8-2022

Adolescent Males and Homeless Shelters: A Study of Behaviors That Initiate Staff Connectedness

Denise L. Cavanaugh
St. John Fisher College, bdsecav@roadrunner.com

Adolescent Males and Homeless Shelters: A Study of Behaviors That Initiate Staff Connectedness

Abstract

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore and understand the behaviors of homeless shelter staff who promoted connectedness with homeless adolescent males and encourage them to remain in shelters. The data were collected for analysis by utilizing semi-structured interviews with four adult males who had experienced homelessness as adolescents and initiated contact with at least one homeless shelter. Four themes emerged from the analysis including (a) authentic relationships, (b) life coach, (c) create a sense of family, and (d) enduring adversity in shelter. The first three themes describe behaviors that encouraged the participants to stay in shelters. The fourth theme relates that the participants endured negative behaviors and remained in shelter to meet their basic needs. Results of this study may be used to impact policy and procedure of homeless shelters. The recommendation is made to continue rules, regulations, and structures with clear explanations made available to the youth. A credential should be developed for homeless shelter staff, enhancing the skills necessary for this position and allowing for higher pay and advancement. Executive leaders must improve the selection and hiring practices and support the development of family-like settings. Expanded attention must be given to street outreach services and the marketing of homeless shelters to attract homeless adolescent males and reduce their number of days on the street.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, EdD

Subject Categories
Education

Adolescent Males and Homeless Shelters:

A Study of Behaviors That Initiate Staff Connectedness

By

Denise L. Cavanaugh

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

EdD in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, EdD

Committee Member

Leah Deasy, EdD

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

August 2022

Dedication

I only wish my parents could be present to share in the celebration of this doctoral degree. As a quote that I carry with me reads, "Because her father told her she could do anything, she did." The youngest of three girls in an era when the glass ceiling was firmly intact, my father advised that the sky was the limit for anyone who persisted. I know he is proud that his love of learning has carried on. Now afflicted with Alzheimer's, my mother has always my biggest fan; she has been a proud, constant supporter. My dear sisters, partners in life's ups and downs, provided me with built-in competition, joy, and helped me become the best version of myself.

To my original cohort at Le Moyne, we were determined when we walked through those doors for Le Moyne's inaugural year. Things didn't go as planned, but I hold you all in my heart and hope that our paths cross again. You are true leaders and I admire your persistence!

I can't thank you enough, Dr. Robinson, for listening to us and advocating for us to transition to St. John Fisher as a group of five. I am blessed to have met you, been supported by you, and grown through your supervision. To my mentor, Dr. Rachel Hendricks you were a bright light in a confusing transitional semester, I valued our frequent virtual sessions, where you became my friend, confidant, and much more than a mentor. Dr. Quigley, thank you for being with us as our cohort advisor. Your kindness, calmness, humor, and quiet sense of leadership carried us through many a dark time.

Dr. Deasy, my committee member, my gratitude to you is endless for staying with me through two committee chairs. You have been that constant support needed through this arduous process, and your editing skills are priceless. You truly were a gift that every candidate should have. Dr. Cleverley-Thompson, thank you for picking up in the middle, appreciating my study, and carrying me home! Your insight and precision were significant in my final product.

Ubuntu, what can I say about this group that bonded in sisterhood like no others? The five of us from Le Moyne, plus our added friend from SJFC, are a close-knit family. I have never known a group of more dedicated, compassionate, supportive women. I truly love you all and underscore that I would NOT have made it here without you; the true meaning of "Not one of us without all of us." The memories, laughs, tears, joys, and sorrows we shared in these 3 years built a connection that will not be broken. "Just keep swimming."

My two best friends, Grace, and Michele, you have been the rocks that I lean on. When life throws the unexpected, you two pick up my pieces. You have been interested in what I am doing, proud of my accomplishments, and always listen to the countless stories. Love you both.

Barry, as part of the spouse support group, bringing me Dunkin during Zoom classes, sitting quietly through hours of complaining and storytelling, and putting our life on hold for me to attain another dream, thank you for your support and love. My two children, my inspirations, the best part of me…. Shaye, you heard every detail of every class, brought me gifts, and shared many glasses of wine. Emmett, although you muttered "Nerd" when you passed by me, and often reminded me that I did this to myself…. I

know you are proud when I hear you tell others…my mom is getting her doctorate. The

journey was hard, and you each have a piece of this with me. Hopefully it inspires you in

some way! My love for you both is infinite.

Finally, to homeless adolescent males that inspired my work, I hope that the

results of this study and the dedication of the staff who work in this field, lead to better

outcomes and fewer days on the streets. These are our children, and we have to do better.

Biographical Sketch

Denise L. Cavanaugh is currently the co-owner of Raindrops on Roses Bed & Breakfast in Herkimer, NY and also works with the College in Prison program at Herkimer County Community College. She has experienced a rich leadership career in the corporate, not-for-profit, and higher education fields. Ms. Cavanaugh attended Russell Sage College from 1974 to 1978 and graduated with a Bachelor of Sciences degree in Retail Management/Economics in 1978. She graduated from SUNY Oneonta in 1993 with a Master of Sciences degree in Counselor Education. After entering Le Moyne College in 2019 she came to St. John Fisher College in the winter of 2021 and completed her doctoral studies in the EdD Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Cavanaugh pursued her research on homeless adolescent males and their connectedness with staff of homeless shelters under the direction of Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson and Dr. Leah Deasy and received the EdD degree in 2022.

Abstract

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to explore and understand the behaviors of homeless shelter staff who promoted connectedness with homeless adolescent males and encourage them to remain in shelters. The data were collected for analysis by utilizing semi-structured interviews with four adult males who had experienced homelessness as adolescents and initiated contact with at least one homeless shelter. Four themes emerged from the analysis including (a) authentic relationships, (b) life coach, (c) create a sense of family, and (d) enduring adversity in shelter. The first three themes describe behaviors that encouraged the participants to stay in shelters. The fourth theme relates that the participants endured negative behaviors and remained in shelter to meet their basic needs. Results of this study may be used to impact policy and procedure of homeless shelters. The recommendation is made to continue rules, regulations, and structures with clear explanations made available to the youth. A credential should be developed for homeless shelter staff, enhancing the skills necessary for this position and allowing for higher pay and advancement. Executive leaders must improve the selection and hiring practices and support the development of family-like settings. Expanded attention must be given to street outreach services and the marketing of homeless shelters to attract homeless adolescent males and reduce their number of days on the street.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Homelessness is a growing problem of significant proportions in the United

States, with a notable increase in homelessness among youth (Sosa et al., 2015). For

years youth have been the undercounted, invisible population sleeping in abandoned

buildings, cars, motels, and couches (Wiltz, 2017). Data regarding numbers of homeless

individuals has been lacking in credibility due to the transient nature of this population,

difficulty tracking, and inconsistent definitions of homelessness (Paat et al., 2021). Wiltz

(2017) stated that these numbers are growing for various reasons, including more

determined efforts to count homeless youth, the drug crisis, and the economy.

Between 2019 and 2020, nationwide homelessness has increased by 2% marking

the fourth year of growth (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2021). Since

2015 the unsheltered population has surged by 30%, following a downward trend

(NAEH, 2021). According to the NAEH point-in-time count completed in 2020,

significant variation occurs between subgroups. Fifty percent of young people not living

with their families are unsheltered (NAEH, 2021). Each year an estimated 4.2 million

youth experience homelessness in the United States (Covenant House, 2021). On any

given night, approximately 41,000 unaccompanied youth ages 13-25 experience some

form of homelessness (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 2019). One in 10 young

adults ages 18-25 and at least one in 30 adolescents ages 13-17 experience some form of

homelessness over a year (National Conference of State Legislators [NCSL], 2019).

The definition of homeless youth varies across state and federal agencies. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the first significant federal legislative response to homelessness, identified specific definitions of homelessness (Cunningham, 2014). Despite the variation in definition and age range, runaway and homeless youth (RHY) are a large and growing population of highly vulnerable adolescents in the United States (Gwadz et al., 2018). For the purposes of this research, a homeless youth is defined as an individual who is less than age 18 and for whom it is not safe to live with a relative and who has no other safe alternative (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

In the 2018 report on RHY conducted by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), most homeless youth outside of New York City were under 18 years of age when admitted to crisis services (OCFS, 2018). The report further stated that young people seeking services came from a variety of places before seeking residential services, including parent's/guardian's home (30%), another RHY crisis shelter (28%), or a friend's home (16%).

Youth report familial conflicts and unsafe home conditions are the primary contributions leading to their homelessness (NCSL, 2019; OCFS, 2018). Numerous studies well document that the primary cause of adolescent homelessness, regardless of gender or sexual identity, is family conflict (Abramovich, 2017; National Health Care for the Homeless Council [NHCHC], 2016; OCFC, 2018). In addition, studies examining the circumstances leading to homelessness find that approximately one-third to over one-half of youth report that family problems are a primary contributing factor to homelessness

(Heinze et al., 2012). These familial conflicts include fighting, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, prevalence of substance abuse, poverty, mental health concerns, and other forms of trauma (NCSL, 2019).

Youth that are unaccompanied and living on the street are highly vulnerable to severe outcomes (NCSL, 2019; Paat et al., 2021; Wiltz, 2017). Wiltz (2017) stated that young homeless individuals are at high risk of experiencing physical, emotional, and mental health problems. The youth are at extreme risk of adverse long-term outcomes due to the events they experience (Gwadz et al., 2018; Paat et al., 2021; Wiltz, 2017). Living on the street leaves adolescents vulnerable to multiple threats, including victimization, exploitation, substance abuse, untreated mental health disorders, prostitution, and suicide (NCSL, 2019). Homeless individuals have worse health outcomes than those housed, including increased morbidity and mortality (Coughlin et al., 2020). Suicide is the leading cause of death among this population, and the mortality rate is 11 times higher than an adolescent living at home (Gauvin et al., 2019).

The most pressing needs of youth in homeless situations include resolving conflict with a parental figure, acquiring independent living skills, gaining employment, accessing food, and accessing treatment for mental and physical health issues (OCFS, 2018). The street victimization of homeless youth physical and sexual abuse produces complex traumatic symptoms in these young individuals (Davies & Allen, 2017). These symptoms may include nightmares, flashbacks, consistent negative alterations in cognitions and mood, decreased range of emotions, sleep disorders, hypervigilance, and feeling of detachment (Davies & Allen, 2017). Davies and Allen (2017) further reported that youth might adopt self-mutilation, heavy substance abuse, or suicide as means of

3

coping. These factors often lead to distrust and fear, causing difficulty in effectively connecting with homeless adolescents to ensure positive outcomes (Gwadz et al., 2018).

Previous research suggested connecting youth to services may be crucial to exiting homelessness (Gwadz et al., 2018). Services provided to homeless youth may include food, independent living skills, clothing, referrals to counseling and other health services, education, and employment services (OCFS, 2018). Residential facilities have been developed to meet the housing needs of homeless youth. These residential programs are differentiated by the length of stays and settings (OCFS, 2018). Although it is uncertain which type of service setting offers the more favorable outcome, linking these youth to services is essential in preventing further homelessness (Slesnick et al., 2016).

Problem Statement

Approximately 66% of unsheltered unaccompanied homeless adolescents and 55% of sheltered unaccompanied homeless adolescents are male (Aviles et al., 2020). Ferguson et al. (2015) identified that male adolescents exhibit different approaches to their homeless experience than adolescent females. Some homeless female youth described connecting with supportive adults more quickly and strongly than their male counterparts, who are slower to develop these relationships (Mendez & Randle, 2020). These findings supported the need for customized interventions for male youth in homeless situations. Such findings do not minimize the need to consider homeless young females. However, they indicated that male dynamics should be researched separately (Aviles et al., 2020).

Specialized settings that provide services specifically to RHY youth have been developed in the United States over the past few decades (Gwadz et al., 2019). Settings

4

centered on RHY are youth-focused, with the youths' own goals directing development and growth, fostering personal autonomy, and maintaining appropriate boundaries (Gwadz et al., 2019). Past studies have been conducted to assess single behavioral interventions or individual programs, but relatively little research has been completed on understanding various service settings and their effectiveness (Gwadz et al., 2018). Some homeless youth distrust service settings and professional adults, making it essential to understand what approaches are effective in RHY-specific settings (Gwadz et al., 2018).

RHY's challenges, including abuse and trauma, have resulted in distrust and fear, which may cause homeless youth to avoid the environments established to assist them (Gwadz et al., 2018). Sieving et al. (2016) considered connectedness to include caring, quality relationships, and a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, research identifying the factors needed to encourage homeless adolescent connectedness in specific service settings is limited (Boel-Studt et al., 2018). The consequences faced by youth experiencing homelessness are extensive and require the coordination of numerous federal and state systems to mitigate the effects (NCSL, 2019).

The Runaway Youth Act of 1974, renamed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and since reauthorized five times, is the only federal law focused on unaccompanied homeless youth (NCSL, 2019). The amended act authorized federal funding for the Basic Center Program, Transitional Living Program (TLP), and Street Outreach Program. These programs aim to provide services or housing to youth experiencing homelessness who may need assistance in meeting basic needs, treating health disorders, and reducing victimization and suicide (NCSL, 2019). The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) was created in 1987 by Congress to work with 19 federal

agencies and a network of state and local affiliates to end youth homelessness (NCSL, 2019). The NCSL (2019) reported that states have also adopted their policies to address the needs of youth homelessness.

New York State recognizes two categories of RHY services, the first includes emergency crisis shelters and interim family programs. The second category is transitional living which includes supported and group residences (NYC Business, 2022). This research will focus on the emergency crisis shelters, defined as residences that house youth ages 16 – 21 years of age, or under age 18, for 30 through 60 days, and the TLP group residences that operate for a maximum of 20 youth for a more extended period, usually up to 21 months (OCFS, 2018). Both services focus on housing and basic needs for homeless youth, connecting with services, providing resources, and developing plans for long-term outcomes (OCFS, 2018). They are voluntary programs youth can enter into and leave independently. For the purposes of this study, homeless shelters refers to emergency shelters and TLPs.

Youth are often reluctant to enter homeless shelters and participate in assistance offered to them due to their difficulty of transitioning from their crisis to safety and service provision (Gwadz et al., 2018). Homeless youth identified building trust as one of the barriers they experience when accessing services (Chaturvedi, 2016). Their ability to initially engage or accept relationship-building from shelter staff is impacted by their background and experience (Chaturvedi, 2016). Previous experiences of youth can serve as an impediment to initial connection with staff or services.

Although research is limited on factors that promote connectedness among youth in homeless shelters, studies show that the quality of relationships with youth contributed

to positive outcomes (Boel-Studt et al., 2018; Cunningham et al., 2008). Connectedness refers to the youth's commitment to active participation in treatment, establishing a relationship with service providers, and acknowledging their responsibility in treatment (Cunningham et al., 2008). Service providers often claim client connectedness is necessary for effective intervention. Slesnick et al. (2016) identified outreach as the first step to connecting with services such as mental health treatment, housing, and other social supports. Outreach is defined as connecting with youth outside office settings, with successful connectedness linking to service provisions (Slesnick et al., 2016).

Despite various efforts, youth who initially connect with homeless shelters often do not form any attachment with staff or the shelter, which is the gateway to service provisions, such as education, employment, or mental health assistance (Slesnick et al., 2016). The homeless shelter may be the homeless adolescent's first contact with services and the connection is crucial (Slesnick et al., 2016). Slesnick et al. (2016) reported that staff exhibiting a high degree of empathy and understanding would develop trust and promote the youth's sense of attachment to them and the shelter, increasing the possibility of connecting the youth with services. Attachment is vital to connect with these youth and promote positive mentoring relationships, positive life changes, and impact therapeutic engagement (Boel-Studt et al., 2018; Gwadz et al., 2018; Van Dam et al., 2018).

Minimal research has been found that provides empirical data to identify which behaviors of homeless shelters' staff initiate and sustain attachment to increase connection. This study investigated behaviors that promote connectedness with homeless adolescent males upon entering homeless shelters.

Theoretical Rationale

Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory guided this research. Bowlby introduced his work in the 1950s when he revolutionized the view of the mother-infant bond and stated that humans are biologically driven to pursue relationships that create security (Shumaker et al., 2009). Bowlby stated that these relationships occur via reciprocal interactions, which are the basis for expectations in relationships later in life (Cassidy et al., 2013). A human being uses another as a secure base to explore from, and a haven to return to, in times of distress (Cassidy et al., 2013). This bond is referred to as the secure base phenomenon. Cassidy et al. (2013) stated that the attachment theory further indicates that the nature of the interaction is more important than the category of the adult involved. Bowlby used the term attachment figure rather than mother. Although Bowlby believed that mothers were typically the primary attachment figure, he did not dismiss the possibility of fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers providing this foundation (Cassidy et al., 2013).

Although Bowlby is viewed as the founding father of the attachment theory, numerous other researchers, clinicians, and theorists have expanded his theory (Heineman, 2010). One of the most significant researchers to develop his work is Mary Ainsworth (Fitton, 2012). The major contribution of Ainsworth (1985, 2015) and her colleagues was their work derived from a 20-minute laboratory setting referred to as the Strange Situation (Shumaker et al., 2009). Infants were systematically separated from their mothers for brief periods during which they studied the separation and reunion based on duration and reaction of the infant. Ainsworth's work provided the first empirical demonstration of how attachment behaviors show patterns that correlate to

interactions between infants and parents during their first year of life (Fraley, 2020).

Ainsworth's major contribution was identifying three primary attachment patterns

between infants and their primary caregivers. These became known as secure attachment

displayed by the infant feeling loved and safe, ambivalent attachment as shown by an ill-

at-ease infant with difficulty being calmed, and avoidant attachment identified by their

indifference (Ainsworth, 1985; Blehar et al., 1977). The individual differences in how

infants organized their behavior toward attachment figures were observed and highlighted

(Ainsworth, 1985).

These attachment styles have impacted adolescent youth interactions (Ratto et al.,

2016). Secure attachment developed from responsive parenting is likely to lead to

stronger identity development, deeper intimacy, and regulated emotions. Conversely,

youth who experience attachment insecurities; either ambivalent or avoidant, will have

lower self-worth and difficulty turning to others for support (Shumaker et al., 2009).

Studies suggest that adolescents experience unworthiness and discomfort with

relationships due to attachment anxiety developed from early parent rejection (Shumaker

et al., 2009). These attachment patterns become significant in developing programming

for adolescent youth experiencing homelessness (Heineman, 2010). Homeless

adolescents with attachment styles that are ambivalent or avoidant may not engage well

or easily with their environment and other people (Stefanidis et al., 1992). These youth

are vulnerable to low self-esteem and may want help one day, but reject it the next

(Heineman, 2010).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) furthered Ainsworth's work by advancing the idea that

adolescent and adult romantic relationships can be categorized similarly to the three

classifications identified in infancy by Ainsworth and her colleagues (Shumaker et al., 2009). However, Bowlby and Ainsworth never endorsed the notion of peers and romantic partners replacing the primary caregiver as true attachment figures (Shumaker et al., 2009). Shumaker et al. (2009) stated that the importance of the primary caregiver during the infant years is not replaced by relationships formed later in life.

