

# Measuring Homelessness: A Review of Recent Research

**Bibliographica No. 7**

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**By Daniel Bentley  
1995**

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**The Institute of Urban Studies**





THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WINNIPEG

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**MEASURING HOMELESSNESS: A REVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH**

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The Institute of Urban Studies is an independent research arm of the University of Winnipeg. Since 1969, the IUS has been both an academic and an applied research centre, committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan manner. The Institute examines inner city, environmental, Aboriginal and community development issues. In addition to its ongoing involvement in research, IUS brings in visiting scholars, hosts workshops, seminars and conferences, and acts in partnership with other organizations in the community to effect positive change.

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## FOREWORD

On behalf of the Institute Of Urban Studies and the University of Winnipeg I would like to thank Daniel Bently, Research Associate for his many hours of work in preparing this annotated bibliography. I would also like to thank Nancy Klos, Librarian at the Institute for her time and diligence in assisting with the literature search and Mary Ann Beavis, Research Associate for her careful editing. A great deal of work goes into preparation of an a report such as this.

The bibliography, focusing as it does on ways of measuring homelessness, is an excellent source of information for academics and professionals attempting to improve on our ability to provide better counts of people without shelter. As well as providing an up-to-date account of measurement approaches; the document provides a wealth of information on the characteristics of the homeless people and the causes that contribute to their condition. It provides information on four countries, Canada, United States, Great Britain and Australia. This permits an element of international comparison of characteristics, causes and the state of the art in measurement technology. It is obvious from the review of the literature that there is a great deal of work yet to be done in this area.

Tom Carter  
Director  
Institute of Urban Studies

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness has been an issue of acute concern for a long time. The topic has stimulated research initiatives in different disciplines for the past couple of decades. The focus of these research initiatives have been conditioned by the perceptions and preoccupations of the period.

In recent years the study of the rootless, largely male, wanderer and tramp, and the life of Skid Row, has moved focus. The chief topics of interest now are—determining the numbers of the homeless, and identifying distinctive characteristics and life circumstances, that might explain what has befallen them. Many recent studies are designed to provide direction for solutions that might address the homeless problem.

This review presents a selection of literature that represents the topics and range of discussion on homelessness in the U.S. and Canada, and to a limited extent, Britain and Australia.

### ENUMERATION

Counting the homeless is very difficult for a number of reasons. The criteria used in identifying a population for study, depend on the definition of homelessness. There are wider and narrower definitions, and the space between them often serves mainly as an arena for controversial exchanges between partisans of opposing social policies and philosophies.

Full census enumerations of homeless people are problematic and largely unsuccessful, and the effort involved can be very expensive. The very situation is such that it is difficult to determine the limits and exhaustiveness of the search. In the end, unless a specific and fully identifiable population of users of a particular set of services is being targeted, the question comes down to the relative likely effectiveness of differing sampling methodologies.

The homeless population is often elusive, and may be rare in many areas, so that most sampling measures are fraught with error. Choosing the right time frame for data collection is also a difficult question: homelessness can be long-term, one-time short term, or episodic, even cyclic. These processes are not easy to uncover.

### WHO ARE THE HOMELESS?

Other lines of research have concentrated on discovering the distinctive characteristics of homeless people. One controversial claim is that all or most of the homeless are mentally ill people who are on the streets because of a past (perhaps mistaken) policy of closing down residential mental health institutions and hospitals. Alternatively, they are often characterized as drug addicts and alcoholics—and these problems are considered to be the cause of their homelessness. Another view

is that the homeless represent a range of household types and age groups (including children) who are persistently poverty stricken, and are the victims of reprehensible social, economic, and housing policies or re-structuring of the labour market.

In fact, there is considerable variation by geography, and even within the same areas there is much variation. There is, it is true, a much higher proportion of people with addiction and with mental health problems among the homeless than among the rest of the population, but it is not easy to say to what degree these conditions are causative, and to what extent these are the effect or accompaniment of homelessness. In any event, there turn out to be sampling problems here too.

One line of study focuses strongly on the importance of housing policies, and the housing market, in affecting those whose very low incomes make it difficult to keep accommodation. This research uses economic and other local area indicators to pinpoint and predict when, where, and among whom the incidence and prevalence of homelessness will be greatest. Often those most affected by housing affordability problems are the people with addiction and mental health problems, but the housing affordability issue can contribute to homelessness for a much more diversified sector of society.

## GENERAL

Urban problems have been the focus of most research, but what happens outside cities is also of interest. There is a perception that homelessness is an urban, not a rural problem, but studies in rural areas suggest otherwise. Often there is a dynamic relationship between factors affecting cities and the situation in rural areas.

The general impression is that the research is advancing most clearly in the United States. In the U.S. there has been a lot of progress in improving the sophistication of methodology. However, there is yet very little in the literature, taken overall, that approaches a clear and replicable standard in detail of reporting, and in analysis and methods.

The structure of this review is, in most parts, a narrative path through the literature. The articles and reports presented often do not discuss issues on a clearly comparable common basis, and so the discussion is centred around an extended annotated bibliography.

## SUGGESTED FUTURE RESEARCH STRATEGIES

The sheer interest in numbers, it seems to the writers, is likely to yield ever more sophisticated counting efforts that will, nonetheless, be as vulnerable to methodological error as their predecessors. Avoiding definitional issues begs the question of the scope of the enumeration. On the other hand, classifying and describing sub-populations makes little sense (and perhaps some of the extraordinary range of prevalence reported for particular measures are an instance) without attention to techniques of enumeration.

One source of delay in improved counting may lie in the conflict between different political approaches to social policy. The rationale for counting and for classifying may appear differently to different interests. One may fear that if research efforts are more focused on assessing the problems and needs of specific groups, for the sake of the planning of services and accommodation, other needs and other groups will be neglected. This perspective lays stress on homelessness as a global dimension of distress, even if its scope is hard to quantify. Different interests may hope that collapsing all the varied kinds of homelessness within one dimension will derail pressures that, they fear, constantly seek to expand the limits of "entitlement," and of programs financed at public expense.

Specialized and successful methodologies are being developed in increasing number, but often in disparate areas of study. Available techniques need to be pooled and harnessed jointly in the service of specific research goals. Recent work by Martha Burt is summarized in this review, which lists a large part of the range.

Michael Dennis, Peter Ross and James Wright are, with Martha Burt, among the most active workers in this area. Their most recent published work makes suggestions that better and sounder things are shortly to come, and their current research efforts (as also those of less prolific writers) may be worth following directly by policy researchers and planners.

Readers should find the summary tables at the end of this Executive Summary particularly useful in understanding the strengths and limitations of the various approaches to measuring the homeless.



**TABLE A**  
**DEFINING THE HOMELESS**  
**(A Problem for Enumeration)**

A RANGE OF DEFINITIONS	PROBLEMS/COMMENTS ON DEFINITIONS
1) the absence of shelter or "on the street"	a very narrow concept, referred to as "literal" homelessness
2) those who do not have customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling or residence	what is "customary and regular access" and what is "conventional dwelling or residence"
3) lack of a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence	residence in temporary shelters, welfare hotels, and transitional housing qualifies a person as homeless
4) accommodation with friends or others (doubling up) where it is understood by both parties to be a last resort and temporary solution	the alternative has to be a street or a refuge
5) dislodged, marginal, or multi-problem (drugs, alcohol, poverty) people	in the opinion of some a "life-style problem" where the person has to bear some responsibility
6) those in very inadequate or marginal or vulnerable living/housing circumstances	may still have a fixed address, a nighttime residence: really an "at risk" population
<p>The definition ranges from the narrow concept of literally living on the streets, to lack of a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime address to those in temporary or potentially unstable accommodation (doubling up) to those in inadequate, marginal or vulnerable living/housing circumstances. The definition <i>certainly affects</i> the size of the homeless population.</p>	

**TABLE B**  
**COUNTING THE HOMELESS**  
**(Some Problems Beyond Definition)**

1) Statistical Rarity:	Homelessness may affect between 0.1 to 1.5% of the total population. This means in random sampling of an urban area, 70 to 500 persons might need to be approached to identify each homeless person. Sampling, therefore is either very expensive or has to take place only in areas of concentration. This prior stratification is difficult and people in the unsampled areas are missed.
2) Identification:	Homelessness is not immediately observable from the appearance of an individual. They have to be asked directly and may not wish to disclose their situation.
3) Transience and Turbulence:	Homelessness may be <i>one time and very short term, periodic</i> (the last few days of the month before welfare cheques arrive), <i>transitional</i> (between one living arrangement and another) or <i>long term</i> (never able to access adequate housing). A count at any point in time may include only part of the homeless population over a year or longer period of time.
4) Geographical Concentration:	Homeless people are not distributed uniformly in the community. Sometimes distribution reflects institutions that serve their needs. Other gathering points may not be as well known. Accurate counting depends on the extent to which locations can be discovered.
5) Communication Difficulties:	It is not always easy to communicate with the homeless. Some may not be co-operative and helpful in providing information. Because of the high incidence of substance abuse and mental illness homeless people may be poor informants. Many are suspicious of the authorities.

**TABLE C**  
**GENERAL APPROACHES TO COUNTING THE HOMELESS**

1) Survey of Expert Opinion:	Surveys of representatives of different levels of government, housing associations, social service agencies, advocacy groups, researchers, shelter operators, and other knowledgeable observers, who provide their best estimates or impressions of the number of homeless people.
2) Published Reports:	Using published reports of the level of homelessness in selected areas and projecting this level to a broader regional or national basis.
3) Shelter Counts:	Using average capacity and/or waiting lists of various hostels, shelters and other forms of transitional housing as an indicator of the level of homelessness. Figures can be obtained at a local or national basis depending on the number of shelters contacted.
4) Arrests or Observations by Police:	An indicator that depends on the knowledge of local police authorities. Would only represent a small proportion of the homeless.
5) Personal Observation:	Basically an approach of virtually living with or at least observing homeless people long enough to get to know who/how many people are homeless in a particular area.
6) Street Counts:	Attempted consensus or actual counts of homeless people at a variety of places ranging from bus and train stations to alleyways and areas under bridges or overpasses. A variety of hostels and shelters and other service locations are often included in such counts.
7) Market and Socio-Economic Indicators:	To a certain extent this depends on determining causes of homelessness. If cause can be associated/correlated with such aspects as increasing rents, rising unemployment or increasing deinstitutionalization then changes in these indicators can be used to predict changing numbers of homeless people.

Note: No judgement has made on the relative benefit of the above approaches. The best approach depends on a variety of factors such as the definition of homelessness that is used, resources available, size of the area, etc.

**TABLE D**  
**A SAMPLE OF SAMPLING METHODS FOR COUNTING THE HOMELESS**

1) Street Sweeps on Probability Street Sampling:	This involves a random sampling in defined areas (city blocks) with know or pre-estimated likelihoods of encountering the homeless. Blocks are stratified according to different levels of probability. Stratification is difficult and time consuming. This method is susceptible to undiscovered sources of error.
2) Hidden Homeless Counts:	Attempts to compensate for some of the errors associated with randomized block sampling. Particular attention is paid to difficult and reclusive sites, such as abandoned buildings. Other areas of attention include doubled up households.
3) Snowball Sampling:	Also called <i>network sampling</i> . It is used to identify populations thickly and widely spaced over large areas. The main idea is to locate people by referral from members of an initial sample.
4) Tracking Studies:	This approach attempts to establish a relationship between the level of homelessness at a particular point in time and annual prevalence. The idea is to determine how often people move in and out of a homeless situation and how long they remain homeless.
5) Counting Homeless Youth:	There is no good method of identifying homeless children who are with their parents or on their own. Shelters will often not accept unaccompanied children. There are also definitional problems. Is a run away child homeless if they have established a permanent or stable arrangement with others (in the prostitution trade for example).

## PREFACE

As part of a broader effort to develop methods and techniques to measure the homeless population, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) asked the Institute of Urban Studies (IUS) to:

- undertake a review of the literature related to the measurement of the homeless population;
- prepare an annotated bibliography of the more important pieces of literature; and,
- on the basis of the literature review, provide a synthesis of methodologies that will provide guidance to groups and agencies attempting to develop measurement approaches.

The main emphasis of the report, therefore, will be on measurement and methodological issues.

The main interest is in homelessness in Canada, however the bulk of the research effort has taken place in, and concerns, the United States and will be an important focus in this report.

Homelessness is a problem that faces numbers of people at different times, and some people for an extended time. There is controversy over its causes: whether it is an outcome of personal failings, or of the combination of impersonal forces.

In many cases, it is difficult to say whether some of the characteristics of people who are homeless are causes or effects. In many instances "causes" turn out to be concomitant with other precipitating factors, such as lifetime poverty and the affordability of housing.

For reasons such as these a discussion of the issues and problems in the measurement of homelessness must also discuss the strength of factors that may affect vulnerability, or imminent homelessness. This is particularly important if it should turn out that homelessness has a cyclical component, in general, or within the lives of particular individuals. If precipitating factors can be identified, then these can be taken account of in the planning of housing and other community policies and the allocation of resources. They can also be considered in efforts to measure the nature and extent of the homeless population.

# MEASURING HOMELESSNESS: A REVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH

Daniel Bentley

## INTRODUCTION

This Introduction presents and discusses the problems caused for research design by the lack of unanimity in defining homelessness. Some of the underlying controversy is also presented to provide a broader understanding of the range of definitions, and how difficult this makes attempts to measure the homeless population.

The Introduction also lays out in some detail the range of methodological difficulties associated with measuring this population.

## DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

All attempts to count the number of homeless people first come up against the problem that there is no agreed definition of homelessness. "On the most general level," as Rossi points out, "the homeless can be defined as those who do not have customary and regular access to a conventional dwelling or residence" (Rossi *et al.*, 1987). This, however, only postpones the definitional problem, as "customary and regular access" and a "conventional dwelling or residence" themselves require definition. What is at issue is the establishment of socially required, or at least minimally acceptable, standards of housing adequacy.

The McKinney Act in the United States defines homelessness as a lack of "fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence" (Jahiel, 1992). For the purposes of the Act, residence in temporary shelters, including welfare hotels and all forms of official transitional housing, as well as in any place not designed or ordinarily used as sleeping accommodation all similarly qualify a person as homeless.

