Another significant group in the sample was those who were not in the labor force at the onset of their homelessness. This group is comprised of seven disabled persons and six persons who were not disabled, but who were nonetheless not in the labor force at the onset of their homelessness. Among the disabled, there were five persons suffering from mental illness, including the two participants for whom it was difficult to get much information. Two persons were physically disabled - one with a broken arm suffered during a mugging, and another with a leg injury suffered on the job.

The non-disabled, not-in-the-labor-force, included two former AFDC recipients, who were caring for small children at the onset of their homelessness. In both cases, these mothers put their children in protective custody rather than take them into the shelter system, and subsequently, these mothers lost their AFDC benefits. One of the non-disabled people was not in the labor force at the onset of his homelessness because he had just been released from prison (employed at the time of the interview), and another had just been released from the military. Two others simply made no mention of their labor force activities at the time that they became homeless (though one was currently employed), therefore it was assumed that they were not in the labor force.

**Public Assistance Income:**

At the onset of homelessness, only eight of the survey participants were receiving any public assistance. Four were receiving AFDC; all of whom lost their benefits as a result of having to separate from their children (two of the AFDC recipients were also

employed part-time at the onset of their homelessness). There was one Social Security Disability Insurance recipient - a mentally ill woman. One person received Unemployment Compensation - the Railroad worker of 9 years, terminated because of his failure of a drug test. Only two persons were receiving General Assistance at the time that they became homeless. There was no information available for two cases. Hence, the vast majority of survey participants, 34, were not receiving *any* public assistance benefits at the time that their homelessness began. Patterns of reciprocity before and after participants became homeless will be the subject of another study, but it should be noted that 26 of the 43 participants eventually became recipients of public assistance *since* they became homeless. Participants' opinions of public assistance were generally highly critical, especially regarding the three-month limit for single adults, and the perceived small amount of cash assistance (\$97.50 every two weeks). But again, that will have to be examined as part of another study.

#### **Work and Income - Summary:**

Far from a group with little experience in the labor force, this sample of persons has had extensive work histories, though the range of wages and types of occupations vary considerably. The most common labor theme in the stories of becoming homeless was the "loss of a job." And among those who did lose their jobs, most lost their jobs *as a result* of becoming homeless. Another significant group lost their jobs because of their substance abuse problems, which was also usually an important factor in their homelessness. A few others lost their jobs because of being laid off.

Another significant group in the sample was those persons who were intermittently employed, and who were "casually" attached to the labor force as a result of its wage structure. These persons tended to be among the most critical of the minimum wage occupations so prevalent in the service sector, though they have and continue to have on-

going periods of participation in that sector. It was not uncommon for people in this group to supplement their incomes with drug dealing, stealing and other illegal activities.

Finally, regarding labor force status, there were an outstanding few persons who *maintained* their employment throughout their experience of becoming and being homeless. Moreover, there was a group who were not in the labor force *at all* prior to their becoming homeless, though most of those persons were disabled, two were taking care of small children, and two were just leaving institutional life, such as military and prison.

Regarding public assistance reciprocity, most of the survey participants were not public assistance recipients at the onset of their homelessness, though there were a few receiving AFDC - all eventually terminated, two receiving General Assistance, one receiving Unemployment Compensation, and another receiving Social Security Disability Insurance. Though many people eventually became public assistance recipients once they were homeless, opinions of that assistance were sharply critical, particularly regarding assistance levels and the 90-day limit of eligibility.

### **Personal & Social Problems: Drugs, Disabilities and Institutional Experiences**

In this section will be considered the final, major piece to the "pathways to homeless" - the roles of substance abuse, disabilities and institutional experience. In their grossest over-simplification, these are the issues usually thought of as the *primary* sources of homelessness within "defect" models. During the interview, survey participants were asked directly about their drug and alcohol use, their self-perceived disabilities, and previous institutional living experiences, including psychiatric hospitalization, prison or jail, military service and foster care. When

instances were reported, participants were asked whether or not they perceived those factors to be related to their homelessness, and if so, whether those factors became involved before or after they "had no place to live." Again, cases will be used to assess the perceptions of the participants.

### **Drugs and Alcohol:**

Table 23 shows the distribution of drug involvement in the pathways to homelessness, as perceived by the survey participants. Because there was only one instance in which alcohol consumption was reported as related to homelessness, it is subsumed under the label of "drug use." The relative absence of alcohol use reported as linked to homelessness may represent the overriding impact of drugs in both the lives and perceptions of substance abusing homeless people in this sample, or it may represent the dominance of drug over alcohol use for this cohort of young adults, primarily African Americans, in the late 1980's. Whatever the source of this finding, the lack of alcohol abuse reported in this sample is consistent with the finding of Ryan, et al. (1989), in their survey of Pennsylvania's homeless, which found that white homeless people were more likely to be older, and to report the influence of alcohol on their being homeless, while black homeless people were more likely to be younger, and to report the influence of drugs.