Criticisms and challenges to the attachment theory remain. Most studies have used modernist, scientific, experimental approaches, rather than qualitative ones (Fitton, 2012). Concerns and conflicts regarding dimensional versus categorical approaches of measurement tools for attachment exist, with no clear agreement (Shumaker et al., 2009). More assessments with differential validity are needed. Collecting data through self-report or semi-structured interviews is controversial, and a more uniform approach is necessary to compare findings.

Attachment is dynamic, complex, and evolving, and has internal and external manifestations. The attachment theory can be challenging to define and study. Despite these challenges, the attachment theory has been relevant in changing times, cultures, and trends (Fitton, 2012). Further knowledge can be gained regarding how attachment impacts homeless adolescents by studying the characteristics and demographics of this population.

Behaviors that initiate connectedness with homeless adolescent males were studied using Bowlby's attachment theory as the theoretical lens. Behaviors that consider individualized needs, non-judgmental and recognize that relationships cannot be rushed are necessary for working with homeless youth (Heineman, 2010). Attachment theory is significant in developing service provision in institutionalized settings (Fitton, 2012).

Focusing on the behaviors that promote connection as adolescent males enter homeless shelters provided the framework for this research. Heineman (2010) stated that those working with homeless young males must be knowledgeable about attachment patterns and how these patterns impact reactions from young males to rules and offers of assistance.

Bowlby stated that attachment behavior is significant in humans from the cradle to the grave (Ainsworth, 1985). Ainsworth (1985) noted that attachment theory had spanned four decades, with more recent studies including Ratto et al. (2016) and Fraley (2020) assessing correlations to peer and adult relationships. Suppose adolescents have not had the experience of secure attachment in their infant years. In that case, research is necessary to determine if specific behaviors can create connectedness or recall feelings that have been lost. Therefore, when addressing the needs of homeless adolescents, understanding must be interpreted through the lens of the attachment pattern they have developed (Heineman, 2010). This research answers the call to identify shelter staff behaviors that recognize the critical importance of attachment theory.

Purpose of the Study

This research intends to further understand what behaviors promote connectedness with homeless adolescent males through their contact with staff in homeless shelters. The purpose of the study was to gain new knowledge on homeless shelters' staff behaviors that encourage youth to remain in shelters and increase their access to services.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were designed to analyze homeless

adolescent males and their connectedness with staff in homeless shelters.

1. How do adult males who have experienced contact with homeless shelters as

    adolescents describe behaviors of shelter staff which resulted in remaining in

    the shelter?

2. From the perspective of adult males who have experienced homelessness as

    adolescents, what behaviors of homeless shelter staff resulted in adolescent

    males not remaining in the homeless shelter?

Potential Significance of the Study

This study adds to the literature examining behaviors that promote connectedness

and attachment between homeless shelter staff and homeless adolescent males during

their contact with a homeless shelter. There is a lack of empirical evidence supporting the

understanding of what promotes the connectedness for youth to remain in residential

settings (Boel-Studt et al., 2018). Research stated that entry into homeless shelters and

connectedness to services provided would positively impact homeless male youth

(Slesnick et al., 2016). The growing population of homeless adolescent males living on

the streets is a social justice issue.

Understanding the staff behaviors that encourage homeless adolescent males to

remain in homeless shelters could lead to change in staff hiring and training practices in

these programs. Leaders operating these homeless shelters can extrapolate the data and

develop a blueprint for desired behaviors exhibited during staff's interaction with

adolescent males in homeless shelters. Improving the incidence of youth remaining in

homeless shelters and increasing their length of stay advances the opportunity to provide services and reduce the number of days on the streets (Crawford, 2018). Shelters applying the results of this research to their organizations could positively impact homelessness of adolescent males.

Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, *homeless shelters* will refer to a combination of both emergency crisis shelters and TLP group homes. Emergency crisis shelters are defined as residences that house youth ages 16 – 21 years of age, or under age 18, for 30 through 60 days, and TLP group residences are facilities that operate to house a maximum of 20 youth for a longer period, usually up to 21 months (OCFS, 2018). Due to their similarities in operation and goals, these two types of shelters as defined by OCFS (2018) will be considered together.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 provided background regarding the severity of youth homelessness in the United States. This chapter also presented the causes of homelessness and the risks for adolescents who live on the streets. The development of homeless shelters and the differences needed in interventions for adolescent males were discussed. Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory was described as the theoretical lens for this research. This study intends to add to the research on the perceived behaviors of homeless shelters' staff by previously homeless adolescent males that initiate and sustain attachment and connectedness upon entering a homeless shelter.

A review of the literature and concepts related to characteristics of homeless adolescents, connectedness to services, and homeless shelters' staff is presented in

Chapter 2. The research design, methodology, and analysis will be reviewed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 will present the findings organized by themes that emerged from the semi-

structured interviews. Chapter 5 synthesizes the information presented, discusses

implications, limitations, and recommendations to improve policy and practice in

homeless shelters.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The growing number of homeless adolescent males and the lack of information on their connectedness to homeless adolescent residences is worthy of further research. A literature review to examine the phenomena of promoting connectedness with homeless adolescent males leads to categorizing the following topics: characteristics of homeless adolescents, connectedness to services, and homeless shelter staff. The attachment theory relates to homelessness in youth serves as a lens to this research and will also be reviewed. All these elements assist in further understanding this phenomenon and offer support for this research study.

Attachment Theory

The application of attachment theory becomes significant when considering these early childhood experiences and attachment styles as the basis for expectations and behaviors in subsequent relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992; Ratto et al., 2016; Shumaker et al., 2009). Shumaker (2009) stated that those who experienced secure attachment in infancy are likely to develop stronger identity, deeper levels of intimacy, and regulated emotion. On the contrary, those who experienced insecure attachment demonstrate anxiety and depression. Current findings support the compelling role of the primary caregiver, often the mother, in developing the attachment style (Ratto et al., 2016). Several studies showed that attachment anxiety and insecure attachment from early parent rejection equates to adolescents feeling they are not worthy, have

preoccupation or discomfort with relationships, and exhibit difficulty turning to others for support (Shumaker et al., 2009). Those with insecure-avoidant attachment patterns may keep a distance from others and not engage, while those in the insecure-ambivalent category may want help one day and reject it vehemently the next (Heineman, 2010). These youth are also vulnerable to low self-esteem, hopelessness, and an elevated risk of suicide.

It is challenging to determine if attachments developed in adolescents are the same identified in infants or developed from new social and emotional bases (Shumaker et al., 2009). The continuing role of attachment with the mother is significant in regulating adolescents' romantic and peer relationships (Ratto et al., 2016). Further exploration of the gender differences in attachment experienced during adolescence is necessary (Shumaker et al., 2009). This knowledge is also important to homeless shelter staff in connecting, interacting, and caring for homeless adolescent males.

Adolescents that have experienced insecure and anxiety attachment in early childhood are the most in need of positive, safe, close experiences with adults (Shumaker et al., 2009). Youth with negative patterns developed in childhood from their infant/caregiver history may not engage well with their environment or people (Stefanidis et al., 1992). Heineman (2010) discussed how the study of attachment theory deepens understanding of how difficult it is for individuals to change the way they view others or change expectations in relationships. Understanding early patterns of attachment and their importance in future relationships, assists in comprehending the confusing behaviors of homeless adolescents. Knowledge of these patterns may also assist in the development of effective programming for this population (Heineman, 2010).

In their study regarding the effects of attachment on the history of homeless youth stabilization, Stefanidis et al. (1992) determined that longer-term treatment is necessary to build trust with these youth due to their fear of continued rejection. Since many of these youth never experienced parental boundaries, they now require respect, limits, and consistency. Depression is often an outcome of their background. In dealing with rejection and ridicule, youth have learned to respond by "shrinking from it or by doing battle with it" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 208).

Attachment theory is significant in developing programming in institutionalized settings (Fitton, 2012). Service providers can be viewed as substitute attachment figures and consequently need to provide specific, consistent, structured expectations that may not have been experienced by homeless youth (Stefanidis et al., 1992). It is crucial for those working with homeless adolescents to be mindful of the ways in which attachment patterns may affect reactions towards support or assistance offered (Heineman, 2019). However, restrictions imposed in shelters hold different meanings for youth who have experienced trauma and insecure attachment in their infancy (Heineman, 2010). Heineman (2010) noted that the independence and self-reliance homeless adolescents have developed on the street or in unsafe homes are challenged and no longer valued. Those working with homeless youth must know about attachment patterns and how they can affect adolescents' reactions to assistance, guidelines, and regulations (Heineman, 2010).

Attachment theory is useful in conceptualizing the strong emotional and physical connection to at least one primary caregiver and the importance of that relationship in the RHY population (Gwadz et al., 2018). Gwadz et al. (2018) reported that an emphasis on

centrality of relationships, consistent with attachment theory, create professional and positive connections between staff and homeless youth. Each homeless youth has experienced different situations and requires a different response (Heineman, 2010).

Over 40 years ago the Strange Situation project provided the hallmark for infant attachment research (Ainsworth et al., 2015). Numerous studies conducted since have predicted strange situation classifications hold true even up to 6 years of age (Ainsworth, 1985). Organizational aspects of attachment displayed by infants provide a starting point for later developmental tasks. Attachment patterns developed in infancy may affect responses of homeless adolescent males to programming. (Heineman, 2010).

Characteristics of Homeless Adolescents

Homeless youth are recognized as a separate subpopulation and exhibit unique characteristics compared to other homeless populations (Slesnick et al., 2016). Due to their stage in human development, decision-making and reasoning are stifled, and young people are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors than mature adults (NCSL, 2019). Efforts to deal with the adolescent homeless issue have been inhibited due to the lack of credible data on the size and characteristics of the population (Morton et al., 2017). Researchers gathering accurate data on the characteristics of homeless youth assists in understanding this population (Anthony & Fischer, 2016).

In their quantitative descriptive study, Anthony and Fischer (2016) compared homeless and non-homeless youth characteristics by gathering data from 558 youth through a collaborative survey. The data they gathered showed the homeless sample was 1.5 times more likely to have been placed in foster care, more frequently spent time in a detention center or jail, less likely to be enrolled in school, have higher rates of drug and

alcohol use, higher incidences of HIV/AIDS, and mental health concerns (Anthony & Fischer, 2016). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth are also overrepresented in the homeless youth statistics (Hein, 2011). In the study conducted by Aviles et al. (2020) among Delaware public school students, findings showed that Black students and Hispanic/Latino/a students are over 1.85 times more likely to experience homelessness than White students. Aviles et al. (2020) stated that most research on homeless youth has been focused on the large cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, and further research must be conducted to uncover the specific needs of homelessness among youth in rural and unpopulated areas.

Morton et al. (2017) found that one of the strongest factors related to homelessness in adolescents was a lack of a high school diploma or a general educational development (GED). Those without high school diplomas were also 4.5 times more likely to experience homelessness later in life. Students experiencing homelessness were 87% more likely to drop out of school than their housed peers, and graduation rates in 44 states for 2016-7 were 64%, 20% lower than all students (SchoolHouse Connection, 2020).

A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Nilsson et al. (2019) found that physical abuse, foster care experiences, and suicide attempts, were all associated with a high risk of homelessness. Their findings confirmed previous reports that family problems are often the most self-reported reasons for youth homelessness, and childhood abuse and runaway behavior are some of the strongest risk factors for becoming homeless. Approximately one-third to over one-half of youth reported that family problems are a primary contributing factor to their homelessness (Heinze et al., 2012).

Some of these conflicts include fighting, neglect, physical and sexual abuse, prevalence of substance abuse, poverty, mental health concerns, and other forms of trauma (Abramovich, 2017; Gauvin et al., 2019; Heinze et al., 2012). Homeless youth reported experiencing parental abuse and being kicked out of their homes at a far higher rate than non-homeless youth (Dang & Miller, 2013). In a study completed by Keeshin and Campbell (2011), over 80% of homeless youth claim childhood abuse, with three out of four of these youth feeling the abuse has long-lasting effects. In their systematic review of interventions for homelessness, Altena et al. (2010) confirmed that youth consistently report that family conflict, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse are their reasons for leaving home.

Hein (2011) claimed that homeless youth are marginalized twice as much because they are housing unstable, have few legal rights, and may be stigmatized by numerous other labels. Without caring adults or safe and permanent homes, RHY were at greater risk of engaging in unsafe situations (NCSL, 2019). NCSL (2019) further reported that multiple threats to homeless youth include one in three teens being lured into prostitution within hours of leaving home and youth experiencing significant disruption in their education. These at-risk youth are highly susceptible to suicide which is the leading cause of death in this population (NCSL, 2019).

Gender

Due to the streets more often considered in masculine terms, adolescent homelessness has often been a male-defined category (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009). Approximately 66% of unsheltered unaccompanied youth, and 55% of sheltered unaccompanied youth identified as male (Aviles et al., 2020). In their recent study,

Aviles et al. (2020) also found that male students are 1.38 times more likely to experience housing instability than females. Anthony and Fischer (2016) found that 62% of the homeless youth in their study sample were male. Altena et al. (2010) found that in the majority of the 11 studies considered in their systematic review, the greater percentage of homeless youth were male. However, young women can feel particularly invisible and outside their traditional environment when experiencing homelessness (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009).

Ferguson et al. (2015) identified that homeless male and female adolescents exhibit differences in approaching their homeless experience. They use different coping strategies and engage in different types of economic activity. Female youth connected with supportive adults quickly and strongly compared to their male counterparts (Mendez & Randle, 2020). Mendez and Randle (2020) found males are slower to develop these relationships asking for assistance with specific issues but not with emotional support. Stewart et al. (2010), when examining the support needs of homeless youth, found far more female homeless youth (40%) than males (18%) cited the need for emotional support as a priority. In the Slesnick et al. (2016) quantitative experimental study, females exhibited significantly lower levels of personal self-efficacy and higher levels of depression than males. The Ferguson et al. study (2015) claimed that prevention and intervention efforts should be customized to address these differences. Such findings do not minimize the need to consider females that exhibit homelessness in adolescence; however, they indicate that gender dynamics should be researched separately (Aviles et al., 2020).

Risks and Challenges of Being Homeless

Some of the challenges youth face on the streets are obtaining basic needs, including food and shelter, and accessing treatment for mental or physical health issues (OCFS, 2018). The exposures and problems faced on the street are also dangerous (Hein, 2011). Along with identified gender differences, Anthony and Fisher (2016) reported that homeless youth claim higher drug and alcohol use, HIV exposure, and mental health issues. The trauma and risk factors experienced by these youth create vulnerability to multiple threats, including sexual exploitation, untreated mental health disorders, physical victimization, prostitution, substance abuse, and suicide (NCSL, 2019). The street victimization of homeless youth, combined with physical and sexual abuse, produces complex traumatic symptoms in these young individuals (Davies & Allen, 2017). These youth were highly likely to experience re-victimization on the streets after leaving home (Altena et al., 2010).

COVID-19 has created even greater challenges for homeless youth such as avoiding infection in group settings and accessing hygiene supplies (Coughlin et al., 2020). Homeless youth may be asked to leave the home where they are couch surfing due to overcrowding concerns. The practice of social distancing became difficult in situations of communal living. Housing services previously available to homeless adolescents closed their doors or were not accepting as many clients due to the pandemic (Abramovich et al., 2021).

COVID-19 will continue to increase the likelihood of today's youth experiencing homelessness and poverty due to reduced availability of housing options (Davis, 2021). Young people faced persistent barriers to shelter, health care, and life sustaining services

at an even more significant rate during COVID-19 (Davis, 2021). Since the pandemic, findings show the number of LGBTQIA+ youth living in vehicles, vacant buildings, and public spaces nearly doubled (Abramovich et al., 2021). LGBTQIA+ youth, who typically experienced higher rates of poor mental health, suicide tendencies, depression, anxiety, homelessness, and substance abuse than other youth, expressed elevated concerns during the pandemic. The increase in self-harm and detrimental health outcomes was combined with an inability to access healthcare and a lack of housing options (Abramovich et al., 2021).

The pandemic has exacerbated the social issues, housing insecurities, and lack of support services in an already at-risk population (Abramovich et al., 2021). All youth at risk of homelessness are experiencing greater incidences of physical and mental health problems, substandard housing, lack of access to basic hygiene supplies, food insecurity, and accessing health care (Coughlin et al., 2020). Since many schools became virtual during the pandemic, homeless youth have become even more difficult to find, count, and connect with reducing opportunities for them to access services (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021).

Connectedness to Services

A deep understanding of the backgrounds of homeless adolescents and the trauma they have experienced is critical in providing services and making connections with these youth (Gwadz et al., 2018). This section will review the literature regarding specialized settings developed for homeless youth, communication styles that are impactful with this population, support systems and mentors.

Specialized Settings for Homeless Adolescents

A network of specialized settings to serve, engage, and house homeless adolescents have developed over the past few decades (Gwadz et al., 2019). Gwadz et al. (2018) suggested in their findings that RHY-specific settings are critical in providing effective services for these youth. Results indicated that approaches specifically tailored to this population are vital in successfully connecting and serving homeless adolescents. These approaches included a focus on relationships, identifying strengths, and engaging youth with their own goal setting (Gwadz et al., 2018). There is a lack of methodological studies on the various settings developed for homeless youth, however there are indications that emergency shelters reduce the number of days homeless youth are on the street (Crawford, 2018). Hein (2011) stated that programs and interventions need to be explicitly tailored to homeless youth since they use different strategies to survive. Housing is a challenging and stressful issue especially for homeless youth over 16. Many of them resort to couch surfing, a term that describes sleeping on acquaintances' couches, which may become their primary means of housing (Heyman et al., 2020). Therefore, to build programs valued by homeless youth, the organizational characteristics they prefer must be identified (Gwadz et al., 2018).

Research identified three primary settings developed for homeless adolescents (Leon et al., 2015; Shillington et al., 2011). These can be grouped into drop-in centers (DICs), emergency shelters, and TLPs. DICs typically offer life skills, counseling, referrals, and food, and are selected due to flexibility, less paperwork, and various services (Shillington et al., 2011). Emergency shelters offer short term stays typically up to 30 days, and aid with life skills, education, employment, and referrals to community

agencies. TLPs are supported living situations for youth to stay for up to 18 months (Gwadz et al., 2019). In their quantitative randomized controlled trial, Slesnick et al. (2016) hypothesized that more youth would engage in DICs than in shelters and their findings confirmed this hypothesis. Their findings showed that not only did homeless adolescents prefer DICs, but when they accessed these centers, they were also more likely to engage in at least one other service. Shillington et al. (2011) found that DICs are preferred by homeless youth, however the specifics regarding what factors are desired are not known.