The McKinney Act definition of homelessness excludes those in temporary and potentially unstable accommodation, such as those "doubling up" with other households. There is a large population, in fact, that lives under such precarious and impermanent conditions. These are people whose ability to keep their current level of accommodation depends on an insufficient and unstable income or on the good graces of friends and relatives. Homebase, an advocacy group in San Francisco, suggests, as an addition to the McKinney Act those who have "accommodation with friends or others that is understood by both parties to be a last resort and temporary solution, the alternative to which is the street or refuge" (Homebase, 1990).

The lack of reference in the McKinney Act to a population segment that may be vulnerable to imminent episodes of homelessness "creates a sharp distinction between *literally* homeless people and other very poor people" (Jahiel, 1992). It is open to question whether such a distinction adequately serves the goal of determining the full extent of the incidence as well as the point-prevalence of homelessness.

To some degree the desirability of one criterion over another will depend on the aims of any particular study—whether to determine the need for emergency shelter as opposed to longer term affordable or other appropriate housing solutions. Jahiel (1992) makes the point that definitions aimed at delineating the boundaries between homeless and "non-homeless" populations, or between sub-groups among the homeless, succeed in specifying categories but fail to provide a linking concept of "homelessness." Jahiel proposes that homelessness be defined as "life without a home of one's own" (1992).

The notion of "home" that is involved here refers to an independent residence that is legally sanctioned—ownership or rental. Home is also the place where people stay who are linked to the owner(s) or renter(s) by such socially or legally sanctioned connections as marriage, long-term relationship, kinship, parenthood, legal adoption or guardianship, or formal co-ownership. The notion of home, Jahiel suggests, also requires that such living arrangements be perceived as relatively stable. Residence in custodial, health or emergency institutions is not classified as having a home.

Jahiel's definition is offered as a conceptual link between literal homelessness and situational marginality or vulnerability to imminent homelessness. The opposite of homelessness is seen as having a residence with some permanency, to which one is entitled, for which one has responsibility and over which one exerts a measure of control, including the right to decide whom to admit—an area of physical privacy. Homelessness in this sense is seen as a situation in which people may find themselves at some point in time or for some period; rather than a qualification of some class of individual with homelessness as their unique quality (and perhaps peculiarity or responsibility).

Howard Bahr, in Momeni (1989), exemplifies some of the preoccupations of the literature: "Sometime homelessness is defined as the simple absence of shelter; sometimes it refers to people who are trapped in or have chosen a deviant life-style that puts them 'on the street.' Social service agencies and government researchers tend to define homelessness in line with their own objectives, political orientations, or traditions. Most of the definitions . . . point to the homeless as dislodged, marginal, multiproblem people." Bahr continues by relating the difficulties with definition to the scale of the homeless problem (although he prefers to ascribe the definitional problem to the motivations of researchers): "Some definitions seem designed to minimize the scale of the problem . . . as in estimates or counts of how many people are homeless in a given night. Other definitions maximize the size of the population, as in projections of how many people are homeless (that is living in streets [sic] in emergency shelters, or in certain designated at risk accommodations) at least once in a given year." Bahr also questions why a year should be chosen as the limit, rather than the previous two, three or five years.

Bahr's work in Momeni (1989) also exemplifies some typical themes as well as some typical and thematic confusions in the literature on the issue of definition. In his review, he captures the fact that definition may shift from the notion of homelessness as a situation common to a number of people because of a range of circumstances beyond their control, to that of an individual situation for which the affected persons bear, or at best *may* bear, responsibility (use of drugs and alcohol), and then to homelessness as a generic term for a wilful deviance (life-style) that makes the people concerned a problem to others, rather than a social issue to be addressed or remedied.

The confusion here is between attempts to describe the extent of a situation and its variation over time and attempts, equally laudable but different, to determine the causes, whether personal or situational, that bring homeless people to their present pass.

In summary, the definition of homelessness may range from the very narrow concept of literally living on the street, to lack of a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, to those in temporary and potentially unstable accommodation such as doubling up with friends, to those in very inadequate or marginal or vulnerable living/housing circumstances. The tension between literal homelessness and a more extended or inclusive definition of homelessness is a constant theme in the literature. The definition used certainly affects the size of the homeless population, its sub-groups and the various suggested causes of the problem.

### COUNTING THE HOMELESS

Censuses or other counts of homeless populations are usually cross-sectional: they provide an estimate of the number of people fitting a selected definition of homelessness at one time. Generally the estimations of the number of the *literally homeless* (Rossi and White, 1987). There is often some methodological variation, such as between daytime or nighttime counts, but still the counts are a single cross-sectional or point-prevalence measure.

There is evidence that any such count fails to capture fully a type of homelessness that many researchers suggest more closely represents the experience of the average or more "typical" homeless person, namely, passing in and out of homelessness as resources dictate. Those in question may find accommodation some or most of the time. They may not have enough money to pay for continuous accommodation and are frequently, or constantly, without independently acquired shelter at some time in any given period during which they receive or earn money. Alternatively they may have limited access to accommodation by other means—friendship, family ties, *etc.*, but, again, perhaps seldom enough to maintain an address with any stability.



Measuring the "literally homeless," therefore, may only be capturing the extreme; those who are utterly devoid of, or who have exhausted, all other means of help, be they financial, institutional, familial or social, so that they are now isolated, destitute and powerless and are then literally homeless and for extended (or ever more extended) periods.

The obvious difficulty here is that homelessness is a process, or sometimes the end of a process, of deterioration, rather than a characteristic or innate quality of a sub-population. Capturing/counting those in different stages of the process, is difficult. However, it is important to capture people at different stages of the process as it may result in very different assessments of numbers, and suggest different responses that would prevent further deterioration.

The question then seems to resolve into two parts:

1. Determining the number of people who at one time and place, or for different lengths of time, or at different times, have no place to call their own, no "private place" by Jahiel's definitions.
2. Identifying the causes, whether environmental or personal (or both in combination) that have brought people to the stage of homelessness.

Issue One will be dealt with in this report by reviewing different attempts to ascertain the numbers of those homeless according to the variety of definitions employed.

Issue Two will be dealt with by discussion of some of the literatures describing some of the sub-populations among the homeless and relating their plight to a range of causes -some economic, some political, some related to the consequences of decisions of public policy, and some medical or psychological/psychiatric.

The terms of reference for this review indicate a preference for discussions of methodological issues, especially as these concern estimating numbers of homeless people (in whatever category). For this reason, and to provide some limit to the scope of this review, discussion of matters related to Issue Two will be secondary.

## PROBLEMS IN COUNTING THE HOMELESS POPULATION

Studies attempting to determine the number of the homeless operate under one or a combination of two methodologies: they involve either *enumeration* or *estimation*.

In enumeration, a census, or complete count, is attempted; in estimation, a complete figure is arrived at by sampling the homeless population in some way, and then applying multipliers to the figure to produce a best guess of its total size.

Censuses are fraught with methodological problems: various obstacles stand in the way of ensuring that a correct count has been achieved that does not underestimate, fail to correctly identify

its target population, count the same people twice, or frighten them away. Estimates, on the other hand, are all vulnerable to the uncertainty attached to the coefficients used to multiply the sample number. In fact, studies that start as enumeration attempts often turn into estimations as they attempt to correct or compensate for acknowledged inadequacies by weightings based on invalidated assumptions.

It will be important to give an account of a number of studies of both kinds, but first it would be preferable to establish a framework to compare studies in terms of their success in coping with threats to validity, as well as pointing out the variation between studies in assumptions and definitions. The studies to be reviewed in fact differ considerably in the degree to which they report their methods fully enough to permit such comparisons.

Censuses and counts of the numbers of homeless focus, of course, on the literally homeless. However, as the discussion proceeds to issues concerning other indicators and predictors of homelessness the focus will move towards consideration of the potentially or imminently homeless as well.

The first problem is that attempting to take a count of the numbers of homeless violates critical assumptions of censuses, namely, that all persons or households have a location at which they can be reached by an interviewer, mail or phone call. Such "addresses" as homeless people may have may not be identifiable or may be too temporary to identify during the person's occupancy. The same individual may also turn up at more than one location, leading to overcounting.

Peter Rossi and James Wright (Rossi and Wright, 1989) describe five principal problems and five main measurement techniques.

The problems are:

- Statistical rarity
- Identification
- Transience and Turbulence
- Geographic concentration
- Communication difficulties

### **Statistical Rarity**

According to Rossi and Wright, homelessness likely affects between 0.1 and 1.5 percent of the population. At these ratios, many observations will be required to reach members of this population. In a random sampling of an urban area, for example, from 70 to 500 persons might need to be approached on average for each identified homeless person. In order to reduce the costs and effort

involved, assumptions must be made concerning the relative concentrations of these rare populations in different areas. Sampling may then take place only in areas of greater concentration—where the population is less or least rare. These areas of greater density must be identified before any count or sampling takes place. This method is called prior stratification. Figures established for the area of greater density can then be extrapolated to wider geographic areas on the basis of some known or estimated coefficient describing the proportions between the general populations in these areas, and a coefficient describing a known or supposed ratio between the homeless, and the domiciled in the unsampled areas. Justifying such coefficients can be problematic, especially since it is arguable that ratios may differ significantly even within each area.

### Identification

Homelessness is not immediately observable. In order to identify someone as homeless you may need to ask directly. A homeless person may not always wish to disclose their situation and there is no other way to check the truth of what will be said to the investigator. Other criteria for identification are also unreliable: not every shabbily dressed or unkempt individual is homeless, some domiciled individuals may present the same appearance. Equally, some homeless people may take great pains not to give any indication of their predicament in dress or other outward signs, and may thus not be overtly distinguishable.

### Transience and Turbulence

An important characteristic of homelessness, as of extreme poverty, is the instability of arrangements. Many people move in and out of homelessness—at any one time, some may be classifiable as domiciled or homeless who will shortly thereafter change their condition.

Rossi and Wright distinguish four subgroups in terms of frequency and duration of homelessness:

1. One-time, very short-term homeless, typically once or twice over a few years and for periods of less than a week. Examples include runaway young people who usually return to their families within a few days, and new arrivals in a city who may be unable to afford accommodation until they have found a job or otherwise established themselves.
2. Periodic short-term homeless. These are people who are homeless in a somewhat regular pattern, for example, for the last few days before welfare cheques arrive. These are people for whom housing costs may be the primary factor in homelessness, who often pay a very high proportion of income for accommodation. These people often have resort to shelters and soup kitchens to tide them over the gap created by insufficient income.

3. Transitional homeless. These are people who are between one living arrangement and another, but who will probably find accommodation. Examples include single parents and children moving out of a previous household, sometimes after a split or assault, evicted households, families having to leave their homes because of an environmental emergency, people migrating between communities (similar to the new arrivals mentioned above).
4. Long-term homeless. These are people who for whatever reason are not able to locate adequate housing: people who have very limited ability or opportunity to acquire employment, or who are unable to access welfare or other forms of income.

The duration of homelessness varies considerably often by reason of different causes and circumstances. The homeless population at any given point in time includes only some part, and perhaps not even a stable proportion, of those who may experience homelessness over a longer time frame. In counting the homeless it will be necessary to determine the type or length of the homeless experience in each case. Answers received to questions about duration of homelessness may be unreliable, for some groups at least, for much the same reasons as those cited above (identification).

#### Geographical Concentration

Homeless people are not usually distributed uniformly in a community. Their spatial distribution tends to reflect the location of institutions that serve their needs, such as shelters and soup kitchens and outreach services. These institutions, however, will often have been deliberately located in areas in which the homeless were thought to congregate. Many counts, therefore, are centred on shelters and other institutions and are targeted at the users of these services, although, again, only shelter users are, *ipso facto*, homeless, soup kitchens and other services also cater to the domiciled very poor. Other gathering points for homeless people are often well known: bus and train stations, clothing depots, *etc.* Other concentrations can be identified through the local knowledge of social workers, shelter managers and activists. Sometimes it is difficult to make comprehensive contacts among these groups, and there may be networks that are not identified.

The main problem which affects the success of the count is discovering locations in which homeless people are concentrated.

#### Communication Difficulties

There are two opinions on the ease or difficulty of communication with people who are homeless. Some researchers have suggested that homeless people may be poor informants because of a high incidence of substance abuse and mental illness, as well as suspicion based on (an often well-founded)

fear of other people. Other researchers, including Rossi and Wright, report that most interviewees were co-operative and helpful and supplied much useful information.

Jahiel (1992) reiterates many of the same points as Rossi and Wright, but in more detail and with greater attention to specific studies.

He points out that since there is no national registry of facilities for homeless people, identifying such facilities in order to count homeless people in them, or in their vicinity, usually depends on contact with "key informants"—those in contact with homeless people through their work or volunteer activities *etc.* The methods of contacting such informants and the networking (or snowballing) involved do not offer any guarantee of completeness. Typically this tends to leave out facilities that are not part of the main networks (see Cowan *et al.*, 1988).

Many researchers (e.g., Burt and Cohen, 1989) make several rounds of identification, and attempt to explore many networks of possible key informants both before and during a study.

Jahiel (1992) also offers a classification of sites for enumeration that are not part of any network of facilities. The streets, as a collective term for these sites, may include:

- sidewalks and alleyways,;
- parks, beaches, fields, woods, caves, riverbeds, or other uncovered areas;
- areas under bridges or overpasses;
- garages, toolsheds, construction sites, or other unoccupied work sites;
- public or private buildings that let homeless people stay for the night, such as subway, bus or train stations, airports, hospital emergency rooms, offices, coffeeshops, *etc.*;
- the doorsteps, roofs, backyards and courtyards of residential buildings;
- empty apartments or houses;
- underground tunnels or chambers;
- parked vehicles or parking lots;
- subway trains, buses, *etc.*

Many of these areas may be inaccessible or unsafe to investigators and, as potential objects of suspicion to the people that occupy them, their appearance has been reported to scare people away. This is all the more likely when investigators are accompanied by police personnel.