As can be seen, experience with drugs is common in the sample, though a minority of people report that their drug use is related to their homelessness. While slightly more than half of the survey participants reported using drugs, only a little more than half of those people linked their drug usage to their homelessness. The principle drug reported as connected to homelessness was cocaine and/or crack (14 cases), followed by a couple cases of heroin (2 cases), and a single case of alcohol. On the other hand, it is significant that *all* of the people who reported using drugs "casually," or in a way that was not a

Table 23. Drug use/drug environment, and the relationship to homelessness, according to self-report.

I. Subject uses drugs	27
A. Related to homelessness	17
1. Abuse prior to homelessness	13
2. Abuse after becoming homeless	4
B. Unrelated to homelessness	10
II. Participant doesn't use drugs	15
III. No information	1
	N=43
IV. Family/neighborhood has drug problem	11
V. Family/neighborhood had no reported drug problem	30
VI. No information	2
	N=43

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source of their homelessness, mentioned marijuana as their primary drug of usage, with several cases additionally mentioning the use of alcohol, and three cases additionally mentioning the casual use of cocaine. No one reported smoking marijuana as linked to their becoming homeless. It is noteworthy that in 11 cases, participants reported that a drug environment, either in their families or in their neighborhoods, were linked to their episodes of homelessness. Two of those cases involved an alcoholic parent, one a

drug addicted sibling, and the remaining 8 cases involved a household or neighborhood economically or physically dependent on the drug trade.

The dominance of the drug economy, the addictiveness of cocaine, and the emergence of its potent derivative "crack," are obviously the most significant factors that have developed regarding the influence of drugs on homelessness in the late 1980's. In way of better understanding drugs and their role amidst the complex mix of factors that lead to homelessness, several cases will be reviewed and examined. First, there are those cases in which drug abuse has led to the break-up of the family. Readers will remember the cases of Ray (age 39) and Clarence (age 33), whose marriages were broken due to Ray's alcohol use and Clarence's heroin addiction. Ray attributes some of his alcohol abuse to his two tours in Viet Nam; Clarence to his beginning dependence on heroin at the age of 13, growing up in "the projects" in the 1960's. Ray lost his job of 17 years as a painter because of his alcohol use. There is also the briefly mentioned case of Bill (32), who left his wife and two children because of his addiction to cocaine. Bill is "on the pipe," or smoking cocaine, but has maintained his job in "pallet repair" throughout his homelessness, occasionally sleeping in a truck at work for shelter. Gary (age 35) might be remembered as dealing and using heroin, which his wife no longer wanted, as Gary had little time for her and the family. He claims to have kicked heroin before leaving Baltimore, where he left his family and work behind. Gary came to Philadelphia to live with his sister and her family, though they lived in a dilapidated structure from which everyone eventually left.

There were also several cases of people whose drug use developed in parental households. Readers might remember the case of Will (age 30), whose mother had grown to accept the drug dealing efforts of Will and his brothers. However, when Will lost one of his jobs and started using the cocaine he was dealing, his mother threw him



out of the house. And there are the two cases of Kevin (age 26) and Maurice (age 23) who were both living with their parents in "the projects," and who both left their parents' households feeling that their unemployment and growing drug dependence could not be resolved while living in that environment. Kevin described the projects as "a graveyard."

Of course not all drug use is reported as linked to homelessness because it preceded that homelessness. There were four cases in which drug abuse developed *after* becoming homeless; in some cases because there was an assumption on the part of people at the "places of transition," that the residentially unstable people (the survey participants) would contribute toward the drug habits of the households on which they had come to rely. An example of developing a drug problem after becoming homeless is the case of Ruth, who might be remembered as suffering from physical and emotional abuse from her spouse, "I got separated from my husband and went into deep depression. So I started to use drugs." Ruth had to stay two days in a chair at Adult Services waiting for a shelter placement, while black and blue from a beating from her former spouse. In the interim, Ruth had to quit her job as a nurse's assistant in a retirement home. After her second shelter placement, Ruth took to the streets where she found occasional shelter by sleeping with men who were casually known to her. At the time of the interview Ruth had just returned from working two months in the Poconos as a maid at a resort.