In a study conducted by Gwadz et al. (2018) using in-depth semi-structured interviews, it was found that the youth distinguished between RHY-specific programs and other settings such as group homes, foster care, and other types of shelters. These adolescents viewed RHY-specific residential settings to meet their needs and provide a safe and relatively stable environment. The characteristics found in positive settings identified by homeless adolescents include perceived safety, services tailored to RHY, emotional support, socialization leading to future independent living, and follow through and after-care when transitioning out of services (Gwadz et al., 2018).

Gwadz et al. (2019) completed a cross-sectional qualitative study exploring the characteristics of higher quality diverse RHY settings, including short-term emergency shelter services, TLPs, and DICs. After identifying factors of higher quality settings and the main challenges faced by lower quality settings, the top half and the bottom half of the scale were compared regarding organization-level characteristics. The results showed that higher quality settings achieved their standard by establishing specific mechanisms. The qualities found to overcome the challenges of stable funding, staffing, and adapting

to changes commonly faced in RHY settings, included several characteristics (Gwadz et al., 2019). These characteristics included youth-centered programming by staff, developmentally appropriate relationships between clients and staff, short and long-term goal setting, and ongoing internal quality assurance. This study also confirmed the necessity for specialized settings specifically serving homeless youth (Gwadz et al., 2019). Some limitations in current services provided for homeless youth were rigid or unrealistic structure, difficulty accessing resources, safety issues, and possible barriers to connection (Stewart et al., 2010).

Shillington et al. (2011) claimed that due to the variety of issues that homeless youth have, requiring multiple interventions, one approach is not likely to be effective. They stated that services should be tailored to specific populations. In their previous study, Gwadz et al. (2018) found that youth felt more connected with RHY-specific settings than adult or non-RHY shelters. These settings were identified in providing instrumental and emotional support to youth, as well as providing skill-building (Gwadz et al., 2018).

Communication and Connectedness with Homeless Adolescent Males

Although shelters are important service provisions for homeless youth, methods for effectively connecting these youth into shelter services have not been identified (Slesnick et al. 2016). Historically, homeless youth have been reluctant to access services, particularly counseling and therapy (Chaturvedi, 2016). Some barriers to connectedness were denial about needing help, not wanting to open up, negative past experiences, and lack of familiarity with therapy. Stigmatization can make homeless adolescents feel ashamed, devalued, and minimize interactions with others (Huffman,

2017). Several studies on connectedness with homeless adolescents identified the impact of positive communication with this population, including eye contact, reflective listening, and sincere response (Chaturvedi, 2016; Huffman, 2017; Stewart et al., 2010).

Similar findings in these studies detailed the interactions necessary for positive communications with homeless youth. Chaturvedi (2016) found that with patience, normalizing counseling, and more opportunities to interact with the service providers, these barriers that youth identify could be overcome. Huffman (2107) found an important factor in providing effective services for homeless youth was successful communication, although communication between staff and youth in agency settings can sometimes be negative and ineffective. Stewart et al. (2010) also confirmed the need for positive communication, honesty, and compassionate staff practicing focused attention.

Reviewing the studies of Chaturvedi (2016), Huffman (2017), and Stewart et al. (2010) in more detail provided factors that homeless youth find effective when receiving services. Chaturvedi's (2016) findings reported that youth feel patience in reaching out to them, and staff exhibiting consistency in their support, may assist in overcoming their resistance to opening up and receiving services. Recommendations from this study suggested referring to counseling as a place to talk rather than therapy and allowing informal interactions between staff and youth before formal engagements (Chaturvedi, 2016). Providing the adolescents with choice in their therapy encourages commitment to it.

Huffman (2017) practiced fieldwork with prolonged observation to uncover how communication can improve homeless adolescents' services in agencies. Cunningham et al. (2008) also suggested that client-centered communication eases youths' concerns,

increases connectedness, and facilitates a bond between youth and staff. Youth identified compassionate communication as being present, nonverbal immediacy, organizational immediacy, and acts of service (Huffman, 2017). Together these practices were termed by Huffman (2017) to be embodied aboutness. Huffman (2017) described embodied aboutness to include being present, showing youth that staff cares, nonverbal immediacy shown by physically turning towards a person indicating compassion, and organizational immediacy demonstrated by being welcoming. The components of embodied aboutness and creating compassionate communication within organizations required strategic planning, long-term action, and rethinking organizational methods (Huffman, 2017).

Stewart et al. (2010) conducted a study to explore homeless youth support needs and preferences. Their findings confirmed that homeless youth desire support providers who are nonjudgmental and understanding, caring, and relate to youth. The youth interviewed identified emotional support, affirmational support, instrumental support, and informational support as support needs (Stewart et al., 2010). As defined by the youth participants, emotional support referred to someone who listens, understands, and can be trusted, and affirmational support related to unconditional support and positive feedback. Stewart et al. (2010) stated that youth also need instrumental support for basic needs like housing, and informational support for increased awareness of resources.

The mixed-methods study completed by Boel-Studt et al. (2018) was conducted to develop, implement, and evaluate a pilot incentive program that encouraged youth connectedness in residential care. Clinicians participated in a focus group to gauge perceptions of utilizing an incentive program for motivation, and youth connectedness was measured by involvement in goal attainment. Practitioners stated that their

commitment to youth-driven approach and youth-provider relationships fostered

connectedness (Boel-Studt et al., 2018). In addition, identifying staff activities and

techniques that developed connectedness and introducing them sooner in youth's

involvement in service setting promoted positive outcomes (Boel-Studt et al., 2018;

Cunningham et al., 2008).

When discussing connectedness with homeless adolescents it is critical to talk

about trust (Heyman et al., 2020). In their study exploring the potential risk factors that

lead youth in foster care to homelessness, Heyman et al. (2020) identified the following

four themes emerging from their focus groups: independence and autonomy, importance

of support, basic needs, and recognizing strengths. Heyman et al. (2020) further

uncovered nonjudgmental communication and its effect on trust building as a subtheme,

stressing the importance of affirmative language. Trust was also seen as a barrier to

relationships from youth's point of view. Trust building foundations were listening, lack

of judgment, and respect, all part of positive communication (Deutsch et al., 2020;

Heyman et al., 2020). Trust was also identified by Deutsch et al. (2020) as a common

theme when building secure relationships for adolescents that are homeless.

Youth emerging from foster care and at risk for homelessness valued

independence and autonomy (Heyman et al., 2020). Heyman et al. (2020) reported that

these youth have not been allowed to make decisions or participate in typical youth

activities. And they identified the value of support and secure relationships. These at-risk

youth also noticed the challenges of meeting their basic needs, and the strength and

resilience they have developed through their life circumstances. Heyman et al. (2020)

stated that trust was observed as the frame surrounding all four themes. Not being able to

depend on someone or trust them to follow through on commitments prevented

relationships from building (Deutsch et al. 2020).

In the qualitative study conducted by Mendez and Randle (2020), gathering

information on a specific intervention developed for homeless youth, the ability to trust

others again was shared as a significant element in relationship building. Youth admitted

that learning to open up again and trust others made them realize that adults may have

their best interests in mind (Mendez & Randle, 2020). The youth reported the realization

they could ask for help and rebuild relationships with family members and other

significant adults (Mendez & Randle, 2020).

Social Supports

Youth-adult connectedness appears to be an important trait for health, well-being,

and positive development in at-risk youth (Sieving et al., 2016). Through their non-

experimental associational analysis, the Sieving et al. (2016) findings proved that positive

relationships with caring adults serve as protective factors for well-being among

vulnerable youth. Owens et al. (2020) examined the association between youth

homelessness and risk-taking behaviors and found social support a significant moderator.

The Owens et al. (2020) study showed that social support, including a network of

family members, sex partners, and service providers, was a significant moderator when

comparing homeless youth to those who are stably housed. The direction of this effect

differed between homeless youth and youth with stable homes, which was

counterintuitive to their hypothesis. Homeless youth with someone to talk to reported

engaging in more risky behaviors than those who did not have anyone to talk to (Owens

et al., 2020). From these findings, Owens et al. (2020) suggested that some homeless

youth seek out those who encourage risky behaviors. Owens et al. (2020) encouraged

future research into identifying the types of social support homeless youth connect with,

whom they choose to talk to, and the characteristics of those available to them for social

support.

Mentors can also be a form of social supports to homeless youth. Tyler et al.

(2017) conducted a study examining the influence of multiple stressors on homeless

youth's ability to function, and the effects of mentors and positive social supports. The

results showed that anxiety and depressive symptoms were reduced over time with access

to positive social support. Adults that youth identify as positive role models who they

trust can positively affect their lives (Tyler et al., 2017). In a study involving a more

formal mentoring program, Bartle-Haring et al. (2012) examined how mentoring

positively affected homeless adolescents receiving substance abuse treatment. More

mentoring sessions involving connectedness, advice, and strategies for problem-solving,

resulted in a decrease in the consequences of their identified problem associated with

drug use, as shown by their scores on the Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for

Teenagers (POSIT).

Dang and Miller (2013) conducted a study exploring the characteristics of natural

mentoring relationships among homeless youth and how this type of social support may

impact functioning and resilience. They stated that natural mentors may already be

available to these youth and maybe more enduring than formal mentoring programs.

Homeless adolescents expressed a sense of loss regarding parental relationships and

identify natural mentors as filling this gap (Dang & Miller, 2013). The social support

provided by these mentors can promote resilience, give youth someone to rely on, help

them problem-solve, encourage, and positively impact their lives (Dang & Miller, 2013; Heyman et al., 2020; Mendez & Randle, 2020). Researchers found that supportive adults are important to at-risk youth overall, but there was a difference between formal mentoring programs and the mentoring that happened organically when the youth selected a significant adult in their life (Deutsch et al., 2020).

Characteristics identified in an important adult figure or natural mentor included genuinely listening, creating an authentic space, treating them like peers, responding in a non-judgmental manner, validating them, understanding, and caring (Deutsch et al., 2020). Adults played a significant role in the positive development of youth. There are strategies that adults initiated that will sustain positive relationships, and social service settings can consider factors that strengthened and promoted mentoring relationships in programming and policy decisions (Deutsch et al., 2020; Sieving et al., 2016).

In a multilevel meta-analysis, Van Dam et al. (2018) explored the presence and quality of a natural mentor on positive youth outcomes. The findings indicated that the presence of a natural mentor, and the quality of mentoring, were modestly associated with positive youth outcomes (Van Dam et al., 2018). Meta-analyses completed in the past have focused on formal mentoring relationships, where this study focused on the informal or natural mentoring that developed organically (Van Dam et al., 2018). The results of this study described the importance of natural mentor relationships and the quality of these interactions which increased positive outcomes in the lives of youth. These initial findings encouraged further studies of the characteristics found in natural mentors and understood the workings of the relationships that can perhaps even transform young lives (Van Dam et al., 2018).

Homeless Shelter Staff

As housing settings have emerged to provide services to homeless adolescent

youth, the challenge is to provide comprehensive yet flexible services to meet their

complex needs (Olivet et al., 2009). One of the most overlooked assets and essential

components in the fight to end homelessness is a knowledgeable, skilled workforce that

can stay connected to this population (Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Olivet et al., 2009).

Although service providers are depended on to solve one of the most distinct expressions

of poverty, insufficient attention is given to their hiring and providing them with support

and skill-building as needed (Mullen & Leginski, 2010).

When building residential services for homeless adolescents within a human

service agency the same principles apply. Higher quality organizations serving homeless

youth adhered to established goals and philosophies over all levels of the organization

(Gwadz et al., 2019). The core philosophy and organizational culture were

communicated, and continuous quality improvement was supported by leadership.

Greatness is a dynamic process that never ends (Collins, 2005).

Challenges of Serving and Supporting Homeless Adolescents

The challenges of working with the homeless population include a wide array of

barriers to success (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). There is no standard service provision for

the multiple barriers that the homeless confront (Paat et al., 2021). There is judgement

from the public, social stigma, personal hardship, difficulties accessing services, medical

conditions, behavioral health needs, and histories of trauma (Mullen & Leginski, 2010;

Paat et al., 2021). At times, due to challenges in funding, some shelters have discarded

programs and services they previously offered (Paat et al., 2021). Paat et al. (2021) stated

that emergency shelter residents have extreme difficulties accessing services regarding

health care, psychotropic medications, special diets, medical crises, or transportation

necessary for any self-reliance, such as employment. In building teams to work with the

homeless youth population it is important to focus on building rapport, and

connectedness to assist with the transition from the streets (Paat et al., 2021). All these

factors influence an improved response to the issue of providing homeless services

(Mullen & Leginski, 2010).

Support and Skills Needed for Staff

Homeless populations are comprised of varied subgroups ranging from

chronically homeless to episodic homelessness, as well as variations in demographics

(Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Even among the male adolescent homeless population,

characteristics vary leading to flexibility needed in skills and training among the

workforces. In many cases, this population has been alienated from traditional systems

that could not provide care to them (Olivet et al., 2009). There is evidence that

discriminatory behaviors and prejudicial treatment resulted in long lasting mistrust of

outreach workers and consequently, homeless individuals refusing services (Paat et al.,

2021).

Unlike in other job clusters no comprehensive efforts have been made to identify

the competencies applicable in the homeless workforce (Mullen & Leginski, 2010).

Mullen and Leginski (2010) discussed the need for a basic orientation of homeless

characteristics to the staff of homeless programs that are part of larger agencies which

serve numerous populations. They also referred to the knowledge gap among other

providers who focus solely on homeless populations but are largely volunteer based

working out of church basements or community centers. Hiring skilled workers, training, and supervising staff to maintain high standards of care, and supporting the staff to prevent burnout and turnover are all critical in serving the homeless population (Olivet et al., 2010).

Management practices must pay serious attention to creating a supportive environment to engage and retain staff and help develop their careers (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). The combined challenges of difficult work, increased variety of co-occurring issues, the need to work independently, and the lack of professional training, all lead to a stressful work environment and possible staff burnout and turnover (Olivet et al., 2009). Paat et al. (2021) reported that disagreements regarding solutions to working with the homeless community, limits of service coordination, and a continued lack of qualified professionals further the challenges presented in staffing homeless shelters.

Responsibility of the Organization and its Leadership

Implementing exemplary leadership behavior practices to produce a highly engaged workforce may decrease worker burnout and improve retention, leading to an improved quality of life for staff and the homeless they serve (Williams, 2014). Although basic training is the priority, evidence-based best practices must be adopted along with effective supervision and leadership to improve performance (Olivet et al., 2009). Olivet et al. (2090) described these practices to include teams with well-defined goals, provide regular feedback and administrative support, and leadership that will take the responsibility for making difficult decisions.

Mullen and Leginski (2010) introduced several strategies to strengthen the capacity of the homeless service workforce and retain them. These included enhancing

benefits such as compensation, health care benefits, and flexible work schedules. Also suggested was fostering a supportive work culture and sense of community, providing career ladders with defined advancement, certifications for mastery of skills, and especially competency-based training of numerous specific skills (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). One of the most significant findings in studying this specific workforce was the use of multidisciplinary teams which bring together a range of skills needed to enhance communication and coordination of care to meet the complex needs of those experiencing homelessness (Olivet et al., 2009). It is also necessary for leadership to address individual's attitudes and beliefs as they work toward client-centered behavior and build trust with the clients.

Momentum must be created at the organizational level to find the resources to address the inattention to the homeless service workforce (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Improvement is needed in expanding the knowledge and skill set of those responsible for solving multiple problems of homeless youth (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Gwadz et al. (2018) found that a deep understanding of the RHY population and their background was critical for staff to provide a sense of safety to the youth and build connectedness with them. Employing homeless and formerly homeless individuals to provide outreach and supportive services have improved understanding of challenges faced by the youth and show potential to build trust with clients (Olivet et al., 2009). Leadership and supervision of staff working in emergency shelters are paramount in developing those working with these co-occurring conditions of homelessness and other mental health issues and providing the highest quality of care possible to those who have often been marginalized (Olivet et al., 2009).

Executive leaders overseeing homeless residences are critical to advancing the workforce that is interacting with the homeless population in all settings, including homeless shelters (Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) stated that managers and leaders in these settings should be trained in exemplary practices that deepen their understanding of expectations, change behaviors, and implement suggestions to improve staff engagement and retention.

Chapter Summary

The empirical literature review confirmed the growing population of homeless adolescent males and the factors that lead to this issue. Characteristics of homeless youth, the causes leading to their homelessness, and the resulting risks and challenges were established by the literature. The literature discussed specialized settings developed for this population, and the need for connectedness with at risk youth. Training homeless shelter staff in skills necessary to assist this population, and support provided by leadership, is critical when serving those in need.

Although there is significant research addressing the nature of homeless youth, there is little empirical research on behaviors necessary to connect with these youth in homeless shelters. There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the ability of shelter staff to encourage youth to remain in homeless shelters to provide effective services.

Chapter 3 will provide the research design and methodology for this study including the context, participants, instruments for data collection, procedures for data collection, and analysis used to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

Homelessness among youth is a growing problem (Sosa et al., 2015). Youth that are living on the streets are at high risk of long-term adverse outcomes (Gwadz et al., 2018). Gwadz et al. (2019) stated that a network of specialized settings to serve the RHY population has emerged over the past few decades. Nationally these settings include the Basic Center Program comprised of short-term emergency shelters, TLPs, and DICs (Gwadz et al., 2019). When youth are served by professional organizations dedicated to helping them, they are less likely to remain homeless (Slesnick et al., 2016). Despite various efforts, homeless male adolescents that initially connect with homeless shelters, often do not form any sense of attachment with staff in these settings which is the gateway to service provision (Slesnick et al., 2016).

Minimal research has been found to determine which behaviors of homeless shelters staff initiate and sustain attachment with adolescent homeless males (Boel-Studt et al., 2018). The following research questions guided this phenomenological study.

1. How do adult males who have experienced contact with homeless shelters as adolescents describe behaviors of shelter staff which resulted in remaining in shelter?

2. From the perspective of adult males who have experienced homelessness as adolescents, what behaviors of homeless shelter staff resulted in adolescent males not remaining in the homeless shelter?

Research Design

Qualitative methodology is used by researchers to apply their interpersonal and subjectivity skills to the exploratory process (Alase, 2017). The qualitative design used in this study was interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is an in-depth exploration of the meaning of experiences based on hermeneutic traditions (Kachingwe et al., 2019). Kachingwe et al. (2019) further stated that the researcher is an integral part of the process as they interpret the participants' experience through their own lens with a heightened awareness of their own bias. IPA also recognizes the reader as a third interpreter.