The problems of correct identification mentioned earlier exacerbate the risk of double or undercounting. In order to reach and identify the homeless population on the street, survey activities must involve asking questions (and waking people up if done at night) at the same time as doing the whole count in as short a time as possible. Undercounting may occur if homeless people are scared away or not identified; double counting may occur when the same individual is found at more than one

location—two street sites, or in a shelter for part of the night and the street at another time. Double counting is minimized by identifying homeless people by name (and some description), and checking for duplicated names (and matching personal information).

Key informants have generally been used to identify facilities used by homeless people and street sites likely to be occupied by them in any density, or to provide access for interviews. Roth and Bean (1986) warn that the homeless population is often invisible to the general public and to the formal service system, and that only those involved with them in a professional or advocacy role were able to direct researchers. Even so, such key informants tended not to be able to describe the characteristics of the overall homeless in their community, but generalized the characteristics of the subgroup that they worked with to the homeless population as a whole.

#### FORMAT OF THE REVIEW

The sections that follow present and discuss literature on the issues of estimating the size of the homeless population, its composition and the circumstances under which homelessness has been an outcome. The literature covers the issues as they are represented in United States, Canada, and, more briefly, in Britain and Australia. There is also a discussion of homelessness outside urban areas.

For the most part the sections work through the articles to be discussed in the form of an extended and lengthy annotated bibliography. Each item is discussed in turn, in a narrative that traces the discussion through the literature. Sometimes the report departs from this format, for example, when the argument has to be built from brief references to a number of articles, and when consecutive discussion would not make it clear.

Many of the papers and reports read for this review deal with the same issues without adding much, or sometimes anything, to the discussion. An attempt has been made to rationalize this down to the most representative articles that could be found. Sometimes the repetitive portions of the articles reviewed have been omitted.

## ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION

### THE LITERATURE

The following section reviews a number of key studies and surveys of the homeless. The discussion chiefly concerns the relative success of different enumeration and estimation attempts, and some of the methodological difficulties encountered.

U.S. Dept of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, *A Report to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters*, April 1984.

This very well known report addressed three issues: the extent of homelessness in the U.S. nationally and by region; the characteristics of homeless people and how knowledge of these might help identify causes of homelessness; and the scope of shelter and other services that are available to homeless people. In this section, the discussion concentrates on of the extent of homelessness, found in Chapter Two of the report.

The data on which this report is based came from a number of sources including:

- an extensive telephone survey of "knowledgeable observers" from different levels of government, housing associations, social service agencies, researchers and advocacy groups;
- a national telephone survey of shelter managers (to find out shelter capacity, funding and a profile of shelter users);
- a review of previous reports from selected metropolitan areas;
- visits to service providers in selected metropolitan areas;
- discussions with a number of national organizations: advocacy groups, associations of public officials, charities;
- a telephone survey of state officials in all 50 states to find out about services provided to the homeless;
- the use of shelter and street counts in selected metropolitan areas.

In measuring the extent of homelessness, this report adopts a narrow definition, i.e., those on the "streets" and who require the assistance of some private or public agency to provide them with shelter. Such a definition does not include those in physically inadequate accommodation or living in overcrowded conditions. The report deals with people whose nighttime residence is in a private or public shelter, or outdoors in streets, parks, public buildings, under bridges, in abandoned buildings or similar places.

Residents in half-way houses, detoxification centres and "congregate living facilities" were not classed as homeless because they were unlikely to be homeless, in the report's basic definition, when

they left their current accommodation. By contrast, those who were "normally" street-dwellers, but were temporarily in jail or hospital, were included.

The report notes that the literal homelessness of its definition—being without shelter on a given night—can be a chronic, or a one-time temporary, or a periodic phenomenon. The report offers the following examples of temporary or periodic homelessness: unemployed people might sleep rough, or in a car, for example, until finding employment; people on inadequate incomes might have shelter as long as money lasted and then be homeless until the following (periodic) income payment; people living in socially difficult circumstances might move out during crises and then return.

These differences result in different totals for the number of homeless, depending on which count is used and the particular issue being addressed. The number of homeless people on any given night will always be less than the total number of people who may be homeless for any interval during a given period—a typical reporting period is a year.

Annual totals, then, are likely to overestimate the number of homeless on any given night. Shelter operators, however, typically report capacity in terms of annual total or average usage, yet the total for any given night, say the authors of this report, is the figure that is "more crucial for understanding the size of the problem and the shelter needs of the homeless," since the number in need at any point in time" constitutes the population of potential users on any given day . . ."

It should be pointed out in response, of course, that single-night censuses do not necessarily yield a representative figure. Averaged annual occupancy does not do so either, nor would the maximum occupancy during any given period be of assistance unless an underlying periodicity were known—which it is not. The general claim among many studies has in fact been that homelessness, in the shape of shelter demand, has been growing steadily.

At the time of the HUD report, no thorough census of the homeless had been attempted, as the authors note, and they quote population claims varying from 250 to 500 thousand, at the lower extreme, to two to three million at the upper. The larger figure, from the congressional testimony and 1982 report of the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), was more often quoted in the media and by mayoral and advocacy organizations. The CCNV report claimed that the U.S. had a homelessness rate of approximately one percent, or 2.2 million. However, no information was ever disclosed concerning the methods by which the size of claim was determined.

For this reason, the HUD report relied on sources of information that fell in to four broad categories: published reports; interviews with knowledgeable observers and agencies (expert opinion); shelter capacity and usage; and street counts. The methodology attempted to cross-check each



against the others. It is important to note that none of these sources represent complete national coverage.

This report will not go into a detailed account of the HUD report methodology, but will concentrate on the essential features. The HUD report used all the sources it cited to arrive at particular figures as a correct estimate for the place and circumstances in question, and these were then used to estimate a homelessness rate per 10,000 of population. This was generalized to the entire U.S. national population as a maximal figure for the homeless population.

Using the first source, the HUD report culled figures from a wide variety of *published reports*—newspaper articles, a municipal study, a U.S. Congressional hearing and state gubernatorial studies. The most heavily used source, however, was the Cuomo (1983) report to the National Governors' Association Task Force on the Homeless. The figures used were always those for shelter usage on a particular night (between November 1981 and dates early in 1982 and 1983), and, where possible, the night on which occupancy was the highest in the period.

The second source used was *expert opinion* from a selected "valid national sample of 60 metropolitan areas," in order to remove any over-representation of particularly acute areas, or areas with published data. Across these areas, 500 or more telephone interviews were conducted, and the figures given to the researchers were then checked for reliability of the source (the report does not state how this was done). An undescribed "more standardized information collection procedure" was also employed within these metropolitan areas. Average homelessness estimates were computed for each metropolitan area, weighted by the likely reliability of the source: higher weights being given for hard information, such as street counts, than for softer sources, such as "impressions of the street population."

The third data collection source was *shelter operators*. They were asked for estimates of the size of the homeless population in their metropolitan areas. The proffered numbers were accepted without adjustment, and were then used as a basis for extrapolation to the country at large.

The fourth source of data was *street counts*. Two kinds were used. The 1980 U.S. Census attempted a "casual count" of homeless persons at a variety of places: employment offices, bus and train stations, welfare offices, food stamp centres, pool halls and street corners. Three cities—Phoenix (March 1983), Pittsburgh (June 1983) and Boston (October, 1983)—conducted local counts of shelter and non-shelter using street people. In these estimations, the number of street residents exceeded shelter users by 1:1.29. This ratio, averaged across the three participating cities, was applied nationwide to yield a national estimate.

The numbers arrived at through the four broad approaches are presented in the table below:

TABLE 1

**Summary Of Four Approaches To Estimating  
The U.S. National Total Of Homeless People (1984)**

Approach 1	Extrapolation from highest published estimates	586,000
Approach 2	Extrapolation from estimates in 60 metropolitan areas obtained in 500+ local interviews (expert opinion)	254,000
Approach 3	Extrapolation of estimates from national sample of 125 shelter operators	353,000
Approach 4	Shelter population and local area street count Shelter population and 1980 Census street count	192,000 267,000

The HUD report claims the most reliable range to be 250,000 to 350,000.

The report also notes regional variations: approximately one third of the homeless population is found in large metropolitan areas in the West, apparently, the authors suggest, because of the better climate and greater seasonal (and all-year) job opportunities. Larger and medium sized urban areas have a higher concentration in terms of rate per 10,000 of population (13 as opposed to 6.5). The report attributes this to the greater concentration of services in the larger centres.

The report's totals, then, are estimations based on weights and stratifications, and rates per metropolitan or other defined area. No separate evidence is presented to justify the particular weights, and the burden of criticism of this report has been that in every way, the basis of calculation is sufficiently open to question as to make the total estimates questionable.

It is worth repeating, however, that the HUD report estimate depends also on a very confined definition of homelessness—one which responds only to the issue of emergency shelter provision. In fact, there need be no obvious single definition which should lay more valid claim than any other to being the true definition. In deciding whether to accept a narrower or a wider definition the criteria, and the arguments surrounding them, always refer to policy issues which drive different emphases. Shelter provision issues suggest the importance of one definition; housing subsidy or rental restraint policies might require another.

General Accounting Office, Report to the Chairman, Sub-Committee on Intergovernmental Relations and Human Resources, Committee on Government Operations, U.S. House of Representatives, *Homelessness: A Complex Problem and the Federal Response* (April 1985).

This report concentrates on factors tending to produce or aggravate homelessness and programs of the U.S. Government aimed at alleviating the problem. Only an early section of this report is examined in this report because it contains a discussion of attempts to estimate the overall size of the homeless population.

The discussion starts from the definition of the HUD report quoted above and then quotes two attempts at definitions that tried somewhat harder than the HUD study to capture an essence of the notion of homelessness: a homeless person is "anyone who lacks adequate shelter, resources and community ties" (I.S. Levine, "Homelessness: Its Implications for Mental Health Policy and Practice, American Psychological Association Workshop, 1983), or, as added to this definition, homeless people are "those whose primary residence is in .. well hidden sites known only to their users" (E. Baxter and K. Hopper, *Private Lives/Public Spaces* [New York: Community Service Society, 1981]).

The General Accounting Office report suggests a synthesis of these definitions in these terms: homeless people are "those persons who lack resources and community ties necessary to provide for their own shelter" (p. 5).

An essential limitation of (HUD type) narrow definitions is made clear here: the absence of shelter cannot be understood as a problem without some judgement of adequacy—why should anyone care if people sleep rough unless that is a hardship, an unacceptable situation, a lack of adequate provision that is someone's responsibility to amend. The "literal homelessness" definition was thought to make some obvious sense, but its strict interpretation in the HUD study results, for example, in including as homeless people who are sheltered at the point of measurement but are, more frequently, without (literal) shelter.

In fact, many street people do find shelter in a primitive sense—a cardboard box, a doorway, a car—we don't treat these as homes because of a notion of adequacy. The GAO report includes this idea explicitly, adding a distillation of the notion of dependency contained in the HUD definition: homeless people are those who are powerless to fend for themselves.

The notions of adequacy and powerlessness seem to be common threads running through the literature. Once out of the bag, however, they open the door to a range of interpretations of adequacy and the limits of expected personal initiative.

The definitional range is played out, notes the GAO report, in the difficulty experienced by attempts at making counts of the homeless. What sleeping locations determine a person as homeless?

Some homeless people shift around—the idea of one all-night sleeping place is itself an artificial notion. Not all potential sites can be reached, not all people in them might be homeless, and many homeless people disguise their plight so that they might not be easy to pick out. The report quotes with approval from a Connecticut gubernatorial task force (1984) that all enumeration attempts produce rough estimations rather than accurate or conclusive data. Even in shelter counts, it appears that operators sometimes count, sometimes estimate, and do both with a measure of uncertainty.

The GAO report then presents some methodological criticisms of the two best known estimates to date, *viz.*, the HUD study presented above and the CCNV report, to which the HUD study may be seen as a reaction.

The HUD report is based on little empirical data. It consists of extrapolations of estimates from those close to the issue or those who had reason to count shelter or other facility users. Some of the participants in the study claimed that figures quoted in the report as estimates of total numbers of users were in fact estimates of smaller populations—geographically, or by type or location of the facility. Some participants were unaware of the boundaries of areas whose homeless population they had been asked to estimate, or felt uncertain about the numbers they had estimated. HUD was alleged to have discarded data suggesting higher totals. One particular assertion was hotly contested: that there was little homelessness outside central cities (see the section in this review on rural homelessness). In essence, although systematic in its use of data checking procedures, the underlying weakness and the manifold uncertainties of the basic estimates weaken any claim the report might have to finality in its estimates.

The CCNV report had been criticized as unsystematic, its use of shelter operators' estimates, though less critical than in the HUD study, yields a figure neither more nor less reliable—but much larger. No actual counts at all underlie the "best guesses" of the CCNV sources.

Although there was no agreement on the overall size of the homeless population, all researchers agreed that it was growing, but with varying estimates of the rate.

The GAO study lists the indicators that estimates of the homeless population have employed:

- requests for emergency shelter and food;
- services provided to applicants for public assistance who list a shelter as their address or who cannot provide an address;
- arrests or observations by the police;
- personal observation of the number of homeless on the streets;
- (rarely) efforts to undertake actual counts of homeless people living on the streets within specific areas (generally of cities).

Nelson Smith, "Homelessness: Not One Problem But Many," *Journal of the Institute for Socioeconomic Studies*, 10,3 (1985): 53-67.

The study cited here is an example of some of the flavour of controversy in this area, and the degree of care for accuracy in quoting studies to confirm or refute particular viewpoints.

After pouring scorn on the arbitrary "guesstimation" and extrapolation of the CCNV study, the author of this article goes on to quote the GAO report we have just surveyed in these terms:

HUD's findings as to the population's composition seem unassailable (and were confirmed by GAO's independent analysis) (p. 55)

The objective of this article is to suggest that the homeless are, to a large measure, a small stable population of people with an intergenerational dependence on the public purse, a large proportion of whom were probably unjustifiably released from institutions, in the heyday of deinstitutionalization. Others are those for whom loss of accommodation has been triggered by the impersonal forces of inflation, and a restrictive deflationary monetary economic policy is their best hope.