There is also the case of John (age 27), who might be remembered as becoming homeless because of a fire that started with the use of a kerosene heater. John reports only using marijuana before he became homeless, but after the fire, John stayed briefly with a woman friend who "turned me on" to coke:

John: No, I wasn't a drinker. My main thing was smoking pot. I drunk beer, I like beer...that's what I like. But cocaine just came in the picture for the last... since I been homeless.

Interviewer: Do you do much cocaine now?

J: Not now. I have done cocaine when that tragedy first happened. I was snorting a lot of cocaine. I was trying to escape a lot of the realities, the pain that I was going through.

I: Do you think that alcohol or drug use played any role in your being without a place to live?

J: No, no. If anything, contrary to that, it has made me become to a certain extent, dependent on drugs, without having a home. Because hey man, the truth of the matter is, when you homeless, shit, drugs is good to you, cause it takes you away from your problem. Same way you see people unemployed - how they drink. Because it takes them away from all the bills; they don't know how they gonna pay it... "Fuck it." That's how you live. I think that's a fact. Anybody can relate to that.

It is noteworthy that two of the cases where persons got involved with drugs during their homelessness were persons who had no family support from their teenage years on. Readers might remember the case of Stephen (age 24) who beat up his step-father at age 17, when he found his step-father beating on his mother. His mother sided with the step-father and threw Stephen out of the house. For the next seven years, Stephen took to living between the streets and the shelters, and occasionally in his own place and with girlfriends. He has hustled drugs for his survival throughout, and describes how the market forces shaped his sales strategy:

Interviewer: Where did you go....

Stephen: I started selling drugs. I started selling meth, then it was crank, and so on and so on.

I: Had you been using before that?

S: No. I hadn't been heavy into crank, but I had been heavy into meth.... Then one night I went to an elaborate party up in Olney, and I was about 18, just going on 19, and this elaborate party took me out. The crank and meth just wasn't good as drug selling go. People was into newer drugs, like coke.

(...)

I: What do you mean by the newer drugs came in?

S: The newer drugs. The synthetic drugs - cocaine itself was already out, but I didn't learn the deal till it got to be synthetic - as far as crack. I didn't really do crack. I did cocaine.

I: So you said that your drug business eventually fell through?

S: Right.

I: How'd that all happen? I'm interested.

S: It happened like, as far as somebody that had it made - said "here you go - try this new thing" - and I tried it. I said "Well damn, this good." He said, "Well, yeah, I know. I made several hundred thousand dollars on it" and... he gave it to me. I took it out then, I tried to sell it. And then from there it worked. I sold cocaine for a little bit but then again, I got hooked on it too. So now, I'm using cocaine, its got me using cocaine, and trying to sell the thing - very difficult because you can't sell and use cocaine. You can't sell cocaine if you use cocaine. See cocaine ain't gonna let you sell, you ain't gonna sell nothing. You ain't gonna sell nothing.

Stephen's drug dealing had to change with the times, and when cocaine was the new deal, its nature as a drug, both in its addictive quality and in its "high," undermined Stephen's ability to do business. In that way, cocaine was unlike any of the other drugs that Stephen had heretofore sold.

Stephen's addiction has taken its toll. He claims to have had 2 cardiac over-doses and one suicide attempt in the last few years. He is growing hopeless with the realities of the street, but still finds that drugs are his last physical comfort:

Interviewer: So how do drugs still fit in your life?

Stephen: Well see, first of all, if I can get me permanent housing and I can get me an 8 or 12 or 13 hour job during the day or during the night, seven days a week, or get me something to start me up - drugs won't be in my life. Cause, I, right now, I swear to God, I don't want to do drugs. I have no desire to shoot cocaine in my arms, but when you're out here and you're walking theses bricks 22 hours, 18 hours or sometimes 24 hours a day - depression builds in. And to alleviate depression, even though its a false alleviation - but to alleviate it, people like myself being in a drug addict world, being in a drug addict mind, being in a drug addict state, resort to drugs as a form of relaxation, as a form of escaping. You know... drugs is the only way.

Another case of drugs following a difficult childhood and teenage life, was the case of Malcolm (age 25). Malcolm is the young man who regularly steals from temporary labor placements because he sees them as "a trap," and when he doesn't get a placement, will steal from cars and stores. He claims that he has been "in and out of jail since age

13. As a juvenile, jail was more fun than home.... It wasn't physical abuse, but mental abuse." Malcolm left his last job and apartment two years ago after stealing from work - he cleaned linens at a Casino in Atlantic City. He took what money he had saved and spent all of his earnings on drugs. Then, Malcolm moved into a vacant house owned by his mother in Philadelphia. He and his step-brother slowly stripped the house of its copper and other materials, to help support their drug habits. When Malcolm's step-brother accidentally set the place on fire, Malcolm was out on the streets. Since then, Malcolm has pieced together a survival between drug houses, the shelters, local churches and friends. Here's how he describes some of his story:

Malcolm: When I started fucking with cocaine. Let's see, December, the last part of December of '86. I started. I started banging (injecting) in uh, around July of '87. And I did that for about a year. August I was terrible. Terrible. I didn't trust myself in August. I didn't, aw, man, I was a motherfucker.