The IPA approach is extremely advantageous because of the bond the approach allows between the research and the participants (Alase, 2017). This approach encouraged the participants who have been homeless as adolescents and experienced contact with a homeless shelters to express their experiences without distortion. Alase (2017) stated the purpose of IPA is making sense of the lived experiences of people who have experienced similar phenomena and how their lives have been impacted.

IPA was the best approach to explore the research questions for this study because it explains the lived experiences of adult males who were homeless as adolescents and the experience they had when entering a homeless shelter which caused them to remain or to leave. IPA is committed to the study of exploring life experiences that have particular significance to people (Smith et al., 2009). A theoretical orientation of IPA is ideography, which refers to exploring every single case and moving between themes from a group of individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). It is critical that the researcher is in a constant state of self-reflection and shares a descriptive narrative of their own journey through the

39

process (Alase, 2017). The methodology supported a standard of excellence by following the specific procedures outlined for IPA (Alase, 2017).

The researcher has a history of working with adolescent males and in developing, implementing, and operating a homeless shelter for this population. While employed as the Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Oneida/Madison Counties, the researcher led a team to evaluate the need for an emergency shelter for homeless adolescent males in the local area. A facility was renovated, opened, and operated by Catholic Charities with the oversight provided by the researcher for 2 years.

The researcher holds a MS in Counselor Education from SUNY Oneonta. She worked with adolescent males as a counselor, athletic academic advisor, and academic success coach at SUNY Morrisville and Herkimer County Community College.

Noon (2018) stated that IPA can draw the link between a particular study, existing literature, and personal and professional experiences. Quality is particularly critical in the credibility of the study. Researchers must ask themselves questions about their clear understanding of the phenomenology they are studying, the procedures followed in the research, whether the essence of the experience is conveyed, and if reflection is practiced throughout the study (Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) claimed that asking these questions will guide the quest to produce credible and transferable research results. Quality and the ability to verify data is very important in qualitative research to be transferable and to protect human participants (Alase, 2017). Smaller samplings always raise the question of transferability of the findings; therefore, the goal is not to uncover what happens in all settings, but rather the understandings of a particular group in their own settings (Noon,

2018). The number of participants recruited for the proposed study was between four and six which allowed for deep analysis of a group experiencing this phenomenon.

Research Context

The context for this research was RHY settings which are defined as organizations providing one or more programs for RHY (Gwadz et al., 2019). Nationally these are defined as those programs included in Basic Center Programs to support short-term shelter services, TLPs and DICs. (Gwadz et al., 2019) For this study, the focus was on the lived experiences of participants that have experienced the phenomenon of contact with staff in either short-term emergency shelters (30-day stay) or TLPs (up to 18-month stays) which together were referred to as homeless shelters. The context of the research was New York State, specifically Upstate New York, which is considered rest of state (ROS) or anything outside of New York City (OCFS, 2018).

New York State recognizes two categories of RHY services (OCFS, 2018). OCFS (2018) stated that the first type of RHY residential program is crisis services, including emergency crisis shelters, and the interim family home. The second category is TLPs including group residences and supported residences (NYC Business, 2022). One hundred thirty-three certified residential programs operated for 1 or more days in 2018 in 23 counties and New York City. Of these certified residential programs, 31 were emergency shelters and 19 operated outside of New York City and served 1,983 youth. The 19 shelters operating in ROS have a total of 213 beds. There were 41 TLP group residences, 16 which operated outside of New York City and served 251 youth and 62 dependents in the rest of state (ROS) (OCFS, 2018). These emergency shelters and TLP

41

group residences, referred to as homeless shelters in this study, were the main research context for this study.

OCFS (2018) defined emergency homeless shelters as those residences that house youth ages 16-21 or under age 18, for 30 through 60 days. Extensions in length of stay are made upon written agreement of the youth, guardian, RHY service coordinator, and notice to OCFS. OCFS (2018) reported that municipalities may also provide services to young adults through age 24 if it is part of a plan that has been approved by the county and OCFS. TLP group residences operate for a maximum of 20 youth between the ages of 16 and 20 for a period of 18 months, and encourage development of independent living skills (OCFS, 2018). Exceptions to age and length of stay may also be made through an approval process. These two types of RHY residential services were the focus of this research since both provide shelter for homeless youth, are voluntary so the youth may enter and leave at any time, cannot be forced or mandated to stay, provide similar services and goals, and the fundamental difference is only the length of stay.

The residential RHY emergency services programs aim to support safe reunification of youth with their guardians when appropriate (OCFS, 2018). In 2018 62% of the youth leaving RHY crisis services in the ROS outside of New York City returned to a family member or stayed with a relative; 35% of youth leaving TLPs returned to family or a relative (OCFS, 2018).

In 2018, OCFS reported that 52% of those admitted to ROS emergency shelters were female, 46% identified as male, 6% identified as transgender or gender non-conforming, 7% were bisexual, 5% were gay or lesbian, 41% were Black, and 30% were White. In TLPs, 64% were female, 36% identified as male, 2% reported as transgender

ornon-conforming, 4% were bisexual, 4% were gay or lesbian, 40% were Black, and 32%

were White (OCFS, 2018). OCFS (2018) also reported the most provided services in

these residences were food, independent living support, and clothing.

Research Participants

Participants in a qualitative interpretative phenomenological study are selected for

their shared experiences (Noon, 2018). The participants should reflect homogeneity to

better gauge and understand the perceptions of the participants lived experiences that are

being studied (Alase, 2017). IPA researchers strive to generate a purposive, homogeneous

sampling to honor the personal significance of the participants and reflect experiences of

a group of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon such as adolescent

homelessness (Noon, 2018). This population will have natural variability (Smith et al.,

2009).

Adult males who have experienced homelessness as adolescents and have been

free of homelessness for at least 5 years were recruited for the study. The following

criteria was adhered to in selecting participants: (a) adult males who have experienced

homelessness as adolescents between ages 12-18; (b) have initiated contact with at least

one emergency shelter or TLP when they were homeless; (c) were unaccompanied as

homeless youth, not part of a homeless family unit; and (d) have not been homeless for at

least 5 years.

Samples in IPA studies are typically small to enable detailed and full appreciation

of each account (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that

researchers must determine early in the process whether an in-depth analysis is desired,

or a more general account preferred. Creswell (2016) recommended a sample size of

three to 15 participants depending on the research design. Smith et al. (2009) stated that there is no right answer when it comes to sampling size; it can depend on the richness of the individual cases or the desire to make connections between various accounts. Therefore, the ideal number for this study was four to six participants which allowed for deep analysis, without being overwhelmed by the data generated. Four participants were the final number interviewed.

The four participants (Table 3.1) who agreed to be part of the research were each asked to select a pseudonym of their choice at the beginning of the interview process. Selecting their own pseudonym can be a meaningful part of the process. John is a White male, age 60, who is now a restaurant owner. His homeless youth experience was outside of New York State. Carter is 27 years old, identified as Black, lives in independent housing, and typically works in the food service industry. His experiences were all in central New York. Michael is 39, self-identifies as Hispanic, and was in central New York for all of his experiences as a homeless adolescent. He works as a chef. Keegan is 30, identified as African American, and has an administrative role in a school district. He had his experiences in the western part of New York State. The ages, race, and locations of the participants provided some diverse perspective for the study.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Job description
Carter	Male	27	Black	Food service
John	Male	60	White	Restaurant owner
Keegan	Male	30	African American	Administrator
Michael	Male	39	Hispanic	Chef

Instruments Used in Data Collection

Various instruments are used in data collection in completing an interpretive phenomenological study and these will be reviewed below. IPA requires rich data, which means the participants should have the opportunity to tell their stories (Smith et al., 2009).

Researcher

The researcher is considered an instrument in qualitative research studies (Alase, 2017). A researcher needs to combine a wide variety of skills to gather data for an interpretive phenomenological study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) reported that interviewing experience is important, and patience is paramount in the careful, systematic rigor of analysis. He further stated that openness is a quality necessary for seeing the world through someone else's eyes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Interview Protocol

In phenomenological research, gaining the essence of the participants' lived experiences is the focus (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2016). The interview questions, in the semi-structured approach, intended to gather views and opinions about the participants lived experiences as homeless adolescents entering homeless shelters (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interview questions are grounded in what the literature says and what still needs to be answered about the behaviors of homeless shelter staff that promote connectedness to homeless adolescent males and impact whether they remain in residence (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

The protocol used in this study (Appendix A) included an introductory statement followed by an opening question, the body of the interview, and a last question to provide

closure. The questions were created by the researcher to collect data that would answer

the research questions. They were asked in a set sequence with probes prepared to prompt

deeper conversation, and follow-up questions to gain elaboration (Jacob & Furgerson,

2012).

Procedures Used for Data Collection

The 19 RHY emergency shelters in the ROS, as identified and defined by OCFS

(2018) were contacted to assess any connection they maintain with previous residents of

their programs. An email was sent to the directors of the programs explaining the

research in detail and asking them to send an invitation to participate from the researcher

to prior residents who may have an interest in participating. The directors of some of the

shelters signed a letter stating that they agreed to send this letter after approval of St. John

Fisher's Institutional Research Board (IRB) (Appendix B). The invitation to participate

was sent to prospective participants with clear instructions on how to contact the

researcher if interested in participating in the proposed study. The prospective

participants contacted the researcher directly by phone or email as described in the

invitation. To reach the desired number of participants, expanded recruitment efforts

were made. These efforts included contacting directors of other not for profits and

organizations, as well as individuals who have experience with this population, seeking

their agreement to support the research.

A second method of recruitment of participants included the snowball strategy,

which attracts further participants through those who have already agreed to participate

(Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) described the snowball effect as those who have agreed to

participate putting in a good word to attract other participants that share this phenomenon.

When the potential participant contacted the researcher, the details of the interview protocol were shared. A statement of informed consent was reviewed with all participants which fully informed them about the nature and purpose of the research, the confidential nature of data collection procedures, the participants' ability to refuse or withdraw from participation at any time, and the minimal risk personally, professionally, emotionally, or physically expected as a result of their participation. It stated that a $20 Amazon gift card would be emailed to them following their participation. The informed consent was sent to participants for their signature electronically and only those prospective participants who returned the consent were interviewed for the research.

The researcher set the date and time for the interview with the participant over email or by phone. The interviews were one-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview began with rapport building and questions were asked in order according to the protocol, including probing questions to gain deeper understanding of the participant's lived experience.

These interviews were conducted via Zoom as required by St. John Fisher's IRB. Zoom offered advantages over other video conference options because no account is required to use it and a simple click is all that is necessary to join the meeting (Gray et al., 2020). Zoom allowed for audio or video and audio recording, therefore the participant exercised their choice. The video recording was only used if the participant agreed and was erased after the initial analysis of the interview. An additional recording device was used for safety and backup. Both recording devices were tested prior to the interviews.

The privacy of the human subjects should always be paramount and never be compromised (Alase, 2017). The IRB guidelines in place at St. John Fisher were adhered to and each participant was advised of their rights. A document linking participants ID numbers, pseudonyms, and their names was kept separately from any consent forms and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home office (Kachingwe et al., 2019). Transcription was completed by a web-based transcription site within 24-48 hours. The researcher offered to send the participant a copy of the transcript of their interview to review and verify as part of the member checking protocol.

The researcher acted as interviewer, observer, and facilitator (Alase, 2017). To raise awareness of researcher bias and to set aside prejudgments, the researcher employed interview field notes and reflexive journaling simultaneously with the transcripts of the interviews (Alase, 2017). There may be a possible risk to participants that recalling the experience of being homeless may bring back emotional or painful memories. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress hotline, 1-800-985-5990, for 24/7 crisis counseling for people in emotional distress was provided to all participants.

Procedures Used for Data Analysis

Data analysis in IPA involves a set of common principles that can be adapted by researchers according to their individual objectives (Noon, 2018). The six-step IPA process outlined by Smith et al. (2009) was carefully followed. Step 1 was reading and rereading the interview transcripts. The researcher fully engaged and read the transcripts one at a time while listening to the audio recordings. Personal biases were recorded in a journal and notes of initial ideas were made in a wide margin on the transcript (Noon,

2018). Smith et al. (2009) recommended that the researcher notes some of their most powerful and striking observations regarding the interview itself.

Step 2 was initial noting, where the researcher coded all statements pertaining to the participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon of interest, using participants' own words whenever possible. Initial codes were categorized as descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual (Smith et al., 2009). Emergent themes from the initial notes were developed in Step 3, grouping related notations into a single phrase to capture their essence. These connections reflect the participants' remarks and the researcher's interpretation of them and reflect an understanding of the participant's meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 4 sorted these themes into broader categories called superordinate themes (Kachingwe et al., 2019). It involved charting or mapping and some emergent themes were discarded, while others were given more importance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). In Step 5, Steps 1 through 4 were repeated with another interview transcript. It was important to consider each case on its own, bracketing ideas that have emerged from earlier transcripts as much as possible (Noon, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). Finally, Step 6 made connections between the superordinate themes from all the transcripts to create a final set of themes and subthemes. Themes were not selected purely on prevalence, but also on the richness of the content (Noon, 2018).

Qualitative validity is based on whether the findings are accurate, trustworthy, and credible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Credibility strategies used to assess the accuracy of findings includes member checking (Kriukow, 2018). The interviewee was sent a copy of the transcript to review and verify if desired (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Researcher bias is a common threat to validity and researchers must manage this by staying in a state of constant self-reflection and preparing a descriptive journey (Alase, 2017). Alase (2017) stated that this reflection should involve a detailed account of the mountains that were climbed and how the final destination was reached. The researcher kept continuous notes throughout the process to record thoughts, self-reflection, and insight from previous experiences that manifested during the interviews.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the behaviors of homeless shelter staff in retaining homeless adolescent males in shelter. Qualitative IPA was used for this research. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The interviews were completed over Zoom and were transcribed electronically. Data analysis followed the six-step process outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Reflection was noted by the researcher with major ideas and thoughts recorded for interpretation. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study and the themes that emerged from data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis was to further the understanding of the behaviors of staff in homeless shelters which, promote connectedness with adolescents when they enter these shelters. These behaviors will be examined to identify which behaviors encourage youth to remain in shelters and increase their access to services, and which behaviors discourage youth from remaining. Understanding the staff behaviors that encourage homeless adolescent males to remain in shelter could improve staff hiring and training, and homeless shelter policy. Identifying behaviors that result in homeless adolescent males not remaining in shelter could also inform procedure and practice in shelter. Increasing the incidence of youth remaining in homeless shelters and the length of stay in shelters could decrease the number of days homeless adolescents spend on the street and positively impact homelessness of adolescent males.

This qualitative data was collected from four adult males who were homeless as adolescents, entered at least one homeless shelter as an adolescent, were unaccompanied, and were at least 5 years beyond homelessness. The participants ranged in age, race, location, number of shelters they experienced, and years during their adolescence that they spent in homeless shelters. They were also diverse in their careers, marital, parental, and economic status. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data while following an interview protocol.

Research Questions

The two research questions that formed the basis for this interpretive phenomenological study were:

1. How do adult males who have experienced contact with homeless shelters as adolescents describe behaviors of shelter staff which resulted in remaining in the shelter?

2. From the perspective of adult males who have experienced homelessness as adolescents, what behaviors of homeless shelter staff resulted in adolescent males not remaining in the homeless shelter?

Findings

Chapter 4 reports the study's findings organized by four themes that emerged from the data analysis. These four themes were authentic relationships, life coach, create a sense of family, and enduring adversity in shelter. Each theme is related to the study's research questions which focus on the behaviors of staff that encourage or do not encourage homeless adolescent males to remain in homeless shelters.

Authentic Relationships

The first theme, authentic relationships, explored the participants' perceptions of staff behaviors that made a connection with them and encouraged them to stay in homeless shelters. The participants in this study described the impact of staff's communication skills, ability to be present, and methods of interacting and connecting with them that were positive and beneficial. The descriptions ranged from non-judgmental actions and welcoming effects to examples of simply being present in the

moment or practicing reflective listening. The staff's characteristics impacted homeless

adolescent youth in various ways during their experiences in shelter

Without exception, contact with staff played an important role in each of the

participant's shelter experiences. The participants encountered many staff who were

irrelevant in their backgrounds, however, each participant could tell a story about at least

one significant staff contact. The participants thoroughly discussed the demeanor and

conduct of homeless shelter staff that positively resonated with them. These behaviors

promoted connectedness with the youth in a way that encouraged them to remain in the

shelter. Practicing persistent reassurance was vital in staff building relationships with the

participants. All four participants shared stories that showed caring through listening,

attentiveness, respect, encouragement, and reassurance. Building trust was crucial in

authentic relationships. Participants felt that it was easier to open up to staff who lived

through similar experiences to what they were living through. The specific relationships

formed with at least one authentic staff person made a difference in the participant's

experience in the homeless shelter.

John, the oldest participant, explained that his experiences as a youth in shelters

were many years ago. He repeatedly stated that homeless shelters have changed

dramatically and are far more regulated now. While reminiscing about his early struggles,

he isolated the characteristics of direct and honest communication as the most important

staff behaviors from his perspective. John appreciated the authentic behavior of some of

the staff. As an example, he shared, "There was one in particular staff guy who really

seemed genuinely wanting to help and basically said you don't belong here, and then, you

got a good head on your shoulders, and you need to…buckle down and apply yourself"

(J, 122). This was a demonstration of directness and genuine communication. He further shared, "I wouldn't listen to the warnings about changing my ways and consequently they were right, there were suicide attempts there, there were jails, and there was a lot of heartache that I could have avoided had I listened" (J, 285).

The staff's attempt to build authentic relationships with him was eventually appreciated by John even if not at the time they were initiated. He realized much later that this staff member was trying to interrupt the cycle that he was in and lead him to a better future. John's reality supports the stories from the other participants who shared that persistence by the staff members was vital. The participants in this study claimed that they didn't learn from just one interaction. They required relationships with individuals willing to show consistency until the youth built some trust and understanding.

Carter also expressed appreciation for real and honest communication. He was the youngest participant, was still living in subsidized housing, and maintained a relationship with the staff who assisted him in growing beyond his homelessness. Carter was in the system from a very young age and could not remember all the different shelters and staff members he encountered.

As he moved from childhood to adolescence, some experiences were memorable and significant beyond homelessness. Carter said, "You can be more easier to talk to, like just open up to somebody to when they have same similar background as me and stuff like that, was just kind of easy to talk to like that" (C, 163). Carter valued authentic conversation with staff who could understand his origins and shared similar backgrounds.

Carter attributed his ability to be housing secure as an adult in his late 20s to the caring and consistency of staff in his final shelter as he aged out of homeless adolescent

shelters. He states, "[They] sat down and taught me…helped me [find] a good job and an apartment" (C, 181). Carter continued to say, "They didn't judge me by, you know, the things I've been through, so that was good" (C, 183). They were a constant when it came to building authentic relationships. The staff he spoke about were not judgmental and were patient in assisting him in finding viable housing and employment.