The references and attributions to the HUD and GAO reports in this article do not bear close inspection, as may be apparent from accounts of these studies. By standards which require counts and hard numbers as evidence, the HUD findings are not much more than organized conjecture, and the GAO study contains no independent analysis and certainly encourages little endorsement of the HUD numbers.

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In point of fact, much of the literature read for this review seemed to parade constructed cases, and misquotation or unreferenced citations from other articles as support for overcategorical assertions of all sorts: that homelessness was/was not an outrage, a problem that required immediate attention, and so on.

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United States Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Homeless Families in America's Cities*, May 1987.

This study reports the results of a somewhat loosely worded survey of city officials, service providers, and related agencies. The questionnaire which was the main survey instrument, asked for estimated or definite numbers, but also for broad impressions and judgements.

The survey did not attempt to come up with figures for total numbers, but concentrated instead on the profile and demographic composition of the homeless, charting an average increase of 31 percent in shelter requests by families in nearly all of the 29 cities surveyed. The survey responses

indicated a wide range of distributions for families among the homeless in the different cities, from 95 percent to seven percent. Over two thirds of homeless families were headed by single parents. There were many differences between cities in the proportion of two parent families. The report goes on to cite verbatim the survey findings in different areas—but without any substantial discussion of the survey methodology, or raw findings. Many of the questions were open-ended, and there is little categorization of the ensuing responses. Clearly, there is a need for more systematic and quantitative studies.

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A number of studies were undertaken in response to the clear need to establish an accepted methodology and set of definitions and appropriate research goals. A review of a range of these research efforts, focusing on their methodological contributions has been incorporated in this report.

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P.H. Rossi, J.D. Wright, G.A. Fisher and G. Willis, "The Urban Homeless: Estimating Composition and Size," *Science*, 235 (1987): 1336-41.

This study distinguishes between the literally homeless and the marginally housed, without elaborating much further. In any case, it concentrates on the literally homeless, and reports a methodology used by the researchers to enumerate people living on the streets in areas of Chicago.

The methodology is presented as an extension of census methods. These enumerate people in their dwellings. Censuses always have difficulties in enumerating the homeless, precisely because the requirement of a steady and conventional location with a mail address is a census assumption. The study we are now discussing, often called the Chicago study, adopted a number of strategies adapted to this situation. In the first place, only a sample survey was attempted, although the report speaks of a "complete enumeration" of a "probability sample" of non-dwelling areas. By contrast with a regular census, this plan involved sending out teams of researchers, accompanied by off-duty police officers, to places and blocks in which homeless people were expected to be found. This was done between midnight and six a.m., a time which was expected to differentiate most completely between people with and without accommodation.

A thorough search was undertaken of locations, many of them somewhat concealed, and all people contacted were interviewed to determine if they were homeless, and to "obtain data on their residence and employment histories as well as their demographic characteristics." All people who were

co-operative enough to be interviewed were paid five dollars. The street survey was based on random stratified samples of city blocks.

A shelter count was conducted in parallel with the street survey. Interviewing teams counted all those present in all Chicago shelters on the nights visited, and interviewed systematically chosen sub-samples of them.

The street and shelter surveys were undertaken twice, once in the fall and once in the winter. In the first street survey, 168 city blocks were surveyed; in the second, 245 blocks. The samples were drawn from a total of 19,409 Chicago census blocks (called "tracts" in Canada). The stratification was according to the number of homeless expected to be found in each block. The expectations were based on the opinions of Chicago Police precinct community relations officers and beat officers. Some difficulty was encountered in prior estimations of the likely homeless population. These proved too high in the first survey. The number of blocks was increased for the second street survey to reduce the impact of such inaccuracies; in addition the age eligibility to participate (18 years) was removed. In the second survey, the classification of all blocks estimated to contain a very high homeless population was reviewed by "knowledgeable persons" (unidentified by the authors), and, states the article, "modified accordingly." A total of 722 homeless people were interviewed in both surveys together.

The sample was used as a basis to extrapolate numbers across all census blocks. This yielded figures of 2344, plus or minus 735, for the Fall of 1985, and 2020, plus or minus 275, for Winter 1986. This is equal to about 0.7 percent of Chicago's population (a little under three million).

The most frequent amount of time homeless was one month, indicating considerable movement and turnover within this population. Using the average duration of a spell of homelessness, the authors estimate the total number of persons ever homeless during the course of a year in Chicago to be approximately 6,000. The details of these computations and the data on which they are based, are unreported, however. Some homeless people were specifically excluded from the study: chiefly those in "specialized" accommodation, such as detoxification centres, shelters for abused women and mental health facilities.

Some general consideration of the issues raised—explicitly or implicitly—in the previous study were discussed in a 1991 conference, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Bureau of the Census—Enumerating Homeless Persons: Methods and Data Needs. The paper in question was: "Validity, Feasibility, and Cost Effectiveness of Strategies to Include Persons not in Ordinary Dwellings,": presented by M. Dennis, edited by C.M. Taeuber.

This paper attributes the incompatibilities between U.S. national estimates of the size of the homeless population to—the politics of service delivery, definitional differences and different methodologies. One of the problems that stems from different views over service delivery is the concern of advocates for the homeless that lower estimates would lead to a reduction in treatment and provision that is already inadequate in the face of what is increasingly believed to be a growing problem (whatever the numbers).

This paper describes a growing consensus that the best way to define the problem—rather than wavering between more and less inclusive formulations—is to estimate a population with "unmet treatment needs" and then identify and develop appropriate resources. This approach requires a more formal or developed research strategy, building on some of the earlier attempts outlined above.

Simple enumeration was undertaken (claims the presenter) by "unobtrusive observation," the kinds of needs assessment proposed as the direction for future investigation requires more sophisticated and intrusive approaches. All future need estimations, it is suggested, will require probability-based samples with extrapolations to the wider population.

The presenter outlines four primary sampling frames:

- *Street locations*, including vacant buildings, abandoned cars, parks, under bridges, public transport vehicles, and 24-hour public facilities (bus stations, hospitals, etc.);
- *Service locations*, including soup kitchens, health care clinics and drop-in centres;
- *Emergency shelters*, including short-term housing, transitional housing, shelters for abused women, runaways and publicly financed hotel accommodation;
- *Other residential facilities*, including prisons (of whatever jurisdiction), mental health facilities, drug treatment facilities, single residence occupancy (SRO) hotels and "general households" (*sic*).

Each sampling frame—often associated with the different definitions of homeless of previous studies—carries with it certain biases towards different sub-populations among the homeless. A shelter survey, for example, might not identify homeless people needing drug treatment if a shelter operator had a strict anti-drug policy. Different temporary housing options may systematically vary with alcohol dependency, family status, mental health status and so on. Valid use of these sampling frames, suggests the presenter, requires some prior knowledge or estimate of the potential population overlap and the extent to which the different locations attract different sub-populations.

The main research strategy recommendations that came out of the workshop at which this paper was presented concerned the need

- to tailor data collection efforts to clear goals, especially policy goals;
- to validate methodologies and methodological assumptions, in particular:



- examining the exclusionary effects of screening criteria;
- examining the different street count techniques;
- examining assumptions about sub-population overlap;
- finding suitable sampling frames for outreach techniques (such as might be used to research rural homelessness, for example).

Also recommended were clarifying the assumptions of different methodologies, and improving interviewing techniques. Most of these suggestions were couched in very general terms and not all of these suggestions have been followed up. It may be useful to keep them in mind as an underlying critical theme in this review.

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The range of articles, and reports which build on the methods sketched above is vast. Every reference examined leads to a forest of further studies. Some of these simply refine previous methods; others employ new ones or adaptations of existing models from other fields. These are found in the attached bibliography.

Some further studies are now outlined which appear to try to implement more carefully designed methods. This is followed by a summary of a general survey and critique of recent studies and, finally, of a compendium of research methods written by one of the most important workers in the field, Martha Burt.

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J.D. Wright and J.A. Devine, "Counting the Homeless: The Census Bureau's 'S-Night' in Five U.S. Cities," *Evaluation Review*, 16 (1992): 355-64.

This report devotes considerable space, as do most others, to a recounting of the tale already told here. Its main points are partly historical and partly methodological. The article describes the hostility encountered by straight counts which appeared continually to revise downward the large figure in the landmark CCNV study. It is obvious, state the authors, that the concept of the "total number of homeless" is a somewhat ambiguous number because of sampling and stratification error and definitional disagreements. This led to a situation in which literal counts were always described as lower boundary estimates and various notional formulae were applied in the cause of extrapolating the figures to some other outcome. So much for history, except that by the end of the 1980s a gradual consensus between more and less conservative researchers was emerging at a figure between

500,000 and a million for the United States as a whole. Numbers between six and seven hundred thousand were modal.

In 1990 the U.S. federal census attempted to enumerate homeless people in a number of areas. In the so-called "S-Night" (S stands for Shelter and Street) on March 20-21, census teams entered all known shelters for the homeless between six p.m. and midnight, then between two and four a.m., enumerators attempted to count homeless people on the street. Finally, later that morning they attempted to locate people occupying abandoned buildings. It was hoped that the resultant figures would yield either an estimate or provide the basis on which an estimate might be extrapolated. The outcome figure was 228,621, less than half the previous "best guess" estimate. The controversy continued.

In parallel with the enumeration effort, the census bureau commissioned a number of methodological and observational studies to determine the efficacy with which the S-Night count was carried out.

Researchers prepared their own lists of shelters, which were compared with the information obtained by the census, with the aim of ensuring that the shelter list was exhaustive. The main focus was on following the activities of the enumerators in the field. Observers were hired and trained, and sent into the streets in designated areas to act as decoy "homeless people." The intention was twofold. Enumerators knew that there would be decoys but not where or in what numbers. The percentage of decoys enumerated (and of course later subtracted from the actual figures) would serve as an indicator of the likely proportion of the homeless who were counted. The decoys also observed enumerators to see how well they followed their procedures, and to what extent they actually approached all those on the street they were supposed to.

The results were that although the census shelter count appeared to have been successful, the street count was not. Only 22-66 percent of the decoys were located and counted by the enumerators, and the decoys also observed enumerators to be quite "unaggressive" (*sic*) in their approach to individuals who were obvious candidates to be counted. There were also some instances of homeless people clearly and successfully evading the enumerators. There were also other procedural lapses but the main finding suggested that the street figures were probably a considerable undercount. In addition, the census had failed to count in "informal shelters," churches, hospitals and all sorts of other non-official shelter accommodation. These findings were established for the limited number of (main urban) areas with decoys, generalized nationally this would suggest that a high proportion of the homeless population was not counted.

The recommendations of the research teams were:

- site selection for the street count should be more extensive, with an effort to reach those not in areas of high concentration or who were seeking to avoid enumeration;
- the enumeration period should be longer (some days) giving enumerators a chance to achieve better coverage;
- some sites were occupied by homeless people only during the day, others at night: enumeration should continue 24 hours; (both these suggestions would increase the risk of double-counting, but the authors suggest that this could be minimized with better "enumerator protocols" (i.e., interviewing procedures);
- non-official shelters should not be overlooked: focus groups of homeless were suggested as a source of information;
- training and security need to be improved for enumerators, so that they can work more consistently and with greater confidence.

M.L. Dennis, "Increasing Census Coverage of Homeless People," Discussion in Proceedings of the Section on Survey Research Methods of the American Statistical Association, 1993.

This is another discussion of definitions and S-Night issues. The paper, by a researcher at the Research Triangle Institute, North Carolina (3040 Cornwallis Rd., RTP, NC 27709-2194) focuses on issues from the S-Night experience. The well-known divergence between minimal and maximal definitions of homelessness has implications for S-Night, in that although shelter residents fit well into the definitional framework, the street counts do not fit well at all because of doubts over the identification of those counted as homeless in any of the accepted definitions. S-Night did not attempt to screen the people counted on the street: they were not to be asked if they were homeless, though some enumerators asked that question on their own (and unsanctioned) initiative. It had been projected that the time sampling frame—two to four a.m.—would assure a very small number of errors; very few people with conventional accommodation would be on the streets at that time.

The paper then reviews these studies (here these are referred to by author and year; the full reference is in the bibliography):

*Martin (1992)*. This paper reviewed the problems of single cross-sectional counts. The main problems are:

- difficulty in controlling enumerator training and the quality and consistency of field work;
- erroneous and out of date information on suitable counting areas (information concerning the likely presence of homeless people);

- *ad hoc* exclusion of people by enumerators based on spur of the moment decisions without an adequate or controlled rationale;
- the sheer difficulty of counting site selection.

*Schwede and Siegel (1992)*. This paper demonstrated the difficulty of selecting shelters. They found that many of the programs selected as counting sites, which were apparently for homeless people, were not in fact programs for the homeless, or at least not within the S-Night terms of reference. They sometimes found that shelters might have only a handful of homeless residents on any given night, or that the same shelter was listed multiple times under different names, or the opposite, that a range of programs and facilities were listed under the same name.

*Barret, Anolik and Abramson (1992)*. Findings here were that shelter coverage for S-Night was good for large cities, but uneven for the street counts. The key findings were that the largest cities do not necessarily have the largest number of homeless people *per capita*, and that there were clear geographic variations in the density, location and identifying characteristics of homeless people. This paper also pointed out the importance of the fact that a third of the S-Night enumerators had personal experience of homelessness themselves, or of working with homeless people.

*Hopper (1992)*. This paper identified the following problems faced by researchers. Homeless people have "low visibility," in the sense that they frequently are not to be found in obvious or accessible places, and are not always easily distinguishable, when present from other passers-by. There is considerable mobility of shelter and other gathering locations, and of people, between these sites. Locating site boundaries, is of course, a problem defined by the lack of accurate prior information to make boundary decisions.

*Brownrigg and Puente (1992)*. This paper stresses the importance of time in defining homelessness. People are constantly moving in and out of homelessness; the same people may often have repeated and intermittent bouts of homelessness; often people double up in accommodation with others, and mobility frequently extends to seeking accommodation or moving, still homeless, in and out of different geographic areas—and across counting site boundaries.

The Dennis paper concludes, among other things, by noting the increase in studies using more careful sampling techniques (or greater caution). These are frequently targeted at sub-populations for the purpose of establishing program needs.

