

Hidden Homelessness

Refugees and Unstable housing in the Twin cities



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C. David Hollister, Lisa Thornquist, Jennifer Simmelink, Hyojin Im, Hoa Nguyen

School of Social Work & Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare

(In collaboration with Hennepin County & Heading Home Hennepin, MN Council of Churches, Lutheran Social Services, World Relief, and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs)

Background

Facts about refugees & immigrants and housing in Minnesota

- ❑ The United States receives more refugees than all other resettlement countries combined. Around 2.5 million refugees has arrived in United States since 1975. (UNHCR, 2002)
- ❑ There are approximately 70,500 refugees resettled in Minnesota currently. At least 500 refugees moving to Minnesota from other states every year; the number moving out is unknown (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2007).
- ❑ Refugees and immigrants face many barriers in securing stable housing and are at greater risk of homelessness (Engstrom & Okamura, 2007; Schmitz, Jacobus, Stakeman, Valenzuela, & Sprankel, 2003)
- ❑ Refugees who are “precariously housed” are in danger of losing their home but they do not meet the traditional definition of “homelessness”, making them ineligible for assistance in most housing programs.

Research questions

- Explore the unstable housing experience among refugees and immigrants among 4 ethnic groups (Somalia, Liberian, Hmong, and Karen) in the Twin cities:
- When do they become homeless or precariously housed?
 - How long is the duration of the unstable situation?
 - Which ethnic sub-groups experience homelessness or precarious housing the most? The least?
 - What coping strategies are used to deal with this issue?
 - What is the effect of the living situation on the family? On children’s well-being? On children’s education?
 - What are the relationships between homelessness and mental health issues?

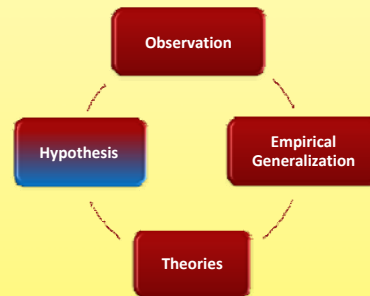
Method

Phase I (completed)

- Convenience sample
- Qualitative
- Semi-structured interviews were completed with 15 families who are part of the Refugee Supportive Housing Network

Phase II (now in process)

- Quota sample
- Quantitative
- Questionnaire given to 200 participants divided equally among 4 ethnic groups: Somali, Liberian, Hmong, and Karen



Next steps

- Data Analysis
- Policy and Program Recommendations
- Learning module for the Center for Advance Studies in Child Welfare
- Results from Phase II will inform questions for Phase III: Focus group research in Fall 2009

Findings from Phase I

Participant demographics in Phase I (N=15)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	41.6	13.96
Length of time in Minnesota (months)	38	37.73
Timing of First Move (months after arrival)	9.5	8.43
Number of Moves	2.7	1.5
Number in Household	5.1	2.83
Household Income	\$1582/month	\$660.53

Findings from Phase I

1. **Barriers to stable housing:**
 - Unaffordable rental expense
 - Lack of rental history, credit history, and proof of employment
 - Lack of appropriately sized housing for large family
 - Difficulty in looking for housing due to lack of transportation
2. **Timing of first move:**
 - Timing and causes of first move vary widely
 - Once housing becomes unstable, subsequent moves occur every few months
3. **Strategy to afford housing**
 - Children sent to live with relatives to reduce rental burden
 - Families doubled-up in overcrowded situations
4. **Experience with homeless shelters**
 - Refugees in this sample tended not to access homeless shelters or other services when they lose their stable housing situation
 - Misinformation about shelters
 - Difficult for children to be in shelters
5. **Participants reported that they want to live near friends, relatives and in places which have culturally appropriate services**
6. **Housing instability affects children’s well-being**
 - Negatively affects school performance
 - Disruption of former friendships and difficulties in forming new relationships
7. **Gender, ethnic, and categorization of immigration status are related to the housing stability**