Michael, like Carter, was homeless early on and in and out of numerous shelters. He spoke about many of his experiences in shelter being negative, however when he finally landed in a residence where this reality changed, he connected with a staff person who was welcoming and persistent. He attributed the turnaround in his trajectory to her and her behavior. Michael described, "This one actually helped me out and…. there was open arms, open heart, and it was nothing but pure love" (M, 52). He further shared:

> So, this one actually sat and listened, and she was like well you're not, I'm not letting you leave. You're stuck here we're going to help you we're going to get you through this we're going to get you through school you're going to get your education and we're going to see that you have a life for yourself. And that got me to the point where thinking wow maybe one person is actually listening. And she didn't do it for a month or week she did it for a couple years. (M, 139)

The persistence, commitment, consistency, and love that this staff person demonstrated to Michael made the difference to him. He continued to tell the story that he left the shelter and ended up going back again which was not usually allowed, but they took him back. Michael says, "And from there it clicked something in my head to where maybe I can start listening and trusting well, some people" (M, 150). Michael couldn't emphasize the topic of listening enough. Listening, perseverance, and patience were the traits he felt

were necessary in staff connecting and making a difference for him remaining in the homeless shelter.

Keegan entered his first shelter as an older teenager, which varied from the other participants who were much younger and had numerous shelter experiences. Keegan was referred to the homeless shelter by his school. He was hesitant and reflective in remembering and recounting experiences; he would pause and look at the ceiling and finally recall his adolescent days in shelter. Sometimes just having a staff person there, knowing they were around, was important to him as a homeless youth. Keegan confirmed that the consistency of a check-in by a staff member was significant to him and his mental health.

Staff who treated homeless adolescent males with respect and gave them space were paramount to Keegan. He stated:

> I never felt judged. I think that you just never know what the long-term consequences of just being a decent human being, who recognizes that most kids think they're grown, and give them space to mess up and to try to do well, so that they'll be good when they're actually on their own, the long run it's just, I just think, I just feel so blessed for having been surrounded by people like that.
>
> (K, 222)

Keegan spent time alone in his room often and battled depression and the effects of trauma. He called a staff member a "straight shooter" who he valued for telling him the truth and being authentic. John, Michael, and Keegan each talked about manipulation and deception in their lives making honesty and directness valuable to them.

The range of behaviors that were impactful to the participants confirm that different approaches are effective with different individuals. However, listening and being present in a consistent manner were key for each of the participants in staff building authentic relationships with them. Persistence and genuine caring built trust which encouraged these homeless adolescent males to stay in shelter, which answers the first research question. The stories from participants about staff who did not give up on these youth showed their willingness to be patient and build relationships. Each participant could isolate one staff member who was particularly significant in their life story. Ongoing encouragement of an authentic nature by at least one caring staff made a difference to the youth and impacted their likelihood to stay or to return to shelter.

Life Coach

Theme 2, life coach, is related to interactions between staff and adolescents while teaching life skills, assisting youth in acquiring resources, and joining them in planned recreational activities. These staff opened the eyes of the participants through unique exposure to events, skills, or resources. The participants' introduction to various activities that they would not have outside of their stay in homeless shelters influenced their future lives. Mastering daily life skills fostered feelings of growth and accomplishment. Several participants cited that the recreational activities planned for them while in shelter attracted the youth and motivated them to stay. The coaching that staff provided while planning and sharing experiences and providing basic needs was long-lasting and meaningful to the participants.

John discovered that by helping in the kitchen, along with learning a valuable trade, he could get extra food. He spent much of his educational time at shelter in

vocational technology programs learning to cook. John reported always being interested in cooking, and the opportunity to volunteer in the kitchen at shelter and participate in various cooking competitions furthered this passion. Possibilities were opened to him through the chances he received at shelter. These were significant occasions for him since he is now an owner of a restaurant.

Additional opportunities presented to John truly changed his life and his perspective. John shared that, "I have never read a book period, and all of a sudden, they had like books there……so all of a sudden, it's like I'm reading this but it's really exciting and totally transformed my thinking" (J, 195). He continued on to describe the experience he had when staff set up opportunities to volunteer as an usher at the opera:

> Some of the things they had in there, as far as the educational stuff opened my
>
> eyes and other thing that they did too is they, which was this was really cool….
>
> like that in this shelter had some sort of arrangement with them where the
>
> residents would go and volunteer work for the opera. (J, 210)

The lasting influence these experiences had on John was mentioned often throughout his interview. He was very aware and grateful for the chances he was offered that he said he never would have had if he "wasn't such a screw up" (J, 224).

John also spoke about the arts and crafts and creative activities that youth were allowed to participate in at shelters. He learned leather work, "You could learn how to use those tools….it was good, that was fun, that was encouraging you know everything they would teach us to do…." (J, 161). He made a music box for his mother that he found long after she died, that she had always kept. John told about learning a skill and said, "That was encouraging to open your mind and try different things that you know you

weren't accustomed to" (J, 168). He recounted these stories with a sense of pride and accomplishment. Learning from the staff how to create something that was special and meaningful to his mother made a permanent impression on John.

Carter did not speak about as many cultural or craft sessions being available to him, however he did learn life skills. He was in so many shelters from childhood on that he felt he had many proficiencies that he didn't need to learn as an adolescent. He felt pride in the fact that entering the homeless shelters as an adolescent he already knew how to cook and make his bed. These were skills the staff would work with the youth to learn if they did not already know how.

Carter also provided examples of staff coaching during periods of recreation. He discussed the homeless shelters that he stayed in that participated in activities versus the shelters that had no recreational events. He talked about the sports that staff engaged the adolescents in down the street and the ice cream stand on the corner that they visited. He clearly brightened up and increased his enthusiasm when he spoke about the activities that staff would plan for them. Carter shared, "So it was just across the street they take [you] to get ice cream right and then they had a little field across the street we used to always play like flag football stuff …" (M, 77). There were other shelters that Carter stayed in that had no activities, the youth went to school and came home, and that was all. He did not have favorable memories of those shelters. The shelters that engaged Carter in activities and kept the youth busy with positive events made a difference in his staying and taking advantage of further services.

Michael also shared experiences with staff planning recreation and adventure with the youth, however he recalled that these rewards depended on behavior. Staff would take

youth places and help them access services if expectations were met. The staff took the residents white water rafting which was a great experience. Michael reported, "In order to do these things you had to do good it was kind of like being rewarded for good behavior" (M, 162). Michael shared additional expectations of staff, "If you're not going to school get a job, if you're not going to get a job, then get your butt back in school and get your education" (M, 178). It was important that there were goals developed for homeless adolescent males in homeless shelters. This provided opportunities for youth to engage with the staff, become aware of targets they could aim for, and strategies to achieve them.

Michael learned food preparation and became a chef from the skills he was taught. He also learned that everything was about cause and effect; there was an outcome for every action. Michael reported that:

> They would actually do more than help you finding a job. They would help you, with your homework, they would help you with your life learning skills. I'm transitioning through like what is like to transition from the younger …the lesson to try to go through that to staging and to an adult. So, some places will teach you everything you need to know about life. (M, 190)

The life skills and life lessons Michael learned in homeless shelters carried with him to adulthood and became the foundation for who he was as a parent.

Keegan was serious and focused on moving ahead out of high school and on to college. He could not recall any recreational times; his experiences were geared toward helping him access various resources. It was critically important to him that staff were always there to assist him in acquiring the items he needed to move forward and be

successful. He told the story of how staff would access shelter resources for important milestone events:

> It was the most random things. Like I wanted to go to prom they made sure I had I got my prom ticket they made sure I had like really nice clothes to wear. I want to get my permit so I can learn how to drive they may give me the money to get that got my permit. I wanted to get a job for the first time they helped me get a job.
>
> (K, 82)

Keegan emphasized the importance of staff's understanding and involvement in finding and acquiring resources needed to move him toward his goals.

Interactions with staff were sometimes very transactional for Keegan. He learned the skill of asking for what he wanted or needed early in life in the shelter setting. He would figure out what he was lacking, ask for it, and not take it personally if the staff could not do it. He identified this as a trait that he used in adulthood that many others had not mastered. The coaching by staff, the follow through, and the consistent behavior demonstrated dependability to Keegan.

The participants had a wide variety of experiences in opportunities, recreational activities, acquisition of resources, and mastering life skills in their various settings. The ability of shelter staff to plan engaging activities, teach life skills, and provide opportunities for the adolescents to participate in cultural events encouraged them to remain in shelter. Staff coaching the youth through introductions to new events, access to jobs, and other situations they would have never experienced, had lifelong impact on their future. The importance of each exposure cannot be underestimated in their desire to remain in shelter.

Create a Sense of Family

Create a sense of family was the third theme built on the perception participants had of staff's ability to substitute for a family unit. When staff made time to build relationships in an authentic manner and coach the youth on life events, it resulted in creating a sense of family. Staff conveyed respect and kindness and took ownership of the emotional structure of how the participants experienced the homeless shelter. Although they may not have encountered the true caring of relatives within their own family of origin, the participants expressed what they thought family should be like. Feelings of safety and belonging were identified as foundational in a family. Structure, rules, and accountability promoted an impression of the comfort they assumed would be part of a functional family unit.

The participants in the study described their backgrounds and family settings as unsettling and challenging. Most of them left their own families at a young age due to various disruptive conditions. Participants revealed that they did not come from a strong family unit. John and Keegan particularly mentioned their detrimental family dynamics, while the others alluded to similar difficulties. The participants all spoke about family as something they longed for and were seeking. They had specific ideas of the kindness, support, respect, and security that were included in a sense of family.

Each of the participants identified regulations and guidelines as signs of concern and consideration. Keegan stated he had more respect for the shelter due to the rules that were in place for practical reasons. Michael spoke about the value of youth understanding the reasons for the rules which would result in youth being more apt to follow them.

The participants stressed the value of rewards for good behavior and receiving something in return when they kept up their end of the bargain.

John's shelter experiences were fraught with manipulating and disappointing adults, however he also identified caring staff members who modeled family behaviors:

> They tried to be mom and dads. Most of us didn't have you know that now that's not to say they didn't have a mom yes, because I had a mom, it just happened that my dad was an alcoholic okay, and there was a lot of abuse and stuff like that in the household, a lot of, a lot of anger, a lot of insanity, beat my mom up stuff like that. And so, being in a stable environment like that, where you had both women staff and male staff, they would have that structure, and be like your mom and be like your dad, you know what I mean, and so the encouragement like that was important. (J, 173)

His experience reflected how some staff members substituted for the roles in a family unit.

John grew up on welfare and he talked about standing in line for blocks of cheese and powdered milk. He returned to some of the shelters because the food was pretty good and there were three solid meals a day with staff encouraging them to help cook. Sitting down to meals at regular times certainly felt like a family to the adolescents who craved belonging. The participants each mentioned the importance of food and sharing the mealtime experience as significant in the memory of living in shelters.

Since John's experiences were several decades ago, he realized the importance of the improved sense of safety. Due to his involvement with shelters in his current life he understands the need for cameras, background checks, records, and technology to provide

safety and security for the homeless adolescent youth now. These safeguards provide the sense of protection and well-being that may be commonplace in a functional family.

John also stated that an enhanced intake and onboarding process would have unveiled his real issues and causes for his behaviors. He felt such methods would have uncovered the root issues of homelessness of the youth and focused treatment appropriately. Michael and John shared that often mental health issues and substance abuse were interchanged, and youth were medicated needlessly. The process of identifying issues of the youth's homelessness upon entry to the shelter and proper treatment would represent the security expected in a family.

Carter had been in and out of numerous shelters since a very young age. Like John, he could understand the necessity of a thorough intake process. He felt that particularly at his young age the staff needed to verify the youth's situation and background, "Because I was a minor…they like to call around and verify, like yeah, he's on his own" (C, 47). There was an element of safety and security this practice represented; staff demonstrated how much they cared for the adolescents by checking up on them.

Reuniting with his mother was never a goal for Carter and he never unveiled the dynamics of his homelife. However, he expressed his desire to be treated like family and he described this dynamic in some of the shelters he stayed in. Carter stated, "Like my second shelter I got to…. not like just one staff member but all were like our family…." (C, 108). He talked about them treating him like family and treating him differently than the other adolescents, which made him feel special and accepted. The staff listened to him more, and from his perspective, took more time with him. Even though he had never

experienced a family unit personally, he reported a sense of knowing what one felt like and spoke softly with feeling when he expressed it. Carter also talked about curfews, and never really caring about them, "I didn't need to be outside anyway, so I really don't care about the curfew too much" (C, 194).

Several of the participants talked about the cause and effect of good behavior and consequences of negative behavior. The expectations included completing chores and doing what was expected of them. It was like keeping their place in a family. Michael shared an experience that occurred once he was residing in a more positive surrounding than those shelters of his earlier days:

Obviously, I had to work, and I had to do chores and do everything like that and do what was normal but as long as if I pulled my weight and then what I was supposed to do and didn't get in trouble and I was okay. I helped them, they helped me, everything was, they showed me, the one thing that nobody else did, they told me that saying please and thank you got you a long way in life, because I never knew the words please and thank you, nobody told me them. So, all these years, growing up, I didn't know just a simple word of thank you and please was a big sign of showing common respect for other people. And so, they showed me that, so it was it was nice. (M, 59)

Michael revealed how staff in homeless shelters taught him manners and values that he didn't learn from his own family. Staff seemed to create opportunities for the participants in this study to gain life lessons that are often learned in family settings.

Michael also talked about sometimes working hard enough to get an allowance, a tradition usually practiced within a family. Positive outcomes for completing tasks taught

responsibility and accountability. While remembering some of the recreational activities the residences sponsored, Michael recalled, "If you were on bad behavior and you were doing bad, then you are unable to go, but at least you still had a home" (M, 164). For these participants, who had often been kicked out of their own houses, the security of having a home, regardless of behavior, was novel. The ability to stay in shelter even when expectations weren't met reflected that staff accepted them even when youth broke a rule. Expectations were set, youth were held to a standard, but they would not be kicked out of the shelter for breaking a rule. Staff modeled the ideal that families do not turn their backs on one another. These staff behaviors allowed adolescents to remain in shelter as well as encouraged them to remain since they felt like they belonged. These were powerful lessons.

Since Keegan was a little older when he entered shelter, he exhibited the independence of a young adult. He didn't like having anyone tell him what to do but still valued the feeling of belonging which came from meeting expectations. He stated:

I was really focused on trying to figure out what it means to be an adult on their own...they weren't like kindergarten teacher nice or anything like that, but they treated me like a young adult who felt respected, I didn't feel like they were crowding me. (K, 104)

He shared the rules were fair and they were in place for a reason. The rules were established to keep them safe. Keegan remembered:

There's a curfew so you have to be in, I think, by nine if I remember correctly, and after curfew there was a guy who actually lived in the bottom floor apartment who lived there full time, who was responsible for checking in and

making sure everyone was in their rooms and also, if anything happened,

emergencies or anything happened with the apartments or whatever he was

readily available downstairs. (K, 37)

Keegan knew there was accountability attached to breaking the rules and understood

there would be consequences. However, he agreed that the rules were for practical

reasons and were not unfair. Even as a homeless adolescent male punishment and

consequences were not viewed negatively, rather they were seen as a method for staff to

keep adolescents safe and secure, teach boundaries, and show caring and compassion.

Enduring Adversity in Shelter

The fourth and final theme was enduring adversity in shelter, which described the

attitudes and behaviors of staff that discouraged participants from remaining in homeless

shelters, answering the second research question. This theme identified the demeanors of

staff that were dismissive to the adolescents or were severely negative. The staff's

discouraging conduct did not always result in homeless adolescent males leaving the

shelters because survival and basic needs were strong motivators to remain. The ability of

youth to endure speaks to the resiliency and persistence of homeless youth. The

participants felt they had no choice and learned to cope with adversity to survive.

John discussed the confusion, distrust, and manipulation he felt during his

adolescent stays in shelter. He often accepted blame for his childhood due to his negative

behaviors. He claims that:

A lot of experiences that I have memories of today about back then it would be

considered bullying. I don't think of it like that, back then, it was, it was just the

price for, you know, being a hard kid to raise. That was just the price of my

actions and my choices, you know. Some of the quote unquote abuse that you

would have today where they couldn't act like that, they couldn't today, they

couldn't swear at you. (J, 184)

John tried to excuse the negative aspects of his experience and pass it off as normalcy for

the time. He reiterated that things were different back then, and the punitive behaviors

that were common would not be accepted now.

John told a story that he stated was like the movie "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's

Nest*" due to the craziness of the incident and severity of the ensuing punishment. John

climbed out of the window of the shelter where he was staying and bought alcohol for all

the residents after collecting their money. He described getting everyone drunk without

realizing the severity of the psychiatric medications some were taking that didn't mix

well with alcohol. John stated that some of the residents started going crazy and:

They tracked it down to me and then next thing you know I'm in a locked ward

strapped to the bed and they're going to do shock therapy on me. I was a kid you

know. Those are some of the experiences that I don't believe would happen today.

(J, 108)

Although John told the story in a light and almost humorous tone, the seriousness and

potential harm of that incident remained with him.

The years John spent in homeless shelters were several decades ago and he

realized systems changed. Some of the tactics used by staff in the past were tough love

and bullying. He was forced to wear a dunce cap and clean dumpsters with a toothbrush.

He witnessed and experienced abusive and neglectful behaviors. His descriptions often

included adults who continued to disappoint. John declared that he stayed in the

residences to keep the courts and his mother off his back and "…do what he needed to do to survive" (J, 67).

John shared that at times he felt fear and confusion because staff at several of the shelters he stayed in were there only to manipulate the youth and take advantage of the young male residents. There appeared to be countless stories as John moved from shelter to shelter describing the staff who only worked with young males to prey on them. John claimed, "I mean, I'm just going to tell you, he turned out to be a pedophile…." (J, 67). Speaking about one of the shelters, he stated, "It was unsafe for young men…. when you're in the shower and they try to join you, you know" (J, 250). John encountered staff who were abusive, demeaning, and neglectful.

John also repeatedly shared how staff labeled the youth, trying to fit them into a box with their diagnoses and medicate them unnecessarily. He shared that:

> They started diagnosing me with all these things, and next thing you know they're trying all these different medications on me forcing me to take them as part of the probation if I didn't want to go to jail…. I had to do that in order to survive and get the adults off my back. (J, 100)

John identified long-time staff as being jaded and hardened by working in the field for too many years. They lost their passion and were judgmental about new youth who would enter shelter based on experiences from the past. He described the hurt and tragedy that staff have seen as clouding their ability to see each youth as a new face with a new story. Therefore, they are unable to provide the best service to the adolescents because they made assumptions and reacted to the behaviors they expected.

John endured fear, frustration, and anger and acted out on these behaviors. He knew that the treatment and methods used were not productive and effective, however, his choice at the time was to put up with whatever was going on in the shelters to have a place to stay and basic life necessities.