Dennis also describes the ways in which the criticisms he reviews were taken into account in the design of the Metropolitan Area Drug Study in Washington, DC (DC\*MADS) by Dennis himself and R. Iachan for National Institute on Drug Abuse. This survey is described more fully below.

R. Iachan and M.L. Dennis, "A Multiple Frame Approach to Sampling the Homeless and Transient Population," *Journal of Official Statistics* (Statistics Sweden 1993).

This study will be summarized by reference to the previous paper. The MADS study examined the prevalence and consequences of drug use in the homeless population of Washington. The study used several definitions of homelessness: it included shelter, encampment and service sites, and street counts, but not doubled-up households.

On the day of a sample, eligible people were those who stayed overnight, or regularly, in any shelter, accommodation paid for with public emergency housing funds, in encampments in vacant buildings, parks, streets, public or commercial facilities, or who used a soup kitchen or emergency food bank.

Four temporal samples of 16 days each were selected in February, March, April and June, 1991 at a rate of four days per week. There were one or two samples from each of the four sample frames: two samples from shelters, one from a soup kitchen, one sample from an encampment cluster and two, two-stage samples of street census tracts and blocks.

No count took place in May, mainly because of practical difficulties. The level of risk to interviewers became unacceptable after a number of armed robberies; in addition, insufficient interviews were being completed, and there was a higher than expected degree of double-counting between the street and other sampling frames. In the redesigned survey in June 1991, the shelter sampling was continued, but the street sample was replaced with a survey of soup kitchens and encampments.

The sample design involved a random choice of four separate days in any one week in each of the four months already mentioned. In order to avoid any systematic co-variation between particular months and levels of accommodation or service usage, the different sample sites were randomly assigned to the different selected sampling days. Sampling was spread over two seasons to allow for seasonal changes to balance out—winter is less hospitable than spring or summer, but the cost of accommodation increases because of the cost of heating and lighting; in warmer seasons, the process may be reversed. Clearly, however, shelter counts would appear to be of great importance in the winter. Services and service sites also change seasonally—another argument for sampling across seasons.

As in previous studies, areas where homeless people were more likely to congregate or encamp were identified for sampling by "experts." These were found in two stages. In the first, experts were nominated who were municipal employees with primary responsibility for providing services locally to the homeless. These individuals identified census tracts they knew to have high concentrations of

homeless people. They were asked to classify these areas as high, medium or low in usage by the homeless. High usage was homeless people somewhere in the area six or more nights a week, medium usage referred to use one to five nights a week; and low usage was a term applied to all remaining census tracts.

The municipal experts were then asked to nominate people who were knowledgeable about conditions within individual blocks within the census tract. These community experts included outreach workers, shelter operators, police officers and other service providers. Using the same scale, these second-stage experts rated individual blocks for the relative proportion of homeless people likely to gather.

Stratification in the non-street counts was achieved by sampling the population on each occasion that a service was offered, and in proportion (i.e., the number sampled) to occupancy or service usage that had been determined by prior observation. Under-counting was anticipated, but compensated for by over-sampling in tracts identified (by experts) as high-density. This took place, however, only after a first count had been completed. Within each census tract, however, samples were selected with equal probability.

Because of the high mobility of the homeless population, even within a given night, the choice of sampling times was critical. Based on expert opinion, four to six a.m. was known to be a period of little movement. People surveyed at that time were less likely to be counted twice by enumerators, who were counting in both the place of origin or the destination. The most frequent origin was a shelter, and the most common destination was a soup kitchen or similar service. By asking homeless people in the survey about their actual or expected use of shelters, soup kitchens and the streets during the day of the sample, data were generated that became the basis of an adjustment formula used to weight the different sampling frame totals so as to minimize double counting. The details of this computation, however, though promised for future publication, do not appear in the literature surveyed at the time of writing.

The homelessness component of the DC\*MADS study incorporates design experience gained in the Rossi Chicago study and in the U.S. 1991 Census S-Night exercise. The authors conclude that it is helpful to define two primary sub-groups of the street homeless population. The first consists of those people to be found in encampments and who tend to seek safety in numbers. The second group includes isolated individuals either wandering in some debilitated state due to drugs or a mental disorder, or hiding for reasons of privacy or safety. This second group has proved very difficult to count.

The DC\*MADS study authors suggest a number of sampling designs that hold promise for future research:

1. *Listing/Sampling Encampments.* This relatively low cost strategy is to work from a list of known clusters of street persons that can be verified by field staff. It is unlikely to cover isolated individuals.
2. *Sampling High-density Areas.* This moderate cost strategy involves a frame restricted to areas with high densities as verified by experts. This frame is larger than the encampment sampling above. It excludes low densities, so that extrapolation is from a partial probability sample.
3. *Sampling and Listing.* This involves a stratified sample excluding areas believed unlikely to contain homeless people. It incorporates both expert judgement and direct observation. It is larger than method two, and is more expensive. It is much more likely to pick isolated individuals.
4. *Waksberg-Mitofsky Geographic Analog.* This sampling strategy is an adaptation of the well known variation of random-digit dialling technique (RDD). The idea is to reduce the number of attempts needed to find eligible population members by following up survey attempts in clusters (areas, encampments, blocks, census tracts—areas, however defined) in which greater numbers of "hits" have been previously achieved. This is an intensive and high cost method with fair coverage of different sub-groups among the homeless.
5. *Stratified Random Sampling.* This high cost strategy involves randomly sampling areas that have been identified (stratified) as of special interest by some prior criterion, in this case a one- or two-stage judgment model incorporating expert opinion and/or field survey. The MADS study falls into this category.

In light of some of the difficulties revealed in capturing data on such an elusive population as homeless people, lately, an ethnographic approach has increasingly been helpful in guiding sampling design and in building a conceptual picture of the extent of the homeless population. The U.S. Bureau of the Census itself has been interested in such methodologies, and has carried out research through its Centre for Survey Methods Research. The following report is on a pilot test of an experimental daytime count of homeless men in Baltimore, Maryland in 1989.

M.T. Salo and P.C. Campanelli, "Ethnographic Methods in The Development of Census Procedures For Enumerating The Homeless," *Urban Anthropology*, 20,2 (1991): 127-40.

The goal of this research project was to develop a better, safer method of enumerating the "street homeless" that would not involve the much reported nighttime difficulties and risks. In approaching

the homeless population, researchers have to deal with a great diversity of people and unconventional circumstances; customary enumeration techniques seem problematic almost from the start.

The approach proposed here was to enumerate homeless people at daytime centres where they receive services such as food, clothing, medical assistance and so on.

The main advantages seen in this approach is the increased probability of finding some of those street homeless who are hidden at night and are likely to be missed in a nighttime count, however strenuous or ingenious, as well as to increase the safety of both Census enumerators and their interviewees. (Some of the safety issues have been described in reviews of previous articles). Daytime services are also three times more common than nighttime shelters. In addition, such a daytime method allows researchers to obtain information about doubled-up families and other precariously housed or imminently or intermittently homeless people.

On the other hand, a daytime count casts a much wider net than a nighttime one. The separation of the "domiciled" from the homeless is not as pronounced as it is between two and four a.m. Screening interviews and questionnaires have therefore to be devised to establish the "homeless status" of potential interviewees.

In order to identify people who were homeless, and to include as few domiciled people as possible, Salo and Campanelli devised a different model. They defined a sampling frame in terms of the means of need satisfaction of the homeless. The problems faced by homeless people are, in the main, of the same kinds as those faced (or solved) by the domiciled—shelter, food, clothing, medical care, work. It is much harder for homeless people to satisfy these needs than for those with homes.

Other needs whose satisfaction is guaranteed by a decent dwelling are also faced by the homeless, and are much harder to meet: hygiene, rest, privacy, excretion, *etc.* Salo and Campanelli observed the means and locations homeless people used in their normal round, and the frequency and stability with which they gained access to the services they needed. This gave them knowledge of where to locate people according to the probability of their appearance at different types of service facilities and times. This spatio-temporal schedule became the basis of the daytime enumeration design. Because of time, money, staff and other restrictions, the researchers limited their count to adult homeless men, who had been estimated to comprise 70 to 90 percent of the homeless population (Burt and Cohen, 1988).

The researchers sought to define the limits of the homeless' sphere of action by mapping out their choices, strategies, opportunities, and resource and spatial limitations. In their research, they charted an integrated picture of the life of homeless men, marking out in particular, those aspects that were most likely to allow for enumeration.



Among other things, this research sought to establish a framework for research that was more likely to be accepted—and hence successful—among its target population. Questions and their delivery had to be designed to be non-threatening and meaningful among people whose expectations and social conversational norms were different from much or most of the rest of the population—where a misunderstood question or manner on the part of the enumerator might be badly misunderstood.

The study also resulted in guidance for interviewers about possible difficulties and misunderstandings that might occur in the process of interviewing homeless people, and in achieving a non-judgmental style.

The researchers state that the model in greater detail, and the specific sampling implications and designs suggested by it, will all be in forthcoming publications. As far as can be determined, however, these have not yet appeared.

The experience of many counting attempts and much of the methodological thinking that has flowed from this is addressed in a manual outlining counting methods by Martha Burt which is reviewed below.

M. Burt, *Practical Methods for Counting Homeless People—A Manual for States and Local Jurisdictions*. (Prepared for the Interagency Council on the Homeless, under contract to the Department of Housing and Urban Development) March 1992.

A complete review of this manual would be too lengthy for this report. The following discussion, however, attempts to convey an account of its scope and then address some of the issues the manual raises.

The manual is divided into three sections: Introduction, Local Studies and Statewide Data Collection.

The Introduction deals with defining components of the homeless population, the strategies that should determine choice between different data types, cautions about certain sources of data, duplication in counts, using volunteers and co-ordination between agencies.

The section on Local Studies covers shelter and service-based counts, and counting in public places. There is also a chapter on various more sophisticated methodologies.

The section on Statewide Data Collection deals with problems facing efforts at large-scale data collection. This section outlines a number of methods and techniques that can be used.

The manual also contains a number of examples of questionnaires, interview schedules and other forms, as well samples of questionnaire items on particular topics, such as mental illness and chemical dependency.

The Introduction lists and classifies several types of definition and describes some of the typical cases which test the classification of a person as homeless. The suggestion is made that components of the homeless population be defined for the purposes of research in terms of the research or program issues or goals, and that definition-limited eligibility be drawn as widely as possible. Data concerning particular population components should be kept separate and be reported separately by component. The different temporal classifications of data are discussed, with their limitations. Biased impressions due to differences in count definitions of households and other grouping criteria and reporting formats are reported, with worked examples.

The use of other indicators of homeless need is also discussed, chiefly the significance of different service reporting requirements in various jurisdictions. An example is data on people turned away from shelters; this is a required statistic in certain areas. The manual explains the weakness of these data as an indicator of the severity of homelessness. In essence, it is impossible to tell whether refusals represent single applicants or single shelter applications, perhaps from the same individual. In Louisville, Kentucky, however, a complex tracking system has been set up to check whether those turned away at one place eventually found shelter. This manual is replete with illustrations of local sophisticated data management and analysis initiatives.

This section also includes an evaluation of the use of expert opinion, in delimiting areas of concentration that may serve as sampling frames. Many local jurisdictions have assembled a certain degree of methodological expertise based on single studies done in their area. The manual offers a digest of some of these sources. The Introduction surveys many practical issues and concerns that face those planning or undertaking field research that touches the lives and circumstances of homeless people.

The next section, on Local Studies, deals with the experience in shelter and street counts of a large number of State jurisdictions. Issues such as the timing of data collection, the availability of prior databases, biases in reporting, representativeness of sampling, and costs are all covered. This section goes through the local experience of each of a very large set of survey jurisdictions, and then outlines the steps to be taken and pitfalls to be avoided in designing different homelessness-related field studies.

The section on Statewide Data Collection outlines some "sophisticated methodologies" for estimating the size of the homeless population. Each method is described, together with biases, feasibility and costs. Some of these methodologies are discussed below.

*Street sweeps, or probability street sampling:*

This involves random sampling among defined areas (city blocks) with known or pre-estimated likelihoods of encountering homeless people. The blocks are stratified according to different levels of probability and sampling is random across the different blocks. One of the major problems is that the stratification is difficult and laborious to determine and the information on which it is based is uncertain and unstable.

By the time the sample is drawn, the underlying assumptions may have been violated. In addition, it is difficult in practice to maintain the random sampling procedure. Any decision to avoid one sub-type of location for some pragmatic reason, for example, a decision not to investigate abandoned buildings, introduces systematic error. Maintenance of the procedure and consistency in interviewing all require considerable technical and statistical support and interviewer training. Altogether, this method is fragile, and susceptible to undiscoverable sources of error.

*"Hidden Homeless" counts:*

These are attempts to compensate for some of the errors of attempts at randomized block sampling. Particular attention is paid to difficult and reclusive sites, such as abandoned buildings. Other areas of attention include doubled-up households. Researchers have obtained access to this information by targeting likely areas, generally using census information to identify tracts in the lowest income groups and sampling intensively in these areas. This method was used in a study mentioned by the author in Houston and revealed a precariously housed population ten times the number of literally homeless previously identified in the study.

*"Snowball" sampling:*

This is also called network sampling. It is used to identify populations thinly and widely spaced over large areas. The main idea is to locate people by referral from members of an initial sample. Another version is to use key informants—at least to start. Again, the aim of this method is to counter the systematic errors of sampling methods that concentrate on service or shelter users and people who are visibly (*sic*) homeless. It is, however, very labour-intensive.

*Counting homeless youth:*

There is no good method for identifying homeless children who are with their parents or on their own. Shelters will often not accept unaccompanied children; children with families may be in such a state that any enumerator may be under an obligation to report this to authorities. Access, therefore,

is likely to be difficult to obtain. There are also definitional issues. Is a child homeless, for example, if they have established a permanent or stable arrangement with others that puts them at risk in other ways (accommodation financed by prostitution is one instance)?

*Tracking studies:*

These seek to establish the relationship between point and annual prevalence. It is important for planning purposes to determine whether any given population passes in and out of homelessness, or suffers occasional or very periodic homeless experience, or is homeless in the long term. Long-term homeless people may have high levels of disability and few resources; short-term homeless may have a much stronger attachment to the labour force, a more stable family life and so on.