Interviewer: So you've been off of it for how long?

Malcolm: Yeah, you see, I haven't banged since, uh, about a month. About a month. Because like, yeah, because like for a while there, cocaine got real bad [the quality]. Real bad. He was cutting it up too much. Cause, yeah, you bang, you get that taste in your mouth, you tell what you're tasting. That and the fact that this dude in the cadillac.... Well, let me just say that a lot of shit goes down that you don't read about in the paper. They found two dead bodies in the [abandoned] cadillac building [across from the city's major shelter for men]. This guy Grease was a slimy motherfucker. They chained him down and shot both his arms full of battery acid.

I: Wow.

M: Yeah. They found him and the skeletal remains of a girl man. This shit you ain't gonna see in the paper, because its homeless people, drug addicts.

(...)

I: I still don't understand when you finally wound up on the streets or in the shelters.

M: After we stripped the house down, I just started living in the streets after we stripped the house down. From here, there, here, there, and then a buddy of mine. But you see like, I didn't know nothing about the shelters, adult services, none of that. And I was, I was doing real bad. Dirty, smelly, hungry, all that shit. My buddy took me, "Man, you got to go to Adult Services. They'll hook you up with a place to stay, showers, all that shit."

I: This is somebody who had been through it.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Not a friend but an acquaintance. And he, he had put me down with the

game. I went down there, played, I started playing the shelter system. Malcolm started "playing" the shelter system by using it as a support for his drug addiction and the impoverished lifestyle that accompanied it. Malcolm says that after cocaine, "nothing turns me on, not even women."

A few of the cocaine-addicted people interviewed for this study also report using drug houses for temporary shelter, which required that people purchase drugs in order to stay there. One person said that "If I'm paying them money, they better let me stay there." A couple of other people report that they are only able to stay with certain friends if they are willing to contribute toward the mutual use of drugs. In this way, drugs and the willingness to purchase drugs become a form of currency with which people can purchase temporary lodgings.

Finally, there were those 11 cases in which people complained that their family or neighborhoods had drug problems. In a few cases, this was a criticism directed at life in public housing. In others, it was their own households that had drug problems. Readers will remember Debra (age 20), who left her husband's family because of its drug problems and the drug dealing in the neighborhood. Jose (age 21), too, left his family because of his brother's drug addiction and the stealing that accompanied it. Two people had parents who were alcoholics and therefore felt pressures to leave those households. Two others were in households dependent on drug dealing for some of their financial survival. Hence, drug and alcohol abuse were not only the problems of drug addicted people who became homeless, but of others who became homeless, in part, because of the drug and alcohol abuse of others.

In conclusion, drugs have become a significant aspect of the homeless problem, particularly in the late 1980's, and for a range of reasons. Some become homeless as result of their own drug addictions, which combine with other household and personal

problems to create residential instability. But others become involved in drugs, and others' drug usage deepens, as a result of their becoming homeless. Moreover, as the drug economy has replaced other failing economies in urban areas, neighborhoods and households have been held in the dangerous balance between economic dependence and physical devastation from the drug "plague." There is no question that at least some of the increase in homelessness this past decade is attributable to this rising dominance of crack and cocaine, with its physical and psychological control over its users, and in its infestation of the basic fabric of the social and economic institutions of impoverished communities.

**Disabilities:**

Survey participants were also asked about the presence of disabilities and the influence of those disabilities on their homelessness. "Disability" was defined for survey participants as "any condition that would make you 'less able' to do the things that you need to survive, such as work, move around, eat, maintain a place to live, etc." In response to that question, 15 people reported being "disabled." Four persons were "physically" disabled; eleven were "mentally" disabled. But by far the majority of persons, 28, didn't report any "disabilities." Table 24 shows this distribution.

The persons with "physical" disabilities included one woman with a thyroid condition, which she said prohibited her from working; one man with a broken arm, suffered during a mugging; one woman with an injured leg, sustained at her former job; and one man with a severe stuttering condition. Others reported having various health problems, such as weight-loss, digestion problems, sleeping problems and a range of other conditions, but they did not report these as "disabling."

The eleven persons with "mental" disabilities included six cases of situationally induced "depression," in other words, psychological distress experienced because of

Table 24. Self-reported "disabilities" in the sample.