When asked why he stayed in shelter, Carter explained, "I just didn't want to be homeless…. what I meant by that…. didn't want to sleep outside" (C, 88). It was a simple decision to him, although he left and came back numerous times. He chose to come back rather than stay on the street. He shared his thoughts about staff that he did not want to talk to:

> Some shelter members you don't ever really want to talk to…there were staff members you don't even really want to talk to because they can't even tell me nothing, they don't even know what I've been through, so I don't even wanna take no advice from you…. that's what I thought at the time. (C, 160)

Carter felt that staff could not help him deal with what he had been through unless they had similar experiences. Even when Carter was unable to connect with staff and felt their behaviors were discouraging, he made the choice to endure them rather than to return to living on the streets. He stated numerous times that shelter was a clear choice over being homeless.

Michael remembered struggles, headaches, and fights from his early experiences. Michael stated that there are many childhood experiences that his older self has forgotten. His memories of being homeless and moving from place to place were of pain and loss. He reported, "Believe it or not, one place I actually had to sleep in a tree house…. this tree house had no windows, had nothing, it was bad …. I was there for about 2

weeks…that was a horrible experience…very bad" (M, 32). In some of the shelters if he wore clothes that he wanted to instead of the clothes that staff wanted him to, he got in trouble. Michael shared, "Everyone had to do what they wanted you to do, and if you didn't, well, you got severely punished" (M, 46). There was a staff member who would always get so mad, "and if he got pretty upset, it would lead to I can't say abuse, but it would lead to neglect" (M, 75).

Michael also stated that there were workers who would just say they didn't have time for the youth and push them aside. Michael stated being dismissed did not feel good to a young adolescent and these behaviors would make Michael think about leaving:

> I know I can leave anytime. But the problem is if I leave… where will I be. That would be back to being homeless on the street again. I don't really feel like eating out of dumpsters and garbage cans. So, I had to deal with it, and I had to find a way to cope. (M, 81)

One of the biggest struggles Michael shared was trying to figure out where the next place to stay would be, "If you're going to wake up to losing the bed you're sleeping in and to what's going to be your next step, where is your next bed going to be located at" (M, 111). This was his biggest fear.

He continued to share, "At one point in time, in every place I was in I wanted to leave because nobody was listening to me. People were just hearing me, but they weren't doing enough listening" (M, 135). Michael shared that staff should try to listen more to the youth instead of just telling them what to do. Staff needed to listen to what the adolescents wanted to do and try to help each youth with a lesson to figure out what life is all about.

Keegan did not want staff to act like a therapist to him. He had a horrible experience with a school therapist who made him feel stupid, and never wanted someone to be like that to him again. He didn't want staff to tell him what to do and, "At the time I didn't want anybody was trying to be a parent to me or anything like that. I was really focused on trying to figure out what it means to be an adult on their own" (K, 104).

Like John, Keegan stated that tough love would not have worked with him. Keegan felt that when it comes to young people, adults often feel that:

> They just need a talking to, and then they just need to get their [expletive] straight or whatever…. oftentimes the most pissed off individuals are the ones who are struggling the most, like it's a symptom of some type of practical needs not being met. (K, 127)

Keegan claimed it is important to deal with these youth in the right way, meeting their needs, giving them space, and showing them respect and caring.

Each participant had negative experiences with shelter staff. There were examples of adverse behaviors that ranged from abusive to neglectful to dismissive. These behaviors were discouraging to the youth and caused them to think about leaving shelter. However, the reality of basic needs; a bed, food, a roof, resulted in them staying in shelter despite the negative interactions or behaviors that staff displayed. They chose to endure offensive behaviors rather than being put back out on the streets.

Summary of Results

This study focused on the lived experience of adult males who were homeless as adolescents and had at least one experience entering a homeless shelter. It uncovered the behaviors of shelter staff that encouraged or discouraged the adolescents from staying in

shelter and accessing additional services. These adult males were able to share their experiences as adolescents and discuss the traits and characteristics that led to connectedness with staff.

Authentic relationships as shown by staff through positive communication skills were identified by participants as making a difference in their experience. Showing interest, being present, and willingness to be persistent and patient with adolescents who may be angry, fearful, and frustrated were at times the deciding point for staying in shelter. Life coaching in recreational activities and assistance in gathering resources was another method staff used to promote connectedness and caring. Unique experiences realized in homeless shelters resulted in some life-changing transformations. The participants repeatedly shared that creating a sense of family provided them with comfortable, safe places for them to reside. For once they felt like they belonged to something bigger than themselves which represented a safe place for growth. The last theme that emerged was enduring adversity in shelter that discouraged youth from remaining in shelter. However, what was consistently shared was even when experiencing negative behaviors, youth were compelled to stay in shelter solely for survival and the access to basic needs.

Chapter 5 will discuss the results of this study. Chapter 5 includes implications of the findings, study limitations, and recommendations, and concludes with a summary of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Homelessness is a growing problem of significant proportions in the United

States, with a notable increase in homelessness among youth (Sosa et al., 2015). Between

2019 and 2020, nationwide homelessness increased by 2%, marking the fourth year of

growth (NAEH, 2021). Since 2016, the unsheltered population has surged by 30%,

following a downward trend (NAEH, 2021). NAEH (2021) reported that 50% of

homeless young people are unsheltered. Specialized settings have been developed to

answer the problem of youth living on the streets. Since these settings have been

established, relatively little research has been completed on understanding the various

choices or their effectiveness (Gwadz et al., 2018). Slesnick et al. (2016) reported that

staff with a high degree of understanding of the homeless adolescent population would

develop trust and promote the youth's sense of attachment with them and the shelter. The

homeless shelters developed to house these youth may be the adolescent's first contact

with services, therefore, the connection made by staff with these youth upon entering is

crucial (Slesnick et al., 2016). Minimal research identified behaviors of homeless shelter

staff that created and sustained attachment with the male homeless youth upon entering

shelter.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the behaviors of staff in homeless

shelters that promote or discourage connectedness with homeless adolescent males when

entering homeless shelters. This research was conducted to gain new knowledge

regarding staff behaviors in homeless shelters that encourage youth to remain and gain further access to services, or those behaviors that result in adolescents leaving shelter. The potential significance of this study is to impact hiring, training, and policy concerning homeless shelters. The increasing number of male adolescents living on the street is a social justice issue and the possibility of increasing their length of stay in shelter could reduce the number of days on the street (Crawford, 2018).

Chapter 5 discusses the results and significance of this study. There are four major sections in Chapter 5. The first includes implications of the findings analyzed from semi-structured interviews with four adult males who were homeless as adolescents. The second section describes the limitations in completing the study. The third section suggests further research, presents recommendations for changes in procedure and policy, professional practice and executive leadership, and discusses connection with social justice. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study provide several implications related to the lived experiences of homeless adolescent males entering homeless shelters and their relationship with staff. The first section discusses the implications on professional practice and leadership decision-making regarding homeless shelters for adolescents. The second reviews the implications supporting, disputing, or expanding the body of knowledge and scholarly research in the field. The third section explores the implications of unanticipated results found from the study.

Professional Practice and Decision-Making

The results of this qualitative phenomenological study suggest that the demeanor, communication skills, and interactions with staff at homeless shelters were impactful and significant to the participants as described in the first theme, authentic relationships. Staff's persistence and patience was key. The dynamics between adolescents and staff were at times memorable and in other instances were irrelevant. Participants rarely disclosed stories of significant relationships with staff early in the interview sessions. However, when probed or questioned, each participant disclosed specific exchanges with at least one staff member that directly related to their remaining in shelter.

The results of this study, outlined in the first theme, authentic relationships, also showed that participant's connection with at least one staff member promoted the youth's staying in shelter. At times a brief subtle interaction, or an extended connection, often made the difference in the experience homeless youth had in shelter. The significance was sometimes not only the type of exchange, but also the willingness of staff to attempt to make a connection repeatedly. This persistence demonstrated their desire to authentically engage with the youth and help them to feel important. One caring adult often made the difference in outcome to each homeless youth.

Each participant's hesitancy described in developing relationships with homeless shelter staff implies that male adolescents require time, patience, and repeated attempts at reaching this goal. The results of this study described in most instances that the participants experienced multiple attempts before they would listen or become comfortable with staff. Patience and consistency in staff's behaviors impacted their decisions to remain in shelter, as described in the first theme, authentic relationships.

The implications of this research further suggest that the homeless youth appreciated family and homelike settings as discussed in the second theme, create a sense of family. Examples of these settings include shelters where meals were served at scheduled times, and guidelines were established that youth needed to follow. All the participants in this study spoke about sense of belonging they felt in shelter when staff replicated a family setting. It was important for the participants to feel connected and have a homelike atmosphere where they felt comfortable. Often not welcome in their homes, shelter provided the only security the participants knew. Therefore, the results imply staff in homeless shelter that create environments reflecting family settings may be more likely to connect to male homeless youth.

Most participants claimed that an enhanced intake process would result in useful and accurate information for the staff in homeless shelters, as described in the theme, create a sense of family. The implication is that questions asked during intake would provide information regarding causes of homelessness of the participants and accurate information regarding their health issues. Gathering these details would result in more effective treatment and service provision. The participants would not be given unnecessary medications if this data was gathered accurately. The participants shared that staff showing care in this way would feel like they were part of a concerned family setting.

Although it is expected that adolescents may rebel against curfews and regulations, this study portrayed the opposite, as reported in Theme 3, create sense of family. The participants accepted and viewed rules as signs of caring and concern. All the participants respected the need for rules and structure. They were willing to adhere to

structure and accountability rather than the dangers of the streets. Some of the

participants expressed the desire to have the guidelines clearly explained to them so they

could understand why the rules were in place. The implication is that youth value the

boundaries and structure they lack in their-family units. Their capacity to follow the rules

allowed them to feel dependable and responsible. Homeless shelters that maintain

structure and curfews create the sense of caring and security that homeless male youth

have been lacking and view as a significant part of belonging to a family. Without these

regulations shelter staff would not create that same sense of family that connects to

homeless adolescent males and encourages them to stay in shelter.

Results from this study imply that coaching from staff, in the form of recreational

programming, was significant to the participants, which was introduced in the theme, life

coach. Numerous times the study participants told stories about activities that staff would

arrange for them which provided a sense of belonging. Therefore, in order to create a

connection with homeless male adolescents requires activities that go beyond meeting

their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. When homeless shelter staff create

recreational programs, they are more likely to have opportunities to create stronger

connections with youth.

Another implication of this study, described in Theme two, life coach, is that

participants had life-changing moments when staff assisted with job applications,

transportation, food preparation, or reading a book. Some participants had even more

impactful opportunities when volunteering at cultural events. Experiencing a worldview

through opportunities presented in shelter gave the adolescents opportunities to expand

their minds and views. The wonder in John's voice when he described seeing "*Man of La*

Mancha," or the joy Carter shared in eating an ice cream cone, were unmatched in their previous life experiences. The results of this study imply that these youth were given chances in shelter that would never have been afforded to them. The participants described activities they shared in shelter that had long-lasting influence on their lives.

Expanding the Body of Knowledge and Scholarly Research in the Field

This phenomenological study was designed to give voice to homeless adolescent males and their perception of which staff behaviors promoted connectedness with the youth and encouraged them to stay in shelter. Although numerous studies have explored homelessness among youth, minimal research provides data to identify these behaviors. Communication patterns and genuine caring have been identified as beneficial in connecting with homeless youth and this study adds to the knowledge of which behaviors connect effectively (Charturvedi, 2016; Huffman, 2017; Stewart et al., 2010). The participants in this study each mention the concept of authentic relationships. Genuine listening and being present were communication styles identified by the participants as improving connections with homeless youth. Everyone shared the importance of not feeling judged. Nonjudgmental communication leads to trust which is important when building secure relationships with homeless youth (Deutsch et al., 2020). Beyond that, persistence and patience were the unique features identified by this study. The participants mentioned the consistency of authentic behaviors, the willingness to try and try again, and patience are key characteristics.

Consistent with the existing body of research, the findings of this study imply that positive relationships with caring adults promote well-being among vulnerable youth (Sieving et al., 2016). The pleasant moments that Carter described when staff took the

youth to eat ice cream or play football strengthened this research. Remembering positive times spent with staff was significant to the participants of this study. Previous studies stated that social support provided by mentors promotes resilience, assists youth in problem-solving, encourages them, and positively impacts their lives (Sieving et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2017). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research. Keegan described the staff's assistance in job seeking, transportation, and accessing resources. He acknowledged the positive impact these instances had on his life.

Participants shared that there was always at least one staff member who was significant in their experience and positively impacted them. Some of the participants established relationships with staff that lasted beyond their stay in shelters. Results of this study confirm previous research which stated that a quality mentorship with one adult significantly impacts positive youth outcomes (Van Dam et al., 2018).

Although Slesnick et al. (2016) found that youth would select DICs over shelters due to more flexibility, the findings of this study from the theme, create a sense of family, were that youth desire structure and rules. Contrary to what some previous research would infer, this study implies that male homeless youth may prefer rules within shelter settings.

Consistent with attachment theory, which provides a basis for this study, the participants' mothers were a central factor in their stories. Attachment theory states that a primary caregiver, often the mother, is the key to developing attachment early in life (Ratto et al., 2016). Those who haven't developed a secure attachment end up with feelings of low self-worth, discomfort in relationships, and have difficulty turning to others for support (Shumaker et al., 2009). The participants in this study expressed a need

for positive, safe, close experiences with caring adults. The results of this study confirm

the need for staff to build the feeling of secure attachment that perhaps was not developed

in infancy for the homeless youth that enter shelter.

Each participants in this study implied the importance of their mother although

they lacked a relationship with her during adolescence. John related stories that

demonstrated he was still looking for approval, and Carter was sad and hesitant when

speaking about no chance of reuniting with his mother. Michael had limited memory of

any childhood relationships, and Keegan was candid regarding his mother's explosive

personality and inability to reconnect with him. Attachment theory explains individuals'

difficulty in developing attachments in later relationships, based on the insecure

attachment patterns developed in infancy.

The implication of this study, guided by attachment theory, is that a staff member

can be viewed as a substitute attachment figure (Stefanidis et al., 1992). The information

gathered during the interviews in this study confirmed that staff behaviors are significant

in developing connectedness and building attachment patterns that were never positively

developed in these youth as infants. The results of this study, therefore, expand the

application of attachment theory to the relationships between male homeless adolescents

and homeless shelter staff.

Implications of Unanticipated Results

Some unexpected results of this study include the consequences of staff exhibiting

discouraging behaviors. Negative and destructive behaviors were displayed by some of

the staff in shelters where each participant stayed. The unanticipated results were that

although the participants experienced some extremely discouraging situations, they

typically remained in shelter. The obvious benefits of remaining in the shelters were apparent to the participants. These benefits include the basic needs of food, a bed, and protection from the dangers of the street. Survival is at the forefront of these young men's minds and a great deal of negativity was sustained to maintain a roof over their heads. Results of this study imply regardless of the shelter or the behaviors of staff, once these participants made the remarkable decision to enter, they stayed, tolerating negative behaviors, because staying was better than eating out of a dumpster or sleeping outside.

Some previous research stated distrust and fear may cause adolescents to avoid homeless shelters (Gwadz et al., 2018). The participants in this study did not reveal these as reasons to avoid a shelter. Without exception, participants claimed the desire for food and basic needs kept them in shelter. Michael was unwavering in his statement that he did not want to eat out of dumpsters and garbage cans again (M, 81). When asked why he remained in shelter, Carter answered that he didn't want to sleep outside anymore (C, 88). Even when faced with negative, and sometimes abusive behavior by staff, the collective opinion of the participants was that staying in shelter with a roof overhead was superior to the uncertainty of where the next night would be spent.

A second unanticipated result of this study was the importance of sense of family to homeless adolescent males. It is documented that the primary cause of adolescent homelessness is family conflict (Abramovich, 2017; NCHCHC, 2016; OCFC, 2018). However, without exception, each participant spoke about the importance of family as a value. Although none of the participants shared details of the strife of their past, there were examples given of turmoil and dysfunction in their family of origin. The participants described the safety and security they realized in shelter as making them feel

like being in a family. They identified staff that made them feel like family and talked about staff substituting for mom and dad. The importance of learning manners and feeling respected, which should be part of family life, was shared with these adolescents in shelter. The results imply that some adolescent males arrived in a shelter with their definition of family and sensed what it would feel like to be part of one, even though they had not experienced it.

Another unanticipated result was the testimony of the participants that foundations laid during their time in shelter carried with them into adulthood. The impact of lessons they absorbed from their shelter experience made lifelong impressions. John read his first book which opened the world to him. He experienced plays and musical events at concert halls that he would never have attended. Today he is a business owner by gaining the skills he learned through his shelter experiences. Carter took advantage of recreational activities and experienced the feeling of people who would never give up on him. Michael learned skills he carried into his adult career. He knew the concept of cause and effect and the knowledge that all careers are open to you. All of these lessons he carried with him into his adult life, and he uses them in his most important role as a father. Keegan learned the importance of identifying what you need and asking for it. He learned to work with youth by meeting their needs, giving them space, and showing them respect and caring. The results of this study imply that staff in homeless shelters have the potential to create lifelong lessons for adolescent males.

Limitations

A qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis provides the opportunity to explore and interpret the experiences of adult males who were homeless as adolescents

and the staff behaviors they encountered when they entered a homeless shelter. The adult males who participated provided valuable information regarding their individual experiences with homelessness throughout their youth, and their relationship with homeless shelter staff. However, the following limitations of this study were identified.

The number of participants was quite small, although Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that IPA studies are typically small to enable detailed and full appreciation of each account. The four participants in this research experienced diverse backgrounds and circumstances that provided plenty of data for the study. However, their experiences were primarily limited to upstate New York, although one participant's youthful experiences were out of state. The race and age of the participants were diverse, which provides a variety of perspectives, however there are other age groups and races that were not represented. These circumstances potentially limit the generalizability of the study.

Interviews were conducted over a virtual Zoom platform, as required by the institution due to COVID-19, which limited the personal interaction between researcher and participant. This virtual collection of data diminished the ability to consider body language, ensure full attention from the participant, and gain the full essence of participant's personality. It decreased the rapport building that is facilitated in a face-to-face interview. It also provided challenges with accuracy of transcription and potential technological challenges. One interview had to be completely redone due to a faulty recording process. The second interview recording was not as lengthy and rich as the first.

