# Homelessness: The Forgotten Problem

Child welfare is a complex issue that impacts society at all levels. According to (Downs, Moore, & McFadden, 2007), the ‘’welfare of children is dependent on the interaction between them [children] and their environment. This paper researches the extent of child homelessness in California; the policies, programs, and services available in the environment; the efficacy of California’s initiatives in reducing child homelessness; and the leading causes of child-homeless in California.

## Extent of Child Homelessness in California

Homeless Children America, an organization that researches Child Homelessness in the United States, released a nationwide white-paper providing insight into the depth of child homelessness and how each state is coping with the issue. California – *the Golden State* – ranks 40, making it one of the worst states for children. Homeless Children America used multiple factors in ranking states: extent of child homelessness; child well-being; risk for child homeless; and state policy and planning – the best score California received was 15, the worst was 48.

There are currently over 9 million children in California (The National Center on Family Homelessness, n.d.) and almost 300-thousand are classified as homeless each year; accounting for 3% of California’s aggregate child-population. Comparing the number of children classified as homeless to the 2.2 million children in California classified as living in poverty, the statistic grows to 13%, or 13 out of every one hundred (The National Center on Family Homelessness, n.d.).

Due to the aforementioned statistics, Homeless Children America ranked California 48 out of 50 for the ‘extent of child homelessness’ metric, and 28 out of 50 for the ‘risk for child homelessness’ metric.

## Policies, Programs, and Services

There are many policies, programs, and services that affect child homelessness in California being offered by nonprofit organizations, and also federal, state and local government. California is planning to develop State Interagency Councils on homelessness that aims to implement a 10-year plan to end homelessness. Recent initiatives include:

* Federally sponsored Policy Academy on Homeless Families with Children (2005)
* California Action Plan to address Homelessness by the California Homeless Families Team [2006]
* Ten Year Chronic Homelessness Action Plan [2006]
  + *previous bullets taken verbatim from* (The National Center on Family Homelessness)

In addition to interagency coalitions, California’s state policies aim to curb homelessness statewide through provision of emergency shelters, section 8 vouchers, TANF (CalWORKS) assistance and federally funded childcare.

## Efficacy

Statistics concerning homeless children provide insight into the efficacy of the policies, programs and services combatting this issue. For example: 80% of families on public service waiting-lists have extremely-low incomes; state-wide time limits for participating in services & programs restrict over half of welfare recipients from continuing to receive the services.

## Leading Causes

### The Family

The “family” in this paper refers to the natural birth by woman, after being impregnated by man. Upon the child’s birth, the woman and man are responsible for the caretaking of the child. At this crucial junction in the child’s life homelessness enters the story. If the family is unable to adequately provide food, clothing, education and/or shelter then potential for the child to become homeless increases. Parents have the first-responsibility to care for the child, provide financial support, physical care and emotional nourishment.

As stated in Child Welfare and Family Services, the family “is the most-dominant part of a child’s environment”. Thus, the breakdown in the family is one of the leading causes of child-homelessness. According to Downs, Moore & McFadden, family trends that are prominent in the breakdown of the family include:

* Young mothers entering the labor force & the increase in single-parent households
* Poverty: Being poor means being at risk of homelessness.
* Neglect: Children without adequate supervision are more likely to run-away, school-absenteeism, and abuse drugs and get in trouble.
* Abuse: Three major factors in child-development issues leading to health, social, and intellectual development problems are child abuse, drug abuse, and domestic violence.

Taken as a whole, the aforementioned are systemic to children of vulnerable families. When parents are immature or not ready for responsibility, children are raised in environments filled with instability, harm, and increased risk for homelessness.

### Other Causes

After a breakdown in the family-structure, children often become wards of state placed under the domain of government, community programs, and other societal institutions. Some children are placed in Foster-Care which may not be any healthier from the dysfunctional family they came from. A percentage of such children will run away or become part of the Juvenile Correction System, increasing their chances to become homeless.

Children at-risk for homelessness may also have drug-addiction problems; exhibit behavioral issues leading to law violations or confrontations in foster-care or group homes; mental-health issues requiring psychiatric intervention & care; or live alternative lifestyles which their caretakers disapprove of, forcing them to niche communities without proper structure for adequate child-care.

# Works Cited

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