I. Physically disabled	4
II. Mentally disabled	11
- "Situational" depression and anxiety	7
III. None	28
	N=43

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their homelessness; one case of manic-depression; one case of a person who was actively psychotic, and from whom the interviewer could get little information; and three cases of other mental illnesses, not specifically labelled by the participants, but an evident part of their stories as these persons were living in a boarding home for mentally ill women. And as was the case with physical health problems, a number of people reported being anxious and worried by their homelessness, but most often they did not report those states as "disabling."

In way of better understanding participants' perceptions of their disabilities and its role in becoming homeless, a few cases can be cited. The case of Frank (age 38) and his broken arm has already been discussed. Frank was living in a "squatters" building when he was assaulted. The hospital social worker referred him to the shelters so that he would have better care than he might get at his dilapidated structure. The case of Lisa (age 40) has been already been discussed because of her bad relationship with her mother, where she returned after her job loss. She was furloughed from her job at the IRS, and at the advice of her doctor, did not retake employment because of her thyroid condition. She went to the shelters with her two teenage daughters when the tensions

grew too deep at her mother's household. The case of a severe stuttering problem is Michael (age 23), the young man who left his mother's household after he lost his job at a metal factory. He recognized his problem and had some difficulty in the interview, though he didn't seem to think that it would hurt his future chances at getting a job. And the woman with the injured leg, she lost her job because of her injury, and had a legal settlement pending with her former employer. Therefore, at the recommendation of her attorney, she was not working at the time. She became homeless after her husband "went crazy," and spent time with relatives before going to the shelters, and then living with the "community" of people at Ben Franklin Park.

The people with mental disabilities were roughly split between the "situationally depressed," and others who had more enduring disorders. Among the people reporting to be disabled by their situational depression was Jerome (age 20), who fled his father's home after an altercation, and who was continually frustrated at his inability to provide for his two children and girlfriend. Also included here is Ruth (age 36), who left her husband after suffering physical and emotional abuse, and Debra (age 20) who entered the shelters seven months pregnant, after leaving the drug-infested household of her husband's family. Among those with apparently more enduring disorders was the two people from whom interviewers could not get much information. Also included is Christine (age 37), whose husband brought another woman into the house, and after which she reports "My mind fogged out. No one would hire me." Christine spent some time in a psychiatric hospital where they helped her to regain some of her memory. Rachel (age 45) is also included here, who moved to Philadelphia from Los Vegas hoping to secure employment at a casino in Atlantic City. Eventually living in her car, which was then stolen along with all of her belongings, Rachel began to suffer emotional problems, and spent nearly a year living on the streets. She admitted herself



voluntarily into a psychiatric hospital, and was then placed in a boarding home. She complained quite a bit about the medicines that they gave her at the hospital, and does not want to return to the hospital because of those medicines. She is afraid of going to the shelters for the same reason.

Unlike the other more seriously mentally ill women, one woman, Betsy (age 21), had quite a bit to say about her mental health problems and its relationship to her homelessness. As an abused and runaway teen, Betsy attempted to take her own life on a few different occasions, each of which resulted in her placement in a psychiatric hospital, and where she was diagnosed with manic-depression. In her years as a teen runaway, Betsy was pimped and abused by men with whom she became associated. She says, "I can't take the pain anymore." The following are some of her views on her situation and her mental health problems:

Betsy: I just turned 21 two months ago. Two and a half months ago. And I'm like, you know it's like, I'm starting to see this is how my whole future is gonna be. You know, and I don't want it. But, I'm getting to the point where well, if that's the way it is, that's the way it is. I'm tired of fighting. And I'm tired of fighting to get ahead just to be knocked back. You know, and I think if there were more of a support system. But, you know, as it is there is almost no support system.

(...)

B: Sometimes I get to the point where nobody else gives a shit, why should I? Nobody else cares whether I'm out sleeping out on a park bench, so why should I care? You know, um.... I think of the desperation and everything. I've just, it seems like I've traded one jail for another. You know, one kind of abusive situation to another. Um, and, you know, its the situation of, you tell a man he's a dog often enough, and soon enough he'll start to bark. You know, you push a person down for so long that eventually they're just gonna stay there. They're just gonna lay there. And there are times when I fight so hard against that, that I just, you know, I say no, I can't think like that. I have to think of tomorrow. And then there are times when I, why the hell bother thinking of tomorrow cause it's just gonna be the same as today?

I: What kind of support is there for you in the mental health system?

B: Um, I'm lucky enough, like I said, to be in the day program. So, those of us who are in that situation, you know. We get together and we talk about it, and we tell the counsellors