Finally, the most challenging facet of this study was recruiting participants. Finding viable participants proved to be far more arduous than anticipated. The first

criteria included adult males who had entered emergency shelters as homeless youth. All

the certified emergency shelters outside of New York City in New York State were

contacted to recruit previous residents of their shelters. Finding that most of these shelters

did not have a mechanism to keep in contact with the alumni of their programs, the field

was expanded to include numerous other not-for-profits and individuals with experience

with homeless youth populations. Although several individuals were found, many did not

meet one of the criteria; usually they had not entered a shelter while they were a homeless

youth. The criteria were expanded to include TLPs with emergency crisis shelters to

assist in recruiting the minimum number of participants. This change expanded the focus

of the research, altering the original intent of only studying emergency shelters. The

delay prolonged the recruitment of participants, which impacted the time frame for the

collection of data and the research analysis. It also resulted in four participants rather than

the six which was initially desired for the study.

Recommendations

The findings of this study provide several recommendations for future research,

improved policy and procedure, advancements in professional practice and executive

leadership, and promotion of social justice.

Future Research

This study found that the participants experienced many trials, challenges, and

disappointments, but they learned how to survive and eventually thrive. Therefore, a

topic for further research is to better understand resiliency in homeless adolescent males,

defining resiliency, and identifying how it impacts the further success of this population.

Numerous studies have been done on the nature of resiliency in youth, but not

specifically homeless adolescent males. Investigating resiliency and its presence in homeless adolescent males could identify traits that individuals are born with or develop that are used to transcend their circumstances.

Additional research would also be valuable in studying the homeless adolescents who do not choose to enter a shelter and investigate the reasons why they do not. In recruiting participants for this research several adult males were contacted who did not meet the criteria because they had not entered a shelter and chose to stay on the streets. Their stories would also be valuable in finding out what barriers they identified that prevented them from entering a shelter. Other valuable research would be focusing on adult males who had exited homeless shelters less than 5 years ago. This research would provide more recent data. The resulting information would lend itself to changing policies, procedures, and marketing of homeless shelters.

This context of this research was primarily on upstate New York with one participant's experience being in a neighboring New England state. An expanded study to include New York City or other states and parts of the country would be interesting to investigate homeless shelter staff's behaviors in other locations. Differences in regulations, policies, and practices could impact the results and provide meaningful data.

Future research may also include a similar study with a focus on homeless adolescent females. There is an opportunity to explore this population which could help inform leaders of differing strategies for communicating and connecting with homeless adolescent females. Determining the need for separate gender-based shelters or promotion of coed shelters could be a valuable outcome. There is significant discussion

of gender issues in the field, but research has not kept up with the need to examine disparities and preferred practices.

Policy and Procedure

The results of this study support that rules and regulations must be in place at homeless shelters since the participants viewed them as a demonstration of concern and security. Safety, rules, and accountability came up often as signs of a caring family. All participants agreed that rules, curfews, and consequences were necessary and almost welcome. The participants started in homes that did not demonstrate caring and concern by placing restrictions on the youth. Adhering to rules assisted them in learning values, responsibility, and accountability. When staff presented the shelter rules in a clear manner, the participants described their experience as being part of something, gaining respect for the shelter, and learning the value of good behavior.

At the time of this writing, there is not a mechanism for consistent rules at homeless shelters. New York State homeless shelters that are certified by OCFS must include their rules in their application and policy manual, but clear practices are not in place to thoroughly guide sharing them with youth. This recommendation calls for the continuance of fair rules and further suggests regulations be transparent and explained to the youth upon entry and throughout their stay. The participants argued that youth will adhere to rules more closely if they are explained to them and they are meaningful. The well-being of youth is paramount and must be ensured by shelter policy. Background checks and restrictions in hiring staff must be continued for the protection of the youth. The participants lacked safety on the streets and expressed their desire to stay in a shelter that felt secure.

Further recommendations include creating a credential for staff working in homeless adolescent shelters. A certification would ensure that staff in these positions would be knowledgeable, trained, and accomplished in the behaviors identified by the participants as pertinent to youth remaining in shelter. Three of the themes that emerged from this research, answering the first research question, identify behaviors that homeless adolescent males value that encourage them to remain in shelter. Developing a credential that would include specific strategies for dealing with the stigmas and trauma realized by homeless youth would elevate the service delivery system. The homeless shelter staff could earn adequate compensation and career enhancement by completing competency-based training.

Previous research conducted by Mullen and Leginski (2010) reported that, unlike other job clusters, there are no competencies applicable in the homeless workforce. They also suggest the development of defined advancement and a certification for mastery of skills (Mullen & Leginski, 2010). Although Mullen and Leginski (2010) conducted their research over 10 years ago, their suggested strategies and findings still hold true. Paat et al. (2021) concurred with their findings stating that working with the homeless population is challenging, draining, undervalued, and lacks qualified professionals.

The recommended certification could mirror other certifications like the Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC) or replicate a microcredential as offered in community colleges. The microcredential may involve as few as 13 credits and enable students to demonstrate competencies in several key areas. Topics included in the training would be trauma-informed care, advanced communication skills, inclusion, non-judgmental approach, life coaching, and persistent engagement.

Trust building and mentoring would also be addressed. This credentialing would require several courses, internships, shadowing, and competency assessment. The information gathered in this study identified the behaviors that the participants found to be critical for staff while working with homeless adolescent males. Such a credential would allow for staff to be fully trained, allowing for advancement potential and higher salary grades.

The participants were clear in sharing the necessity for staff members to be consistent and persistent. The participants' experiences often included leaving a shelter multiple times and later wanting to return. They must be welcomed back and given chance after chance until some trust is built between them and shelter staff. Staff exhibiting patience and willingness to keep trying to reach out to the participants represented a turning point for them. Previous studies show that staff exhibiting patience in reaching out to homeless youth and consistency in their efforts, may assist in overcoming resistance to receiving services (Charturvedi, 2016). The policy recommendation is to ensure that shelter programs do not place a cap on the number of times youth can return. Homeless shelters should be open to youth returning numerous times unless they are exhibiting dangerous behaviors to themselves or others. In this study participants stated that there was always one more time staff reached out to them, or allowed them to return to shelter, that made a difference in their trajectory.

The results of this study demonstrate the lifelong benefits of exposing the participants to numerous cultural events, recreational experiences, and assistance with resources to proceed with major life events. It is important that carefully structured plans for participation in cultural and recreational events be established and followed at all homeless shelters. Funding for homeless adolescent shelters should include dollars

earmarked specifically to support assistance with major life events and attendance at various cultural activities for these adolescents. Procedures for both planning and applying for targeted funding should be outlined for homeless shelters in support of recreational, cultural, and life events.

Executive Leadership and Professional Practice

The results of this study suggest that implementing exemplary leadership practices to produce a highly engaged workforce is necessary to improve outcomes for homeless adolescent males. The first three themes that emerged identify the behaviors of staff that are significant in connecting with homeless adolescent males. The participants of this study outlined qualities including communication skills, reflective listening, patience, consistency, and persistence necessary to connect with them as homeless youth. Executive leaders of organizations that operate homeless shelters can make great strides by creating job descriptions that outline the desired characteristics to perform this job effectively. Detailed characteristics of this type are not typically part of direct service staff requirements (CHRON, 2020).

Executive leaders of homeless shelters must be intentional regarding the recruiting, interviewing, and screening process to hire the best pool of individuals to fill these staff roles. Too often the quick need to hire results in selecting individuals who have minimum qualifications and will work for a low wage. The urgent need for 24-hour coverage at homeless shelters sometimes preempts the desire for compassionate, engaged, knowledgeable staff on all shifts. Previous research supports that basic knowledge about the population being served, high standards of care, and specific

competencies are desirable in staff working with the homeless youth population (Mullen & Leginski, 2010; Olivet et al., 2009).

Executive leaders must establish hiring practices that are strengthened and improved to recruit the best staff for these important roles. Gwadz et al. (2019) stated that high quality agencies that serve the homeless population adhere to established goals and philosophies at all levels of the organization. Exemplary onboarding practices provided by leaders of agencies operating homeless shelters should follow strong recruiting efforts. The recommendation is that new staff are trained at the outset on knowledge specific to the homeless youth population. They should be well-versed on strategies and best practices for working with this marginalized population. New staff should shadow seasoned staff members and become familiar with the layout of the shelter and the rules. If credentialling of this job group becomes established, staff hired without the certification should be expected to obtain it within an identified period of time. The responsibility for these enhanced practices fall on the leadership team of the organization.

Leaders are in a position to advocate for the changes in policy that include implementation of a credentialed position. Executive leadership in agencies operating homeless shelters in New York State should express their support to the OCFS to create a credential similar to CASAC. The result would lead to employing individuals who have been educated and trained in the behaviors that participants of this study identified as critical. It would support higher salaries for these positions and provide opportunities for career development and advancement as certification milestones are reached. Governing agencies are more likely to listen and comply when leaders in the field support change.

Leaders of homeless shelters must provide support and guidance to staff members for developing these competencies, renewing their knowledge, and easing the effects of burnout in this field. It is extremely important in this field for executive leaders to provide ongoing coaching to their staff and provide periodic updated training to safeguard against job stress and fatigue. Practice should be put in place for rotating long-term employees out of direct service positions to renew and recharge. The study participants spoke about the negative effects of staff left in difficult positions for too long. Jaded views of new youth entering shelter was the result of experiencing too much hurt and disappointment with previous residents, which effected the staff's ability to be objective in their interactions. Williams (2014) claimed that leaders in these settings need training themselves in exemplary practices deepening their own knowledge to provide the support needed to improve staff engagement and retention.

The participants articulated the desire for a more focused intake process. Some of the participants stated that they were given unnecessary medications because correct information was not gathered. Strengthening the intake would assist in identifying core reasons for the participants' homelessness which would lead to more effective service provision. Although OCFS prescribes elements of the necessary intake process, it does not appear to be adhered to closely according to participants in this study. The recommendation is for leaders in the field to create a streamlined, but focused intake that uncovers causes for homelessness and presenting health issues.

At times staff in these settings may guard against becoming too much like family to the adolescent males that enter shelter. The theme, create a sense of family, that emerged from the data collection, shows that the participants value any circumstances

that gave them the sense of family. The recommendation is for leaders to prepare

guidelines for staff to practice the positive relationships found in the family unit. Shared

responsibility, chores, and consequences for actions need to be modeled for these youth

who have not experienced these situations in their family of origin. A shelter that is

homelike in size, setting, and structure is preferred. Guidelines that include plans for

meals to be eaten together, support given to access resources, and assistance with job

seeking skills add are experiences attributed to the family. The participants of this study

reinforced the benefits of creating a sense of family.

The participants in the study all claimed that repeated interactions were necessary

to gain connectedness and build trust with homeless shelter staff. Therefore, a

recommendation is that the practice of patience needs to continue with homeless

adolescent males to establish an environment of safety and trust. In working with

homeless adolescent males, the dependability of consistent interactions are more

important than with coed or female populations. These behaviors lead to connectedness

and homeless adolescent males remaining in shelter.

Promoting Social Justice

Social Justice is defined as an effort to create and sustain a society where each

person and all groups are valued and work to eliminate systems that devalue dignity and

humanity (Central Connecticut State University, 2022). The homelessness of adolescent

males is a social justice issue because living on the street without basic needs met and

being vulnerable to numerous dangers does not represent a society that values its youth.

Everyone deserves basic human rights, particularly vulnerable youth. As long as there are

any homeless youth navigating the dangers of living on the street it is a social justice

issue. Making strides to improve services that will change this trajectory and decrease the number of youth on the street should be a societal goal. Knowledge that can be gained to improve the behaviors of homeless shelter staff which encourage youth to remain in shelter longer will allow youth to take advantage of more services resulting in a positive impact on youth.

An additional recommendation relating to breaking the cycle of homelessness is to provide greater understanding and education to homeless youth on family and parenting. Learning about attachment theory and its impact on feelings of secure attachment in infancy and the ensuing relevance to adolescent and adult relationships is significant in parenting. National statistics show that the majority of youth identify challenges and strife in their family unit as the primary reason for becoming homeless (NCSL, 2019; NHCHC, 2016). If these same homeless youth can learn strategies to develop secure attachments when they have children of their own, build strong family skills, and learn positive family communication and relationships during their time in shelter, perhaps the cycle of homelessness could be broken and a path to decreased homelessness in youth be paved.

Finding that the participants remained in shelter despite discouraging behaviors of staff urges a shift in services towards expanding outreach programs. The results of the study found that if the participants came to a shelter and left multiple times, they returned because their basic needs were being met. Therefore, the goal is to inform homeless youth about the existence of homeless shelters and recruit them to come into shelter initially. The stigma that exists regarding shelters has to be addressed and marketing should be developed that is appealing to youth. To create change in this social justice

problem, funding, efforts, and operational strategies must shift towards intense street outreach and targeted marketing of homeless shelters to adolescent males.

Conclusion

The number of youth who experience homelessness every night in the United States is staggering. Although these numbers are difficult to collect due to the transient nature of the population, reports say that one in 10 young adults ages 18-25 and at least one in 30 adolescents between ages 13-17 experience some form of homelessness over a year (NCSL, 2019). Although these youth report familial conflicts as the primary contributor to their homelessness and their home lives are not safe, living on the streets leaves adolescents vulnerable to multiple threats including victimization, exploitation, and even increased morbidity (Gwadz et al., 2018; NCSL, 2019; OCFS, 2018; Paat et al., 2021). A response to this social justice concern has been the development of specialized settings in the United States over the past few decades centered on youth-focused programs for runaway and homeless youth (Gwadz et al., 2019). Although these settings exist, due to the trauma of their past experiences, homeless youth have developed fear and distrust which impacts their willingness to access services (Gwadz et al., 2018).

The purpose of this study was to explore the behaviors of homeless shelter staff that impact adolescents and encourage them to stay in shelter or result in them leaving shelter. Studies show that homeless adolescents' first connection with services may be in homeless shelters (Slesnick et al., 2016). The connection and sense of attachment formed with staff may be crucial in them accessing services (Slesnick et al., 2016). Minimal research has been found on the factors that initiate and sustain connectedness between homeless youth and shelter staff. Therefore, this research provides a new understanding

of the staff behaviors that promote connectedness with homeless adolescent males who enter shelters.

The theory that framed this research was Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory, which states that humans are biologically driven to pursue relationships that create security (Shumaker et al., 2009). He further claimed that relationships which occur through reciprocal interactions are the basis for expectations in relationships later in life (Cassidy et al., 2013). When addressing the needs of homeless adolescents, understanding must be viewed through the lens of the attachment pattern they have developed (Heineman, 2010). This study showed that relationships formed through reciprocal interactions were paramount in the participants perceiving security and remaining in shelter. The first theme, authentic relationships and the third theme, create a sense of family, reflect the importance of attachment patterns developed in infancy that linger into adolescence. The participants in the study showed the need for connectedness and a sense of family that was lacking in their family of origin. Based on attachment theory, the hesitancy participants demonstrated in building trust most likely reflected the insecure attachment patterns developed in infancy.

A qualitative methodological approach was used to answer the call to identify shelter staff behaviors that recognize the critical importance of this theory. An interpretive phenomenological analysis set out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do adult males who have experienced contact with homeless shelters as adolescents describe behaviors of shelter staff which resulted in remaining in the shelter?

2. From the perspective of adult males who have experienced homelessness as adolescents, what behaviors of homeless shelter staff resulted in adolescent males not remaining in the homeless shelter?

Participants included four adult males who had been homeless as adolescents and accessed at least one homeless shelter. They were recruited through certified homeless shelters, numerous not-for-profit organizations, and individuals who work with this population. A semi-structured interview following an interview protocol was used to gather information. The data was carefully analyzed with strict adherence to the six-step interpretive phenomenological analysis as outlined by Smith et al. (2009).

The results of this interpretive phenomenological study were categorized into four themes that gain understanding on the behaviors of shelter staff and their relationship with homeless adolescent youth. The first theme was authentic relationships and identified the characteristics of shelter staff that demonstrate authenticity in their interactions with homeless youth. Reflective listening, being present, nonjudgmental attitudes, building trust, and demonstrating caring were identified as important to youth in connecting with staff and remaining in shelter.

Theme 2 was life coach and related to the staff's involvement with recreational activities, obtaining resources for the youth, teaching life skills, and planning cultural events that lead to new experiences for the youth. The third theme is creating a sense of family. This theme relates to the staff's ability to substitute for the lost family unit of the youth, as well as creating a sense of safety and belonging for them. Finally, Theme 4 was enduring adversity in shelter, which described behaviors of staff that discourage youth from remaining in shelter. This theme outlined the destructive behaviors of abuse or

neglect that the staff may display. The unexpected finding was that youth usually remain in shelter despite these negative behaviors since their alternative is being back on the street. They identify survival and access to basic needs as being preferable to street life.

The results of this research support and expand on current research and provide suggestions for improved practice, enhanced policy making and impact on social justice. The result of this study expands scholarly knowledge on the concept of mentorships. Deutsch et al. (2020) reported that an important adult figure or natural mentor plays a significant role in the positive development of youth. The findings of this research concur that each participant identified at least one significant staff member who made a difference in the trajectory of their future.

The results of this study support and advance the findings of previous research that identifies the aspects of communication that improves connectedness with homeless youth. Research shows that compassionate communication, being present, and trust demonstrate care and connectedness to homeless youth (Chaturvedi, 2016; Huffman, 2017; Stewart et al., 2010). This study adds the concepts of persistence and patience to the factors that the participants felt were vital in staff behaviors. These traits relate to repeating positive communication patterns over and over to build trust with marginalized youth who have not experienced trusting relationships in the past.

The recommendations from this study provide suggestions for changes in policy and procedures, enhancement of professional practice and executive leadership, and for promoting social justice. The policies currently in place for rules and regulations in certified shelters were supported by this study. The suggestion is to initiate a practice of informing youth about the regulations and why they are in place. Further

recommendations for policy changes include the ability for youth to return countless times to shelter as long as they are not a danger to themselves or others. The results of this study show that the chances that staff gave them over and over were pertinent to all of the participants. Trust is difficult to build, and it takes providing traumatized youth with consistency and patience to build that trust. These are the types of behaviors that staff need to exhibit to homeless youth for them to remain in shelter.

Funding opportunities for shelters must include specific budgets for recreation, resources, and cultural events which were found to be impactful in lifelong changes for the participants. A formal credentialing for homeless shelter staff should be developed similar to CASAC for addiction counseling. Current direct care staff in homeless shelters are typically recruited with a minimum of a high school education. Homeless shelters may employ a case manager and a house manager who are required to have bachelor's degrees and human services experience; however, they are not required to know the specifics of working with the homeless population. The needs of this population are unique and the best practices for working with them must be established and taught.

The overall findings of this study provide information for executive leaders to lead change, enhance current practice, and support their staff in homeless shelters. As leaders, they must advocate to the governing agency in New York State, the OCFS, to initiate a credentialing structure for staff of homeless shelters. The leaders of homeless shelters can take the findings of this study to augment job descriptions for staff of homeless shelters to include the communication skills and behaviors found to be effective in connecting with homeless youth. Most recruitment tools are general, require minimal degrees and do not specify characteristics identified by the participants in this study. It is

suggested that executive leaders elevate their support of shelter staff to include coaching, reviewing cases, and providing a mechanism for long-term employees to rotate out and have responsibilities other than direct service when they need respite prior to burnout.