Simple approaches involve identifying, within a sample, those people who have been homeless for less than one month, and adding this number multiplied by 11 to the original sample number. This produces an estimate that assumes people become homeless only once during a year, and that they do so at a steady average rate. Both of these assumptions are, of course, unrealistic.

Another simple version is to collect annual counts from shelter and service operators. But this only covers shelter users, it depends on the quality and uniformity of recording procedures, and these may not be trustworthy. Finally, this procedure is likely to avoid duplication only within shelters and not between shelters.

A more sophisticated tracking technique involves identifying a population at one point in time, and attempting to contact the same people after a period to ask about their experiences in between. By this means, frequent short-term homelessness can be uncovered. This method does not attempt to gain or repeat a generalizable sample, but aims at providing data on the volatility of homelessness and exhibiting patterns of entry and exit with respect to homelessness.

S. Sudman, M.G. Sirken and C.D. Cowan, "Sampling Rare and Elusive Populations," *Science*, 240 (1988): 991-96.

This article explains techniques for sampling and estimating the numbers of populations so widely scattered, infrequently occurring, or hidden that regular counting methods are likely to mis-estimate, because they depend on easy identification.

Following is a description of two methods from this account. The first is aimed at identifying spatial clusters of individuals where the existence of clusters is assumed or known, but the location of the clusters is not. As we have already confirmed, identifying such clusters (e.g., preferred city blocks) from expert information turns out to be unreliable. Instead, a survey begins with random

sweeps and once a contact is made and a member of the target population is identified, then screening continues in the immediate vicinity of that person until some target number of other contacts is made (or the quantified patience of the researcher has worn thin!). This is the method applied to reduce the effort and expense of random digit dialling in telephone surveys, but could also be applied to spatial searches.

The other technique of greatest interest is capture-recapture. This is a technique to estimate the size of populations that are difficult to find and count, or populations that are in motion and cannot be counted all at one time. The technique was originally developed for counting populations of animals or fish, and has been extended to include nomadic or mobile human populations.

The technique requires obtaining two or more independent observations on the same population. The observations need to be done at about the same times, or based on different sources that represent approximately the same population.

The researcher needs to know only three things to make an estimate of the population size:

- the number of persons observed at the first time (or the first source);
- the number of persons observed the second time (or in the second source);
- the number of persons observed at both times, (or in both sources).

All members of the population must have an equal chance of being observed. They must then be tagged in some way, so that at a later time it can be determined whether the individual has been previously observed. With human populations, this usually means collecting identifying information like name, sex, I.D. numbers of whatever kind, address if possible, or other distinctively unique features.

The estimate is given by the formula:  $N_t = (N_1 \times N_2)/M$ , where  $N_t$  is the population size,  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  are the number of persons observed at the first and second time, and  $M$  is the number observed at both times (or in both sources).

## WHO ARE THE HOMELESS? PROFILES AND CAUSES

The main focus of this review has been on the estimation of the numbers of people affected by homelessness. As we suggested in the Introduction, however, much of the public discussion in this area has been concerned with attitudes towards those who are homeless.

Two sets of views are common:

- The homeless are people forced into shelterlessness by the slings and arrows of economic misfortune, social isolation, racial or social stigma, and other forces which have acted on them and oppress them despite their volition; or
- The homeless are (a small and) permanent number of misfits and deviants with antisocial habits which leave them unable to function in society, and thus they bring upon themselves the destitution and isolation, leaving them no recourse but the streets and public assistance and shelter. Or, they are largely mentally ill, and so, little can be done for them, except, perhaps, some form of reinstitutionalization.

The following section discusses literature that explores the prevalence and roles of alcohol and substance abuse, and mental health issues, in explaining homelessness. The relationship of income and rent levels and housing market forces is also investigated as predictors of vulnerability to homelessness.

There is considerable value in reviewing the literature on "cause." If cause can be determined then indicators typifying these causes can be used to predict the vulnerability of people and the level of the homeless population. For example, if it can be determined that certain changes in housing market forces lead to increases or decreases in the homeless population, then careful monitoring of trends will provide estimates of the expected number of homeless people.

### THE LITERATURE

Bassuk and Lauriat (1984) have stated the situation in the United States very eloquently. They describe how, at the beginning of the '80s, a conservative turn led to a reduction in funding for facilities and support for the poor and the homeless, and, in places, an active hostility. Anti-conservative politicians were then said to have made the relatively inexpensive provision of shelter services in their localities a rallying point against Republican political foes. City politicians, meanwhile, feeling the main brunt, tried to shift the financial responsibility for programs to other levels of government. No one, the authors claim, sought to investigate and search for fundamental and long-lasting answers.<sup>1</sup>

All this overstates the polarity of views perhaps, but provides a framework for discussion. In either case, this cast of the fundamental questions leads to research aiming to justify a particular profile and socio-demographic breakdown of the homeless population, to identify the forces, be they economic, societal, social, community or individual that combine to lead to the presence of so many (or relatively few) homeless people among us.

Arguments move between claims that: the homeless, especially the "new homeless" of the '80s, are increasingly like the rest of us, without any distinctive profile. They just bear the worst end of the stick of failed (Reaganite) policies; or, alternatively, the homeless are quite distinct from the normal population, with a large measure of personal pathology.

Fundamentally, we are back at issues of estimation; different reports come up with different profiles and there is certainly evidence for regional and seasonal or periodic or cyclic instability, if not a shifting profile altogether. Much of the variation, however, is doubtless due to methodological inconsistencies and incompatible criteria. There is little basis to examine this in detail, as studies rarely report their methodologies with sufficient precision.

Variation, however, is also due to the different political philosophies toward the homeless, the different definitions these philosophies generate, and the efforts to obtain estimates that support particular positions and philosophies. For as long as the target population of any study remains undefined, and its enumeration or estimation methodologically doubtful, any results lack conviction.

Studies dealing with the demographics and economy of homelessness concentrate in three broad areas: alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness and issues of housing; income and rent and their association with broader economic forces. Examining these "supposed" aspects of causation help predict levels and vulnerability to homelessness.

## **ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Available studies are American, conducted in Boston (5 studies), New York (13), Philadelphia (1), Chicago (1), Detroit (1), Milwaukee (1), Minneapolis (1), Ohio (1), St. Louis (2), Baltimore (8), Dallas (1), Nashville (1), Anchorage (2), Denver (1) Los Angeles (5), Phoenix (2), Portland (2), San Diego (1), and San Francisco (1), all between 1978 and 1987. Prevalence of alcohol or substance use ranged anywhere from 11 percent to 86 percent among a total of 50 studies.

These studies are reviewed in Fischer (1987). The following tables present a summary of the findings.

TABLE 2

**Prevalence Estimates of Alcohol Problems  
Among Contemporary Homeless Populations by Region**

REGION	NUMBER OF STUDIES	PREVALENCE ESTIMATE
National	3	17.1 - 37.7%
Northeast	16	11.1 - 50.5%
North Central	7	20.8 - 57.5%
South	10	16.3 - 70.6%
West	14	22 - 86%

Source: Fischer, 1987.

As Fischer notes, the studies in this area lack uniform definitions and common methodologies, and therefore comparisons are difficult. Certainly the prevalence of alcohol problems varies enormously. Whatever the variability, however, they do offer strong evidence that problems associated with alcohol usage affect substantial portions of the homeless population. Alcohol over-use affects about seven percent of the general population. Alcohol abuse in the homeless exceeds this many times over.

Five studies, presented in tabular form below, were oriented specifically towards the investigation of alcohol problems and their correlates in homeless populations. They offer some general basis for comparison across sites. The four local studies were surveys using probability sampling to select a representative range of interviewees from shelters and service sites. The national study is based on clinical data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Care for the Homeless clinics, from 16 of the 19 cities where the foundation has operations.



TABLE 3

Comparison of Design Methodology  
Five Recent Studies of Alcoholism Among the Homeless

	Ropers & Bover	Roth & Bean	Koegel & Burnham	Wright & Knight	Fischer & Breakey
<b>Study Period</b>	1983-4	1984	1984-5	1984-6	1986-7
<b>Location</b>	Los Angeles	Ohio	Los Angeles	U.S. (National)	Baltimore
<b>Sampling Site</b>	Shelters, Soup lines, Congregat- ing areas	Shelters, Cheap hotels, Congregat- ing Areas	Shelters, Soup lines, Congregat- ing areas	Clinics	Shelters, Jail
<b>Sample Size</b>	269	979	379	23,745	321
<b>Sex Ratio (M:F)</b>	3.63	4.26	24	NR	1.29
<b>Identification of alcohol abuse group</b>	Self-report of drinking behaviour	Self-report of drinking behaviour	DIS*	Medical record	SMAST*
<b>Prevalence</b>	45.3%	20.8%	19.6 - 62.9%	17.1 - 37.7%	56.7%

The following includes references to data not in the table.

The five studies uniformly report higher proportions of males in the alcohol problem group, although prevalence by sex varies across the studies. Alcoholic homeless people also tended to be older. The socio-economic background of those studied did not appear to vary from the normal in any systematic way across studies.

There were indicators of prior unstable histories in some in a higher than average school drop-out rate, but in others, military service seemed to indicate some stability. In two areas, alcoholics were slightly more likely to be working. Alcoholic homeless were more likely than others to have been married, though none were at the time (only 10% of the general sample were married). Those with alcohol problems had fewer friends, and were more likely to have severed family relationships. Alcoholic homeless were less transient and more long-term than other homeless studied. Not

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\*A standardized measure of alcohol-related problems.

surprisingly, alcoholic homeless were more likely than others to cite alcohol as a primary reason for their condition.

The Koegel and Burnham study indicated that nearly 70 percent of alcoholic homeless had at least one other DSM III<sup>2</sup> diagnosed mental health problem. It is difficult to generalize further regarding links between alcoholism and mental illness because of variation in measures of mental disorder used in different studies. Depression is also a feature of alcoholic syndrome itself, and it is difficult to speak of alcohol problems and other mental problems as wholly distinct. However, alcoholics with no other diagnosis tend to be older, White, formerly married males.

Those with alcohol problems were between 1.3 and 1.8 times more likely to have criminal histories, and 1.3 to 2 times more likely to be victims of crime than homeless people without alcohol problems. Drug use estimates ranged from three to 31 percent.

There is general agreement across the studies that alcohol-related problems affect substantial numbers of the homeless—from one to three fifths of those surveyed. The connection between drinking and homelessness remains unclear. Homeless problem drinkers were more likely than non-drinkers to have had conventional early lives, suggesting alcoholism as an agent of decline into homelessness. Alcohol was also cited by respondents themselves as such a factor.

As a functional social adaptation to homelessness, alcoholism may, of course, be its consequence as easily as a cause. In general, the data bear both interpretations, or some combination. There are further measurement problems; measurement methods are often not fully explained in the different studies, and measures are often different and may not be comparable. Alcohol problems may also be manifested in different ways in different sub-groups, and such classifications are not always made or not with comparable criteria; age, sex, ethnicity and co-morbid conditions are examples.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Leona L. Bachrach, "What We Know About Homelessness Among Mentally Ill Persons: An Analytical Review and Commentary," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 43,5 (May 1992).

This article discusses a number of issues concerned with the mental health among the homeless. The key questions are, says the author, how many of the homeless suffer from chronic mental illness? Has deinstitutionalization precipitated an increase in homelessness? What kinds of programs should mentally ill homeless persons be offered? The first two issues are reviewed in this report.

The question of the prevalence of mental illness among the homeless begs the question of definition, and, like so many articles about the homeless, this one too goes over the definitional questions with which we are by now familiar. Beyond these, there are some distinctive problems.

Mental illness may be an accompaniment or a result of the circumstances which brought about homelessness or of its associated stresses. Many homeless people suffer severe physical deprivation. Baxter and Hopper (1982) (quoted by the author) have written that if at least some homeless individuals regarded as mentally ill could receive "several nights of sleep, an adequate diet, and warm social contact, some of their symptoms might subside." In other words, they might be little worse off than those not homeless who are not incapacitated, but who might be equally susceptible. The homeless situation is one that induces fear and insecurity for most, that may be temporarily assuaged by alcohol, and may be part of a subculture that has learned different and perhaps more situationally adapted norms. Seen through all this, the argument runs, differential diagnosis becomes less certain. It then becomes easy to play numbers when so much speculation is involved—and again we are back at estimation.

The homeless may also not be a distinctive psychiatric population in another sense. They may have greater pathology than normal populations but may overlap considerably with other, more clinical, sub-populations, such as chronic crisis patients, revolving door patients, "urban nomads"—groups discussed in the psychiatric epidemiological literature, but not homeless, necessarily, in any of the accepted definitions.

There is also the question of diversity—"within-group variation"—among the homeless. Studies show wide demographic differences by area and other variables. Within the same area, homeless people may form quite distinct sub-groups, each with its problems and, often, with its specific program or service provision. Greater prevalence of mental illness might be explained by co-varying third factors.

Just as "homelessness" and "chronic mental illness" lack standard definitions, so too does the term "deinstitutionalization." Deinstitutionalization is both a fact and a philosophy. The release of patients from mental hospitals resulted from improved drug therapy, outrage over institutional conditions, and a desire to reduce the cost of care. It is not the case, however, that deinstitutionalization suddenly released all those otherwise protected in state hospitals in one pathological wave. Some or many of the homeless mentally ill might never have been hospitalized in the first place for reasons of admission criteria or the provision of other treatments. Nevertheless, certain key influences seem clear: some individuals are sufficiently disabled by their condition that they are ineffective in seeking, or maintaining, help and shelter.

Pamela Fischer, Robert Drake and William Breakey, "Mental Health Problems Among Homeless Persons: A Review of Epidemiological Research From 1980 to 1990." *Treating the Homeless Mentally III*, 1991.

This paper presents data on a range of health, substance abuse and treatment issues. The review will be confined to the question of the prevalence of mental illness among the homeless and some of its sub-populations.

Most previous studies, the paper states, focused on single residents of shelters, some examined young mothers. Few attempted systematic street sampling or reported data in such a way that clinical characteristics could be compared across studies. Research designs were also heterogeneous. Prevalence of mental health problems varied from two to 90 percent, an uninterpretable range.

