

The Role of Supportive Housing in Homeless Children's Well-Being: An Investigation of Educational Outcomes

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effect of family supportive housing service receipt on homeless children's educational well-being.¹

METHODS

Using Minn-LInK data, three-year longitudinal data sets (2007-2009) were developed and comparison cohorts were created using homeless/highly mobile codes in educational records. A longitudinal analysis of four cohort groups (Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5, and Grade 6) was conducted. Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) analysis was used to determine whether the supportive housing service group and its matched comparison group's educational outcomes were changing at different rates over the investigation period (see Table 1 for descriptive cohort information).

HOMELESS CHILDREN

Children who experience homelessness also experience a myriad of negative encounters with educational systems, including absenteeism (Larson & Meehan, 2009), high rates of mobility (Rafferty et al., 2004), grade repetition (Rafferty et al., 2004), and the need for special education services (Masten et al, 1997), which may all contribute to poor academic performance (Rafferty et al., 2004; Obradovic et al., 2007).

Fortunately, a myriad of services is available to assist families struggling with homelessness. Available services follow a continuum of care ranging from emergency shelters to transitional housing to permanent supportive housing. Supportive housing programs focus on homeless families with significant barriers (e.g., health, disabilities, history of abuse, and violence) to housing stability and long histories of homelessness. Supportive housing programs provide families with social services, such as job and life skills training, alcohol and drug abuse programs, and case management in conjunction with permanent housing.

Thirty-four percent of Minnesota's homeless population is comprised of children in families (Wilder Research, 2010), yet little is known about children's experiences of homelessness related to child well-being over time. The current understanding of homeless children's encounters with educational systems is driven by studies exploring the experience or "state" of homelessness rather than change in academic experience longitudinally. Even less is known about how children fair while receiving supportive housing services as most research focuses

on adult (e.g., employment) or family-level (e.g., housing stability) outcomes.

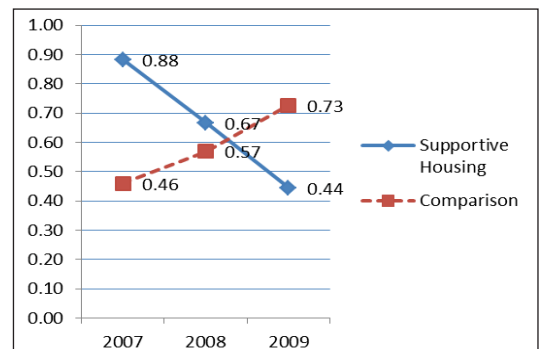
Table 1. Descriptive information

	Sup. Housing N	Percent	Comparison N	Percent
Cohort 1 [Grade 3]	19	27.1	89	26
Cohort 2 [Grade 4]	20	28.6	83	24.3
Cohort 3 [Grade 5]	18	25.7	95	27.8
Cohort 4 [Grade 6]	13	18.6	75	21.9
Total	70	100	342	100

FINDINGS

School Mobility. Results revealed a general trend of decreasing school mobility over time for students receiving supportive housing services. However, school mobility in the comparison group increased over time for all cohorts. The difference between changes in the supportive housing cohorts' and comparison cohorts' school mobility rates over time reached significance for Grade 5 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. School Mobility: Grade 5



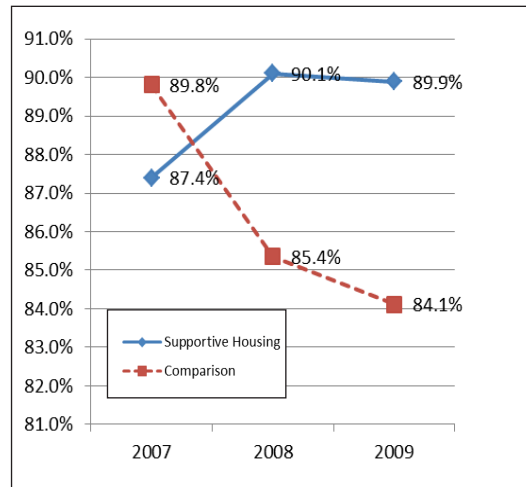
¹The report, from which this brief is taken, investigated children's educational well-being and involvement in child protection.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Positive effects of supportive housing services were found in school mobility, school attendance, and math achievement even though levels of significance were not reached for all cohort groups/grades.
- Additionally, the number of students with an IEP increased over the years for students receiving supportive housing services, possibly suggesting that existing disabilities are being diagnosed due to increased attendance, reduced school mobility, or educational supportive advocacy by family case workers within supportive housing programs.
- Overall, supportive housing appears to have positive effects on children's educational well-being, especially in areas directly affected by housing service receipt, such as school mobility, and to a lesser extent, attendance. Future research may further investigate this issue using larger samples and varying methodologies.
- Though academic achievement was higher for children receiving supportive housing services than for children in the comparison group, proficiency rates in standardized testing remain low.
- Given these findings, it seems warranted to maintain or increase funding of supportive housing programs to meet the needs of homeless children. Policy-makers and service providers may wish to consider new approaches or partnerships for supporting homeless children's academic needs.

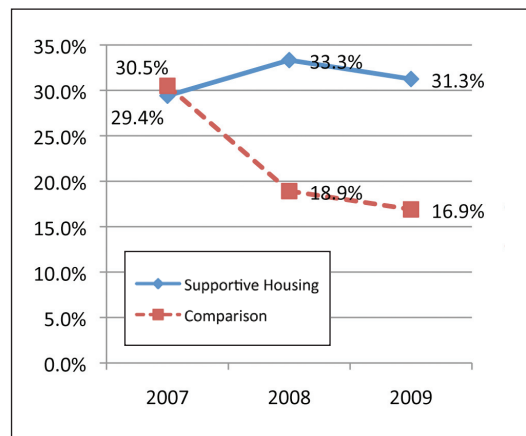
Attendance. The Supportive Housing cohorts' attendance rates were generally higher than those of the comparison cohorts. Results of GEE analysis revealed changes in the Supportive Housing group's attendance rate over time was significantly different from its comparison group in Grade 6 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attendance: Grade 6



Academic Achievement. A significant difference among cohort groups was found for proficiency on the MCA II-Math for Grade 4 (see Figure 3). Children receiving supportive housing services maintained proficiency over time whereas the proficiency of children in the comparison group decreased over time.

Figure 3. Percent of students proficient in MCA II-Math: Grade 4



Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The number of students with an IEP in the supportive housing group increased at a much higher rate than that in the comparison group though the analysis did not reach a level of standard significance.

LIMITATIONS

Small sample sizes in each cohort group limit the power to detect small differences and to identify possible mediation that might cause an indirect effect on the observed relationships. Additionally, the history of homeless children in the comparison group was only available in 2008 and 2009. It is unknown whether these children were homeless in 2007. It is also unknown what services, if any, children in the comparison group received.

REFERENCES

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For the original full report and complete list of references, visit the CASCW web site at <http://cascw.umn.edu> and follow the link to Minn-LInK.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is a resource for child welfare professionals, students, faculty, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. Minn-LInK is a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well being in Minnesota using state administrative data from multiple agencies.

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