

Emergency Housing, Transitional Housing, and Child Welfare in the Twin-Cities Metro

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-LINK Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue we were interested in understanding how emergency/transitional housing use and child protective service (CPS) involvement were related for children living in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. We aimed to identify where to best invest efforts to mitigate risk for children's involvement with both systems, improve school attendance, and decrease school mobility. Overall, emergency/transitional housing use and CPS involvement led to poorer school attendance and increased school mobility. Children were 1.9 times more likely to experience CPS involvement if they experienced emergency/transitional housing in that same month, and 1.6 times more likely if they experienced it in the month prior. Children were 0.3 times less likely to experience emergency/transitional housing if they experienced CPS in the month prior.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. This study found that children entering emergency shelters also tend to experience involvement with child protective services in the same month they enter the shelter. What factors do you think are leading to concurrent involvement in these two systems? Do you find that you are usually aware of the other systems in which families are involved? What resources might you offer to help families access other supportive systems, such as shelter? In what ways you would like to see cross system collaboration improved? What might your role in this be?
2. Do you think that some families may not seek out housing assistance for fear of being reported to CPS? How might services be altered to reduce this concern and better support children and families that access housing assistance?
3. This study found that children who experience both child protective service involvement and emergency/transitional housing often experience lower school attendance and higher school mobility. Given that lower school attendance and school mobility can ultimately hinder children's academic success, what are some of the existing practices in place to mitigate this risk? Are there additional approaches that you believe you or the larger system could implement to help address this concern?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. The policies and supports around housing assistance may need improvement to help reduce child protective service involvement and increase school engagement. What does your state and local policy look like in terms of availability of housing assistance? How may entering transitional or emergency housing differ from permanent supportive housing or receiving housing subsidies/rental assistance? How can we advocate for housing supports for children and their families?
2. How do the current systems and structure of education and human service systems facilitate or hinder cross-system collaboration? Are there additional or alternative ways to facilitate growth in knowledge about how to help families? How can we change policies or procedures to better serve the needs of families experiencing crisis?
3. What prevention and early intervention services are available to families experiencing homelessness in your state and in your organization to mitigate risks for housing instability, maltreatment, and poor educational stability and achievement? What services are needed but not available? What kinds of policies and resources are needed to develop and implement these services?