Nevertheless, once methodologically weaker studies have been discounted, estimates survive that suggest that about one third of homeless adults have mental health problems (one quarter of men and nearly half of women). Median rates for children (42%) and youth (52%) are high. The table on the next page presents mental health prevalences by some methodological differences, and shows the full range of reported prevalence.

Several studies have contrasted homeless samples with community populations, usually from the Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) household<sup>3</sup> survey. Sample sizes varied enormously, studies took place in nine major cities, one was statewide (California) and three were nationwide. A variety of sites were sampled: mainly shelters, clinics and streets, but also jails, emergency rooms, and in the case of the ECA comparisons, households across the U.S. The samples are predominantly male, from 41 percent to 98.6 percent. Assessment was either by clinical examination (half the studies) or standardized instrument (DIS).

In general, the rate and distribution of specific disorders differed considerably between homeless and household populations. Anxiety disorders, major affective disorders, and substance use disorders were more common than the major mental illnesses in the household population, and the more severe and disabling disorders were more common among the homeless. Schizophrenia, dementia,<sup>4</sup> mental retardation, antisocial personality disorder, and multiple co-existing disorders were all particularly high. In one Baltimore study (Breakey *et al.*, 1989), homeless mental illness rates were high, even by comparison with the low income segment of the ECA household survey.

TABLE 4

Mental Health Problem Prevalence  
by Assessment Method and Sampling Site

Study Variable Assessment Method	Mental Health Problems	
	Number of Studies	Prevalence (%)
Psychiatric Examination	6	12.3 - 48.6
Standardized Scale	24	19 - 89.3
Pre-Post Treatment	30	10.6 - 59
Records Review	16	10.6 - 52.8
Self-Report	2	18.8 - 54
Provider Assessment	11	2 - 68.6
<b>Sample Site</b>		
Clinic Hospital	9	12.3 - 52.8
Shelter	49	12 - 89.3
SRO	1	54.2

Source: Fischer, Drake and Breakey, 1991.

In Los Angeles studies homeless people were much more likely to be diagnosed with specific psychiatric disorders than any other part of the population. Homeless people also report nonspecific symptoms of distress at much greater rates than the rest of the population, though cause and effect in this instance seem indistinguishable—and environmental conditions seem *at least* as likely to cause the distress as the other way round!

Homeless children are reported to experience developmental delays, emotional problems and child abuse at greater rates than children who are not homeless (e.g., Alperstein *et al.*, 1988 and Whitman *et al.*, 1984). The deleterious *effects* of homelessness on children are widely recorded.

It bears repeating, however, that there is insufficient discussion of sampling frames in these studies. In fact, in all the studies examined in this area (including those not written up in this review because of duplication of content) methodological discussion was confined to the type of diagnostic method, the spread among sample sites and the size and demographic breakdown of the sample. No discussion was presented concerning the representativeness of a demographic profile or of sampling frames. Only one example could be found (Breakey, 1987)—Rossi's Chicago night street count. Lamb, Richard H. "Deinstitutionalization in the Nineties." *Treating the Homeless Mentally Ill*, 1991

This paper is a call for a new direction in care for the homeless mentally ill. It contrasts the ideology of deinstitutionalization and hopes for rehabilitation with the practical concern that independence and rehabilitation are not always achievable. Reinstitutionalization is not a practical possibility because of severe constraints on involuntary committal. The need for long-term care must be recognized, however, and institutional care should be considered positively in suitable cases, including involuntary committal. A comprehensive, case management oriented system needs to be established. The diversity among the mentally ill needs to be recognized and the bureaucracy currently impeding care must be reduced.

#### THE ROLE OF INCOME AND RENT AND HOUSING MARKET FORCES

The line of research to be sketched out here begins from a different direction than the others. It does not attempt to count or describe a population, so much as describe or predict the conditions under which homelessness is precipitated for those whose income and social support is weak.

Karin Ringheim, *At Risk of Homelessness—The Roles of Income and Rent* (Praeger, 1990).

This book first discusses some of the competing theories of the causes of homelessness: that homelessness is mainly the result of deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill; or that it stems from alcohol and drug addiction. Reasonable doubt is cast on some of the claims made, and Ringheim cites

the claims of service providers and shelter operators that an ordinary life is very difficult without security of shelter. Traditional low cost accommodation has been disappearing, and it seems difficult to claim that structural economic forces have had no impact in further limiting the financial autonomy of the poor.

The writer suggests that societal perceptions vary, and in this conservative time basic acceptable needs of the poor (that may have to be satisfied at public expense) are viewed as less important. Therefore, the number of people to whom traditional compassion is extended is also less. The intrusion, through recessionary forces, of the "new homeless," including families, into the picture has complicated matters, and focused attention once more on economic forces, not just on the personal choices of people who are weak or who have failed.

The heart of this work, however, is not in the lengthy theorizing in the first two chapters, but in the use of data from various housing surveys by HUD or the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Much of the very careful discussion concerns the strengths and shortcomings of particular measures and indicators, and chances of error induced by changes (mainly reductions) in sampling. In the end, Ringheim is able to identify a population of vulnerable renters (rent = 45% or more of income), a decline in the average income of renters, and an increase over time in demand for low-cost housing—where rent does not exceed 30 percent of income as indicators. The extent of the gap between the incomes of low-income earners and gross rent of available housing stock is associated with levels of homelessness—clear evidence for the impact of decreasing affordability.

Kim Hopper, Ezra and Sarah Conover, "Economies of Makeshift: Deindustrialization and Homelessness in New York City," *Urban Anthropology*, 14 (1985): 183-236.

This study combines data from a number of sources. Macro-economic data on the loss of jobs in New York in the '70s and '80s, and on the relative distribution of wage levels, are mentioned. Housing stock reduction and gentrification is quantified. Mainly, however, the study combines data on the declining availability of accommodation at the lowest cost—SROs and cheap hotels—and a survey of 223 first time arrivals to the New York City shelter system. Although this population turned out to be unrepresentative of the normal populations from which they had come—42 percent had been hospitalized at some time for psychiatric or alcohol or drug problems—many were working, and a majority had no mental or substance problems. Most who were working had low skills and insecure jobs, a decline from the more skilled and secure jobs that many of their fathers had held. The authors posit a progressive marginalization of some men through the progressive shrinking of the skilled labour market.

The main conclusions, argued through a careful examination of "makeshift" strategies that interviewees used to get by, are that the borderline homeless are often vulnerable to start with, but that restricted economic opportunities force them into ever more ingenious or improvised strategies for survival. To the degree that circumstances worsen, these strategies for survival fail more and more frequently and render people's hold on secure accommodation weaker.

Robin Law and Jennifer R. Wolch, "Homelessness and Economic Restructuring," *Urban Geography*, 12 (1991): 105-36.

The main argument of this study of homelessness and poverty in Los Angeles, is that the rise in homelessness in U.S. cities is partially an outcome of change in industrial composition and labour demand that has reduced the income earning capacities at the lowest skill levels of the labour market. In downtown Los Angeles, there has been a combination of job loss at the low skill level and a decline in earnings for the low-skill jobs that remain. When the following forces are also taken into account, this is seen to have led to increasing displacement of the working poor from affordable areas of accommodation. These forces are:

- demand for local housing from an increasing high skill/high wage workforce downtown;
- pressure from industrial and commercial activities on low-cost housing sites;
- housing demolition to meet seismic standards;
- massive inflows of poor immigrants from Asia and Central America to the inner city.

The net result is a combination of higher costs and lower income leading to homelessness for those least able to obtain an adequate income or with the least informal alternatives.

Previous studies, according to the authors, have concentrated either on failing low-cost housing supply or on the loss of access to housing either through low income or deinstitutionalization. This study attempts to trace the connection of a number of these elements at the local level.

The authors show how downtown Los Angeles has been a centre of low-skill/low-wage work. General losses and changes in the mix of skill and wage levels ("the sectoral mix") in the downtown are identified. The whole level of wages, it seems, has in fact declined. Higher paying low-skill jobs have disappeared and available low-skill jobs attract lower wages. The income of low skilled workers has declined relative to others.

An analysis of commuter patterns suggests that a large share of downtown workers, especially the low-skilled, live in inner-city communities. These communities contain some of the cheapest housing in Los Angeles County. They are united by poverty; in 1980 the median income was 58



percent of the median income for Los Angeles County, and the proportion of households below the poverty line was double that of the County.

At the same time, there has been massive immigration into the area due to political instability and war in Asia and Central America and immigrants from Mexico, plus an increasing concentration of corporate offices and an accompanying demand for downtown living from a growing high-skill/high-wage workforce. The rise in demand and gentrification that has ensued has put further pressure on the hitherto low-cost housing stock. Affordable housing in other areas has not materialized.

The gap between housing supply and demand downtown has grown steadily. Between 1970 and 1980 the median value of owner occupied housing has risen 260 percent in real terms. By 1988, the median value was almost \$200,000. Only 17 percent of all downtown residents could afford such a home. For households in poverty, home ownership fell from 27 percent in 1970 to 20 percent in 1980. Almost 75 percent of poor tenant households were spending more than half their income on rent. Between 1977 and 1985, rents increased 122 percent while the consumer price index rose 77 percent. The number of affordable rental units declined.

Another statistic that portrays the situation is the rise of 35 percent in the downtown population in the face of an increase in the total number of housing units of only three percent. Overcrowding has increased sharply. An estimated 200,000 people in Los Angeles County reside in garages, and estimates for the number of homeless are now 35,000 for the City of Los Angeles and 50,000 for the County. It may be that homelessness is typically the result of a long series of personal misfortunes which slowly erode social supports, but affordability and housing opportunity are certainly factors

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The following article is offered as an extension of some of the same principles as the previous one. Although it does not expressly address issues of homelessness, it describes a tool to estimate the geographical distribution of an underlying dimension of poverty. Vulnerability to homelessness is likely to be a dimension of similar dynamics, and is certainly a closely related concept.

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Katherine O'Regan and Michael Wiseman, "Using Birth Weights to Chart the Spatial Distribution of Urban Poverty," *Urban Geography*, 11 (1990): 217-33.

The extent and characteristics of homelessness seem to vary considerably by geographic area. The authors refer to this as "the dynamic geography of urban poverty." At the local level, they claim, there is a shortage of information on household situations. They suggest a number of indicators: institutional or other traces of poverty, such as welfare receipts, unemployment, school drop-out rates, etc. They illustrate the process through charting the spatial distribution of low birth weights, an indicator of poor nutrition.

Much of the research cited as background in this article is concerned with the census-track based mapping of social issues, using empirical data as assumed indicators of underlying dimensions of need and as a basis for deciding upon the location of service provision. However, whether or not empirical data of the sort described are a good indicator or not, they are often scarce and population estimates between censuses are inaccurate, so that it is difficult to calculate the ratios that are of interest.

Birth weight, on the other hand, is noted on birth certificates, and, while confidential, is often tabulated by county health departments against other demographic variables. Low birth weight is linked in research with low household income (and inadequate pre-natal care), mothers of low socio-economic status (as measured by education), and single or teen mothers. All these are groups at substantial risk of persistent poverty. The persistently poor are a classification close to that of homelessness vulnerability.

Multiple measurements of birth weight and other poverty indicators are also reported, and were used in factor and cluster analyses to pinpoint geographic areas where concerns coalesce. Similar means might be used to pinpoint pockets of vulnerability to homelessness, with an eye to the establishment of service provision.

The spatial cross-tabulation of data and use of clustering statistics and factor analysis may also be useful in charting some of the variance reported in estimates and cross-sectional profiles of the homeless.

## CANADA

The following section summarizes research on the state of the homeless population in Canada. One major theme is the difference in focus between Canadian and American research, a difference that reflects, in part, differences in political culture on questions of housing, and in assumptions about public responsibilities.

There appears to be no research initiative on measuring the extent of either literal or acute homelessness, or vulnerability, in Canada approaching the scale of investigation in the United States. Such projects and studies as can be found are partial, local and unco-ordinated. Much of the material is journalistic, with no research component beyond the recounting of vivid case histories in support of the thesis that not enough is being done to solve the problem. These articles are not discussed here. This review concerns only actual studies or reviews of studies that focus on efforts to determine the magnitude of the problem.

Canadian writing on homelessness often has a different focus than the American. Canadian studies are generally written within a framework set by governmental definition of indicators and ongoing or periodic evaluations tied to the development of housing policies. Although, of course, subject to the issues of the moment, Canadian housing policy has long been interventionist: the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has been involved for a long time in the assessment of housing needs, and in research and development and the allocation of funds to respond to these needs.

Accordingly, the Canadian discussion tends to be conducted in terms of an ongoing dialogue over needs and programs. Often, the writing appears to be concerned to influence the public or decision-makers to provide more programs. The need is often stated with as much vigour as the authors can summon, and the information suggesting the need for provision is taken as evident or proven. Typically, the statement of need is relatively brief; the detailing of program requirements are given more space.

The terms of reference in articles and papers focuses more on the characteristics of the homeless population, the condition of the housing stock, and so on. Counts and discussions over the accuracy of different estimations and extrapolations seem to be largely absent.

The main vehicle for the estimation of need has been a developing index of housing need indicators. These express norms against which housing adequacy may be judged. Socially acceptable minimums in housing standards have risen over the years, in response to long-term growth in Canadian *per capita* income (till recently) and rising consumer expectations.

Housing standards are measured in terms of dwelling unit *adequacy*, *suitability* and *affordability*. Norms are set for each of these standards, and the housing needs indicators developed to apply these standards change to reflect improvements in housing conditions and changing public values with respect to acceptable housing. For example, even at the beginning of the 1970s a significant number of dwellings still lacked basic indoor plumbing, and so housing *adequacy* could then be measured by the presence or absence of such facilities. By 1982, only 1.6 percent of dwellings still lacked these and indicators began to incorporate other, more general standards of physical condition, such as need for major repairs. *Suitability* was measured in the past by an accounting unit devised for international comparisons: persons per room. More than one person per room was considered crowded. In the 1980s the National Occupancy Standard (NOS) was developed, reflecting common elements among provincial housing standards. Its criteria are as follows:

- there can be no more than two persons per bedroom;
- parents are eligible for a bedroom separate from their children;
- household members aged 18 or over are eligible for a separate bedroom unless they have a spouse or partner; and
- dependants aged five or older of the opposite sex do not share a bedroom.

