

Youth and Young Adult Homelessness

DEFINITION

Youth and young adult homelessness is the number of unaccompanied youth under age 18 who accessed emergency shelter without their families and the number of young adults ages 18 to 24, including young parents, who accessed emergency shelter.

SIGNIFICANCE

There are three primary causes of homelessness among youth and young adults – family conflict, residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements, and economic problems. Many youth run away from home due to abuse, strained family relationships, substance abuse by a family member, and/or parental neglect. While data collection efforts such as the *Voices of Youth Count* have estimated there to be approximately 700,000 homeless and runaway youth ages 13 to 17 and 3.5 million homeless young adults ages 18 to 25 in the U.S., the exact number is not known.^{1,2}

Youth may become homeless when they run away from or are discharged from the foster care system. National estimates find that one-third of young adults who had experienced homelessness had been in foster care. Youth who “age out” of foster care without permanent families are more likely to experience homelessness.^{3,4}

Youth who identify as lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, some of whom report being forced out of their homes by parents who disapprove of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTQ homeless youth experience greater levels of violence and physical and sexual exploitation than their heterosexual peers while on the streets and in shelters.^{5,6}

It can be difficult for homeless youth to obtain needed food, clothing, and shelter. To meet these basic needs, some turn to prostitution and/or selling drugs which can result in exploitation, arrest, assault, and/or contracting sexually transmitted infections.^{7,8}

Homelessness often has a negative impact on education, employment, and health outcomes for youth and young adults. Homeless youth are more likely than their peers to be chronically absent, face disciplinary actions, be held back, and drop out of school. They are more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, substance abuse, mental health problems, bullying, and suicide than youth with stable housing. Homeless youth often have trouble accessing health services because they may lack health insurance, information about their coverage, and/or parental consent for treatment. Black youth are almost three times as likely and Hispanic youth are almost two times as likely to experience homelessness as white youth.^{9,10,11,12}



Homeless Youth and Young Adults in Rhode Island

- ◆ In 2018, Rhode Island conducted a *Youth Point in Time Count* to assess the number and characteristics of Rhode Islanders ages 14 to 24 with experiences of current, former, or potential housing instability or homelessness. The *2018 Youth Point in Time Count* identified 173 youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 experiencing current, former, or potential housing instability, 67 of whom were currently homeless. Information was also collected on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, sexual orientation, unsafe conditions, pregnancy and parenting, and barriers to services.¹³
- ◆ During the 2019-2020 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 11 unaccompanied homeless youth living in doubled up situations or in shelters.¹⁴
- ◆ In 2020, 150 young adults ages 18 to 24 stayed at an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility, including 42 parenting youth, 31 unaccompanied youth, and 77 youth who were sheltered with their parents.¹⁵
- ◆ An additional 95 youth ages 13 to 17 received emergency shelter services with their families in Rhode Island in 2020.¹⁶
- ◆ Family Service of Rhode Island operates a Basic Center Program that is designed to meet the immediate needs of homeless and runaway youth. The program provides emergency host homes, food, clothing, and counseling services to youth up to age 18.¹⁷
- ◆ On December 31, 2020, there were 40 youth in the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families between the ages of 13 and 20 who were classified as absent from care, 18 females and 22 males. These youth were absent from either foster care or juvenile justice placements.¹⁸

References

^{1,7,9} Ingram, E. S., Bridgeland, J. M., Reed, B., & Atwell, M. (2016). *Hidden in plain sight: Homeless students in America's public schools*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises & Hart Research Associates.

^{2,3,8,10} Fernandes-Alcantara, A. L. (2019). *Runaway and homeless youth: Demographics and programs*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, March 1). What We Know About Youth and Young Adult Homelessness. Retrieved from www.aecf.org

^{5,11} *Student homelessness: Lessons from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*. (2019). Washington, DC: SchoolHouse Connection.

(continued on page 183)