Lastly, in promoting social justice, which pertains to a society's efforts to promote human rights and dignity to all, the results of this study suggest education and training to homeless youth. While in shelter if homeless youth are versed on the implications of the attachment theory and its impact on future relationships, they may be able to break the cycle found in their family of origin of abuse and dysfunction. If services provided to these youth include parenting skills and strategies for practicing secure attachment with their future children, perhaps an impact could be made to decrease the number of homeless youth in the future.

The findings of this study show, that despite negative behaviors of some shelter staff, the attraction of basic needs and survival were enough for homeless youth to endure these behaviors and remain in shelter. This was an unexpected finding but vital in determining the future of policy, procedure, and services provided to homeless adolescents. The indication is that policy makers should focus funding and strategies on outreach efforts and marketing of shelters to homeless adolescent males. This study shows that if some male adolescent youth enter a shelter, they may remain despite discouraging behaviors from staff. Marketing efforts are required to dispel the stigma homeless shelters may have and make them appealing to adolescent males. Based on the results of this study, positive behaviors of the staff, developed through targeted hiring and enhanced training, may promote connectedness, encouraging increased lengths of stay

and access to additional services, resulting in favorable outcomes for homeless adolescent

males.

References

Abramovich, A. (2017). Understanding how policy and culture create oppressive conditions for LGBTQ2S youth in the shelter system. *Journal of Homosexuality, 64*(110), 1484–1501. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1244449

Abramovich, A., Pang, N., Moss, A., Logie, C. H., Chaiton, M., Kidd, S. A., & Hamilton, H. A. (2021). Investigating the impacts of COVID-19 among LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness. *PLoS ONE, 16*(9), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257693

Ainsworth, M. D. (1985). Patterns of attachment. *The Clinical Psychologist, 38*(2), 27–29. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-25025-001

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. N. (2015). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation* (1st ed.). Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203758045

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies, 5*(2), 9–19. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9

Altena, A. M., Brilleslijper-Kater, S. N., & Wolf, J. R. L. M. (2010). Effective interventions for homeless youth: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 38*(6), 637–645. https:/doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2010.02.017

Aviles, A. M., McCallops, K., Hussain, M., Highberger, J., Ryding, R., Merriman-Nai, S., & May, H. (2020). Using youth risk behavior survey data to analyze housing instability among Delaware public school students. *Journal of Children and Poverty, 26*(2), 215–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2020.1802649

Anthony, E. R., & Fischer, R. L. (2016). Surveying homeless and unstably housed youth: Methodological considerations when estimating the prevalence and characteristics of the population. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 97*(4), 330–335. https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.2016.97.40

Bartle-Haring, S., Slesnick, N., Collins, J., Erdem, G., & Buettner, C. (2012). The utility of mentoring homeless adolescents: A pilot study. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 38*(4), 350–358. https://doi.org/10.3109/00952990.2011.643985

Blehar, M. C., Lieberman, A. F., & Ainsworth, M. D. (1977). Early face-to-face interaction and its relation to later infant-mother attachment. *Child Development*, *48*(1), 182–194. https://doi.org/10.2307/1128897

Boel-Studt, S., Schelbe, L., Hansen, M. D., & Tobia, L. (2018). Increasing youth engagement in residential group care: A mixed method pilot study of a youth-guide incentive program. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, *47*, 863–880. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-018-9465-y

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Volume I. Attachment.* Basic Books.

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss. Volume II. Separation: Anxiety and anger.* Basic Books.

Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental Psychology*, *28*(5), 759–775. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.28.5.759

Cassidy, J., Jones, J. D., & Shaver, P. R. (2013). Contributions of attachment theory and research: A framework for future research, translation, and policy. *Developmental Psychopathology*, *25*(4), 1415–1434. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579413000692

Central Connecticut State University, John Lewis Institute of Social Justice. (2022). *Our definition of social justice.* https://www.ccsu.edu/johnlewisinstitute/terminology.html

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. (2019). *Youth homelessness.* https://www.chapinhall.org/impact_area/youth-homelessness/

Chaturvedi, S. (2016). Accessing psychological therapies: Homeless young people's views on barriers and facilitators. *Counseling and Psychotherapy Research*, *16*(1), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12058

Collins, J. (2005). *Good to great and the social sectors*. Jim Collins.

Coughlin, C. G., Sandel, M., & Stewart, A. M. (2020). Homelessness, children, and COVID-19: A looming crisis. *Pediatrics*, *146*(2), 7–11. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2020-1408

Covenant House. (2021). *The issues.* https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-teen-issues/statistics

Crawford, M. (2018). Runaway sexual minority youth: Comparative analysis using Bronfenbrenner and Foucault. *Theory in Action*, *11*(2), 51–71. https://doi.org/10.3798/tia.1937-0237.1810

Creswell, J. W. (2016). Introducing qualitative designs skill. In J. W. Creswell, *30 Essential skills for the qualitative researcher* (1st ed., pp. 257–270). SAGE Publications Inc.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

CHRON. (2020, June 22). *Homeless job descriptions.* https://work.chron.com/homeless-shelter-job-descriptions-11804.html

Cunningham, K. A. (2014). A question of priorities: A critical investigation of the McKinney-Vento Act. *Critical Questions in Education*, *5*(3), 218–232. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1046706.pdf

Cunningham, W. S., Duffee, D. E., Huan, Y., Steinke, C. M., & Naccarato, T. (2008). On the meaning and measurement of engagement in youth residential treatment centers. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *19*(1), 63–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731508314505

Dang, M. T., & Miller, E. (2013). Characteristics of natural mentoring relationships from the perspectives of homeless youth. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *26*(4), 246–253. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12038

Davies, B. R., & Allen, N. B. (2017). Trauma and homelessness in youth: Psychopathology and intervention. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *54*(2017), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2017.03.005

Davis, R. (2021, March 26). Study highlights impacts of COVID-19 on youth homelessness across the US. *Invisible People.* https://invisiblepeople.tv/study-highlights-impacts-of-covid-19-on-youth-homelessness-across-the-us/

Deutsch, N. L., Mauer, V. A., Johnson, H.E., Grabowska, A. A., & Arbeit, M. R. (2020). "[My counselor] knows stuff about me, but [my natural mentor] actually knows me": Distinguishing characteristics of youth's natural mentoring relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*(April), 104–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104879

Ferguson, K. M., Bender, K., & Thompson, S. J. (2015). Gender, coping strategies, homelessness stressors, and income generation among homeless young adults in three cities. *Social Science & Medicine*, *135*(June)*,* 47–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.04.028

Fitton, V. A. (2012). Attachment theory: History, research, and practice. *Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*, *19*(1–2), 121–143.

Fraley, R. C. (2020). Resources: Attachment theory resources. *R. Chris Fraley.* http://labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/resources.html

Gauvin, G., Labelle, R., Daigle, M., Breton, J-J., & Houle, J. (2019). Coping, social support, and suicide attempts among homeless adolescents. *The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention*, *40*(6), 390–399. https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910/a000579

Gray, L. M., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., & Cook, K. (2020). Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. *The Qualitative Report*, *25*(5), 1292–1301. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss5/9

Gwadz, M., Freeman, R. M., Kutnick, A. H., Silverman E., Ritchie, A. S., Cleland, C. M., Leonard, N. R., Srinagesh, A., Powlovich, J., & Bolas, J. (2018). Do programs for runaway and homeless youth work? A qualitative exploration from the perspectives of youth clients in diverse settings. *Frontiers in Public Health, 6*(112), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2018.00112

Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Leonard, N. R., Kutnick, A., Silverman, E., Ritchie, A., Bolas, J., Cleland, S. M., Tabac, L., Hirsch, M., & Powlovich, J. (2019). Understanding organizations serving runaway and homeless youth: A multi-setting, multi-perspective qualitative exploration. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *36*(9), 201–217. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-018-563-3

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*(3), 511–524. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511

Hein, L. C. (2011). Survival strategies of male homeless adolescents. *Journal of American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, *17*(4), 274–282. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078390311407913

Heineman, T. V. (2010, June). *Relationships beget relationships: Why understanding attachment theory is crucial to program design for homeless youth.* California Homeless Youth Project. https://www.library.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/HYP-Report.pdf

Heinze, H. J., Jozwfowicz, D. M. H., Toro, P. A., & Blue, L. R. (2012). Reasons for homelessness: An empirical typology. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, *7*(1), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2011.643832

Heyman, J. C., White-Ryan, L., Kelly, P., Farmer, G. L., Leaman, T. L., & Davis, H. (2020). Voices about foster care: The value of trust. *Children and Youth Services Review, 113*(June), 1–16, Article 104991. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104991

Huffman, T. P. (2017). Compassionate communication, embodied aboutness, and homeless young adults. *Western Journal of Communications*, *81*(2), 149–167. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10570314.2016.1239272?journalCode=rwjc20

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(6), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1718

Kachingwe, O. N., Anderson, K., Houser, C., Fleishman, J. L., Novick, J. G., Phillips, D. R., & Aparicio, E. M. (2019). "She was there through the whole process:" Exploring how homeless youth access and select birth control. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *101*(June), 277–284. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.04.012

Keeshin, B. R., & Campbell, K. (2011). Screening homeless youth for histories of abuse: Prevalence, enduring effects, and interest in treatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *35*(6), 401–407. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.01.015

Kriukow, J. (2018, February 18). Validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Design.* https://drkriukow.com/validity-and-reliability-in-qualitative-research/

Leon, S. C., Bai, G. J., Fuller, A. K., Busching, M. (2015). Emergency shelter care utilization in child welfare: Who goes to shelter care? How long do they stay? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *86*(1), 49–60. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000102

Mendez, L. M. R., & Randle, C. A. (2020). Lifted: A thematic analysis of homeless adolescents' reflections on their lives since beginning a multifaceted, community-based intervention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *121*(February), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105891

Morton, M. H., Dworsky, A., Matjasko, J. L., Curry, S. R., Schlueter, D., Chavez, R., & Farrell, F. (2017). Prevalence and correlates of youth homelessness in the United States. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *62*(1), 14–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.10.006

Mullen, J., & Leginski, W. (2010). Building the capacity of the homeless service workforce. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal*, *3*(2010), 101–110. https://doi.org/10.2174/18749240010030201

National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2021). *State of homelessness: 2021 Edition.* Author. https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2021/

National Conference of State Legislators. (2019). *Youth homelessness overview.* Author. https://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/homeless-and-runaway-youth.aspx

National Health Care for the Homeless Council. (2016). *Engaging youth experiencing homelessness: Core practices & services.* Author. https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/engaging-youth-experiencing-homelessness.pdf

New York State Office of Children and Family Services. (2018). *Runaway & homeless youth annual report 2018.* Author. https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/rhy/assets/reports/RHY-Annual-Report-2018.pdf

Nilsson, S. F., Nordentoft, M., & Hjorthoj, C. (2019). Individual-level predictors for becoming homeless and exiting homelessness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Urban Health*, *96*, 741–750. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-019-00377-x

Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: An appropriate methodology for educational research? *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, *6*(1), 75–83. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v6i1.304

NYC Business. (2022). *Runaway and homeless youth shelter, operating certificate.* Author. https://www1.nyc.gov/nycbusiness/description/runaway-homeless-youth-shelter

O'Grady, B., & Gaetz, S. (2009). Street survival: A gendered analysis of youth homelessness in Toronto. In J. D. Hulchanski, P. Campsie, S. B. Y. Chau, S. W. Hwang, & E. Paradis (Eds.), *Finding home: Policy options for addressing homelessness in Canada* (Chapter 3.4). Cities Centre, University of Toronto. https://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/3.4%20OGrady%20and%20Gaetz%20-%20Street%20Survival.pdf

Olivet, J., McGraw, S., Grandin, M., & Bassuk, E. (2009). Staffing challenges and strategies for organizations serving individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, *37*(2), 226–238. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11414-009-9201-3

Owens, C. R., Codd, E. L., & Haskett, M. E. (2020). Risk-taking behaviors of homeless youth: Moderation by parental monitoring and social support. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, *26*(2), 237–251. https://doi.org/10.1080/10796126.2020.1834804

Paat, Y-F., Morales, J., Escajeda, A. I., & Tullius, R. (2021). Insights from the shelter: Homeless shelter workers' perceptions of homelessness and working with the homeless. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, *32*(3), 263–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2021.1969719

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal*, *20*(1), 7–14. doi:10.14691/CPPJ.20.1.7

Ratto, N., Doyle, A-B., & Markiewicz, D. (2016). Attachment with mother and adolescents' conflict with romantic partner or close friend. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *48*(1), 68–77. https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000031

SchoolHouse Connection. (2020, September 14). *The McKinney-Vento Act: Quick reference.* Author. https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/mckinney-vento-act

Shillington, A. M., Bousman, C. A., & Clapp, J. D. (2011). Characteristics of homeless youth attending two different youth drop-in centers. *Youth & Society*, *43*(1), 28–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X09351277

Shumaker, D. M., Deutsch, R. M., & Brenninkmeyer, L. (2009). How do I connect: Attachment issues in adolescence. *Journal of Child Custody*, *6*(1–2), 91–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/15379410902894866

Sieving, R. E., McRee, A-L., McMorris, B. J., Shlafer, R. J., Gower, A. L., Kapa, H. M., Beckman, K. J., Doty, J. L., Plowman, S. L., & Resnick, M. D. (2016). Youth-adult connectedness: A key protective factor for adolescent health. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, *52*(3), 275–278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2016.07.037

Slesnick, N., Feng, X., Guo, X., Brakenhoff, B., Carmona, J., Murnan, A., Cash, S., & McRee, A-L. (2016). A test of outreach and drop-in linkage versus shelter linkage for connecting homeless youth to services. *Society for Prevention Research, 17*(2016)*, 450–460. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0630-3

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis theory, method and research.* London. United Kingdom: SAGE

Sosa, S. I., Peek, S., Muhammad, S., Gonder, T., Cook, J., Bolton, J., & Parrish, M. S. (2015). Advocating for the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Act: The role of professional counselors. *Georgia School Counselors Association Journal*, *20*(1). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1072610.pdf

Stefanidis, N., Pennbridge, J., MacKenzie, R. G., & Pottharst, K. (1992). Runaway and homeless youth: The effects of attachment history on stabilization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *62*(3), 442–446. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0079343

Stewart, M., Reutter, L., Letourneau, N., Makwarimba, E., & Hungler, K. (2010). Supporting homeless youth: Perspectives and preferences. *Journal of Poverty*, *14*(2), 145–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/10875541003711631

Tyler, K. A., Schmitz, R. M., & Ray, C. M. (2017). Role of social environmental protective factors on anxiety and depressive symptoms among midwestern homeless youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *28*(1), 199–210. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12326

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2019, September). *RHY-HMIS Program manual.* https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/4448/rhy-program-hmis-manual/

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2021, November 23). *The challenges in counting and serving homeless populations.* Author. https://www.gao.gov/blog/challenges-counting-and-serving-homeless-populations

Van Dam, L., Smit, D., Wildschut, B., Branje, S. J. T., Rhodes, J. E., Assink, M., & Stams, G. J. J. M. (2018). Does natural mentoring matter? A multilevel meta-analysis on the association between natural mentoring and youth outcomes. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *62*(1–2), 203–220. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12248

Williams, V. D. (2014). *Leadership behavior practice patterns' relationship to employee work engagement in a nonprofit that supports the* [Doctoral dissertation, Peppperdine University]. Pepperdine Digital Commons. Theses and Dissertations. 425. https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1424&context=etd

Wiltz, T. (2017, July 7). A hidden population: Youth homelessness is on the rise. The *Pew*. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2017/07/07/a-hidden-population-youth-homelessness-is-on-the-rise

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I would like to thank you again for taking the time out of your schedule to participate in this interview as part of my research study. As I have mentioned before, this research focuses on the experiences of homeless adolescent males as they encounter staff in homeless adolescent residences and how the staff's behaviors connect with the adolescents and impact their decision to stay. The aim of this research is to better identify these behaviors from your experience as an adolescent.

The interview today will last approximately one hour during which time I will be asking you about your experience accessing and staying at homeless adolescent residences when you were an adolescent. I am interested in you and in hearing your story during that time in your life. The session will be recorded.

If at any time you wish to end the process or skip a question you may do so. If there is something you don't want to talk about you can just let me know and we will move on. I have already received your signed consent form which included permission to record. Do you have any questions about the consent form before we get started? (Discuss their questions). Please stop me at any time during the interview if you have questions.

Questions

The definition of connectedness used for this study refers to a feeling of belonging or being joined emotionally or socially with others.

Q1: Tell me about your first contact with a homeless adolescent residence when you were an adolescent.

Probe: How did you find out about it? How did you get there?

Q2: What can you recall about the first time you walked in the door of the homeless adolescent residence? What do you remember happening first?

Q3: Do you remember if you contacted a homeless adolescent residence more than once, or whether you contacted or stayed at more than one homeless adolescent residence?

Probe: How did your experience entering one program differ from another?

Q4: What do you remember about your interactions with the residences' staff?

Probe: Who did you meet? How did they greet you? What was your first impression? Would you describe the interactions as formal or informal? Describe any experiences that you remember from each time entering the homeless adolescent residence.

Q5: Some research suggests that when staff in homeless adolescent residences are nonjudgmental, understanding, caring, and can relate to adolescents, then youth are more likely to stay in the residence. What were some of the behaviors of the staff in the homeless adolescent residence you attended as a youth that may have impacted your decision to stay or leave that residence?

Probe: How would you describe the listening skills and attentiveness of the staff? In what ways did they establish trust? Can you recall a time when a staff member in the homeless adolescent residence demonstrated behaviors such as caring, understanding, or nonjudgmental?

Q6: What do you recall about the services that staff in the homeless adolescent residence offered or described?

Probe: What kind of services did the staff in the homeless adolescent residence offer that you found helpful or useful? What other kinds of services would have been helpful at that time?

Q7: What do you wish the staff in the homeless adolescent residence you experienced would do differently to encourage male youth to stay?

Q8: Is there anything else about connecting with the homeless adolescent residences' staff that you would like to share?

Thank you so much for your time today and for your assistance in this research. You have my contact information if you think of anything else you would like to share with me or if you have any further questions. I have your contact information, and with your permission, I will reach out to you if I need any clarification on anything you said today. Once again, thank you so much for your assistance in this research and sharing your story today.

Appendix B

IRB Approval

February 25, 2022

File No: 4222-021722-05

Denise Cavanaugh
St. John Fisher College

Dear Ms. Cavanaugh:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "Homeless Adolescent Males and Emergency Shelters: A study of Behaviors That Initiate Connectedness."

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at irb@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen Lynd-Balta

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

ELB: jdr