*Affordability* is determined by the proportion of income set as the maximum that a household should spend on shelter. This has varied through time, rising lately from 25 percent to 30 percent. The original standard was based on a rule of thumb developed from nineteenth century underwriting practices. Shelter costs can include a variety of basic shelter financing and expenses (utilities, fees, taxes), income is combined household income of all those aged 15 or older.

With all these indicators, argument still continues over the implications for need assessment of different computations and definitions. In 1981 a new model, called the Core Housing Need Model was developed in a joint U.S.–Canadian study (US HUD and CMHC, 1981). This incorporates a 2-stage analysis which distinguishes voluntary and involuntary occupation of unsatisfactory housing. Voluntary and involuntary occupation of unsatisfactory housing is determined by comparing whether household income is above or below a "norm rent income." Norm rent income is the level of household income at which a suitable rental dwelling unit could be obtained that met standards for suitability, adequacy and affordability. These criteria taken together express the level of housing need in terms of numbers falling below the defined standards. This Core Need Model and its conceptual background set the terms of discussion for much Canadian material on housing and homelessness issues.

The existence of the model, of course, does not imply that there is a constant data-gathering effort to support its continual and ready application to all questions. It may be possible to use the

model to determine vulnerability to homelessness, but it certainly cannot measure or determine the literal homeless. It only includes households that have a "place of residence."

The discussion below covers some of the most important pieces of Canadian literature.

## THE LITERATURE

D. Hulchanski, *Who are the Homeless? What is Homelessness? The Politics of Defining an Emerging Policy Issue* (University of British Columbia Planning Paper #10, School of Community and Regional Planning).

This paper considers the dynamic by which social issues, in this case, homelessness, become "legitimate" and acceptable items on the public agenda. Politicians and policy makers (civil servants) have an interest in defining such issues as narrowly as possible, in order not to be burdened with developing large and difficult policy responses, and to refute criticism of existing policies and institutions. Local officials and service agencies, on the other hand, who confront these problems first hand, require as full a documentation, description and quantification as possible, in order to mobilize public effort, resources and political momentum to develop means to aid them in providing adequate and effective programs.

The paper compares the status of homelessness as an issue between "less developed nations" (*s/c*) and the United States and Canada. In poorer countries, the problem is largely immediate and obvious, and the solutions, even if presently unreachable, are also fairly evident. In richer countries, the choice of a criterion or an acceptable minimum housing standard becomes an issue—the debate moves the criterion up or down, on the waves of political tides moving between the institutional forces described above. All this is by way of background. The paper then makes comparisons between the U.S. and Canada. The American response is largely as we have already described: the issue of homelessness, or the "new homelessness," was raised in its most recent form, in the early and mid-1980s; there were Congressional hearings, and the debate currently continues over estimation, definition, acceptable housing minimums, and programs. Research is ongoing, with some methodological progress.

Canada, our emphasis in this section, is in a different case:

Canadians are continually reminded by politicians and housing officials that they have one of the best housing stocks in the world and that, on average, they are among the best housed people in the world (p. 9).

Government policy from 1973 is quoted, to the effect that housing is a "social right." However, hunger and homelessness visibly increased—to the shock, as the paper puts it, of many Canadians—in the early to mid-1980s, as in the United States. A 200,000 increase in the number of Canadians

below the poverty line was recorded between 1979 and 1985 (National Council on Welfare, 1986). Since that time, community groups and local agencies have initiated programs (such as shelters and food banks) and sought greater government action, both in this area and connected issues, such as poverty, unemployment and housing.<sup>5</sup> However, at the time of writing, no general Canadian government study of homelessness had been undertaken, according to the author.

No mention of homelessness can be found in major federal government housing policy documents of the mid and late eighties, a number of which are noted in the paper. Notwithstanding, the evidence has accumulated that Canada's affordable housing stocks are severely inadequate. The paper uses this data as an indicator of housing need—a parallel concept to homelessness. The term "housing need" describes the state of those whose housing circumstances fall below a given standard. (See the discussion of the Core Need Model, above).

According to this CMHC criterion, more than a million households were inadequately housed, 200,000 acutely so. The governmental response, apparently, was to downplay the whole issue and suggest that claims of so acute a situation were merely Canadian excessive self-criticism, and that "efforts are required to reduce, where possible, the magnitude of on-going expenditures."<sup>6</sup>

Local studies have taken place, the authors state, despite apparent mainstream indifference. This paper describes three Toronto studies from 1983.

#### **METRO TORONTO'S STUDY OF THE HOMELESS**

The Metro Toronto Planning Department conducted a study of housing need in the early 1980s and realized that traditional survey methods were not useful in measuring the situation of those without a fixed address. Their survey revealed that at least 3,400 people were without a permanent address in Toronto, and that their demographic profile did not fit the "skid row" stereotype: 36 percent were under 25 years old, and there was an increasing number of families and single women.

The count of those "without a permanent address" was made up of hostel residents and clients identified by selected social service agencies. Homelessness, as such, was not defined. The distinction between at-risk individuals and those literally without shelter was, apparently, left unexplored. However, in the opinion of agency staff 70 percent to 90 percent of clients who do find housing were unsatisfactorily housed because of the poor physical state of the accommodation.

#### **THE SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF METRO TORONTO**

"People Without Homes: A Permanent Emergency" by the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto (1983) examined the nature and scale of homelessness rather than focusing on homeless

individuals. The issue here was the provision of affordable accommodation. Focussing on sheer shelterlessness and the provision of emergency accommodation was thought to be superficial; such solutions would do little to ease the long-term problem. Solutions had to focus on how to secure adequate living conditions for those with low incomes.

#### THE SINGLE DISPLACED PERSONS PROJECT

This is a conceptual report written by a coalition of staff and board members of social service agencies and Toronto inner-city clergy. It attempts to define homelessness in the sense of deprivation of a "home," i.e. a certain standard of secure and stable housing. The essential problem is said to be the difficulties of people on low incomes in finding affordable secure adequate shelter. The issue is affordability and the standard of accommodation. The continuation of the current cycle of insecurity in which the poor are trapped is seen as the result of a complex social and economic dynamic. There are structural barriers in the way of affordable housing for those who are vulnerable—the responsibility for the situation is societal rather than individual.

Bairstow & Associates, "The Homeless" (City of Regina Housing Study VI).

This study, executed jointly by the city of Regina planning department and Bairstow & Associates, describes a population of older individuals, primarily men, whose lifestyle is seen as unacceptable to traditional seniors' housing, and a population of younger individuals ineligible for subsidized housing by reason of age or lack of family. These people have inhabited low-rent apartments and hotels whose numbers are falling through age, upgraded fire codes, rising taxes, and increased property values. A table is provided (6.23) showing estimates of projected increases between 1981 and 2001 in the number of low-income, non-family households annually and over five-year periods. The numbers are further divided into elderly and non-elderly, although the cut-off used for this division is not stated. "Low income" is also left undefined.

Net increases in low-income households (elderly and non-elderly) are put at 286 a year between 1981 and 1986, and, at a minimum of between 128 and 133 a year from 1986 to 2001. Action is recommended to respond to the housing needs of these people.

MaryAnn McLaughlin. *Homelessness in Canada: The Report of the National Inquiry* (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1988).<sup>7</sup>

"This report summarizes a year-long study of homelessness in Canada." This is the opening sentence of an introductory paragraph to the report by Terrance Hunsley the Executive Director of the

Canadian Council on Social Development "National Inquiry on Homelessness in Canada"; MaryAnn McLaughlin was the co-ordinator of this project.

The project itself focussed on emergency shelters. In the first of its two phases a "snapshot survey" (*sic*) of shelters was undertaken, followed in a second phase, by "local workshops which addressed related issues" and visits to a number of shelters to learn how they operated and about their problems.

The report first quotes the 1986 Canadian Census to outline the number of dwelling units in Canada, and CMHC data are used to distinguish the proportion of government subsidized housing. The stock of subsidized housing was estimated at about 500,000 units in 1986; of these 77,588 units for seniors, 70,320 units for families and 1,550 units for people with special needs were subsidized under the National Housing Act. However, from Statistics Canada data, the project researchers estimate that in 1984, 972,000 families and 1,025,000 unattached individuals were living in poverty in Canada. Of these, 98,000 families and 422,000 individuals were elderly. Almost no subsidized housing is available for non-senior unattached individuals. (The report at this point mentions attempts to increase this housing supply). These figures are not presented with supporting arguments, but are clearly aimed at suggesting that there are a large number of poor people in Canada, whose housing needs may not be met at present.

Beyond subsidized housing are shelters. This third tier is said to be complex and largely undocumented. The shelters covered in this study include orphanages, foster homes, maternity homes, half-way houses, the several kinds of group homes, shelters for battered spouses, refugees and disaster victims. There were (either in total or as a subset serving the "homeless and destitute") 472 such facilities across Canada, with a nightly capacity of 13,797. It is difficult to understand how the researchers arrived at this figure, since the next sentence informs the reader that some shelters would not divulge their capacity, and others stated that they routinely took in numbers exceeding their capacity. No further statement is given to explain the methodology involved in reaching this estimate of capacity.

On January 22, 1987, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) conducted a "snapshot" cross-sectional survey of approximately 1000 agencies providing shelter and allied services for the destitute and homeless. A total of 558 completed questionnaires were returned, of which 308 were from shelters that had served destitute or homeless people on January 22. The other 250 were agencies providing food and clothing or referral, but not shelter.

The survey findings were that in the 283 shelters of the 308 reporting that had sheltered people on the night of January 22, 7,751 individuals were served. The combined nightly capacity of the



shelters reporting was 10021, giving an occupancy rate of 77 percent. In Ontario, occupancy for men's shelters was 96 percent, and, because they often take in people above capacity, occupancy overall in Ontario was 101.5 percent. The total shelter capacity in Canada was given previously as 13,797, in 472 shelters. If the 77 percent occupancy rate found in the CCSD survey is extrapolated to the whole shelter population, it is estimated that 10,672 people overall made use of Canadian shelters during the period surveyed.

Overall, 61 percent of all shelter users were men, staying mainly in men-only hostels. Children 15 years and younger were 11.5 percent, and women the remaining 27.5 percent.

A total of 153 shelters provided details of the number of people they had sheltered for one or more nights in 1986: 124 had a combined total of 102,819 different people during the course of the year. The authors also state that 29 other shelters had "provided 548,567 beddays"—but this measure is not explained. The authors of this report made the further calculation that, on average, shelters had served 18.8 times their nightly capacity over the course of the year.

The report also offers a demographic breakdown of the identified shelter population: 54 percent were unemployed; 20.1 percent were current or ex-psychiatric patients; 51.5 percent were receiving social assistance; 9.4 percent had been evicted from their previous residence; 33.3 percent were listed as "drug abusers"; and 3.1 percent were physically handicapped. The remainder of the report covers eating habits of shelter clients, and a program of consultations and workshops undertaken by the authors to put together a list of options and solutions to the linked problems of acute poverty and homelessness.

It should be observed that the report does not try to distinguish the very poor from the literally homeless, though other writers have noted important distinctions, nor does it make clear the details and origins of its figures and calculations concerning the size of the homeless Canadian population.<sup>8</sup>

J. Heilman and M.J. Dear, *Homelessness: A Comparison of National Experiences* (The Los Angeles Homelessness Project, 1988).

This report compares the study of homelessness in Britain, Australia, Canada and "less developed" countries. The chapter on Canada will be covered here, the other chapters in a later section of this report. The information sources used are mainly municipal or institutional reports, or newspaper or magazine articles. These references will be footnoted here, rather than included in the bibliography.

The text states that on any given night in the Winter of 1987 about 8,000 people slept in hostels or on the streets of Canada. This is taken from a *Macleans* article from February 1987.<sup>9</sup> The CCSD article discussed above is taken as the source of claims that 20,000 to 40,000, as an estimate of the

number of street people in Canada (0.1 to 0.2% of the total population), errs on the low end; and that 130,000 to 250,000 are homeless at any one time during the year.

Another *Macleans* article<sup>10</sup> is taken as the source of a federal estimate that one million Canadians are without shelter, or in substandard accommodation, or spend more than 30 percent of their income on accommodation. (This is, of course, a figure that is difficult to interpret as describing any detailed definable group, either as homeless or in a particular degree of housing need).

Other means of estimating the size of the homeless population are also quoted. Most of these come from the CCSD report already discussed. A demographic breakdown of the Ontario population<sup>11</sup> classifiable as poor is presented. The following segments of the population are classifiable as poor:

- half of all families headed by single women;
- half of all unattached women;
- half of all unattached singles under 25 years;
- one third of families headed by persons under 25 years.

Journalistic sources (the *Macleans* articles already quoted and an article in the *Toronto Star*<sup>12</sup>) are the source for shelter usage data that suggests that in Toronto, 2,000 people were homeless in one year and that just over 73,000 were below the poverty line. Further figures are presented from similar sources, to suggest that there is inadequate provision in terms of basic housing for a large, young and vulnerable poor population; the need for social and housing programs is acute.

The chapter also surveys factors surrounding homelessness in Canada, some are said to be causes and some, symptoms. Deinstitutionalization is implicated as an important factor: there has been a drop in the number of psychiatric beds, but those needing mental health assistance cannot obtain support without a permanent address. Many fall between the cracks and end up in temporary and other shelter accommodation. These claims, of course, depend on the accuracy with which people in this situation have been counted, or the population size extrapolated from a sample.

Other factors mentioned here include a loss of affordable housing stock and a reduction in the value of welfare payments. Affordable housing stock has been reduced both through the conversion of buildings and through reduced rent control and a rise in housing costs. All these factors squeeze the poor, and render their housing options ever narrower and more precarious.

H.P. Oberlander and A.L. Fallick, "Shelter or Homes? A Contribution to the Search for Solutions to Homelessness in Canada," Centre for Human Settlements, University of British Columbia, 1987/88.

This paper is one of a number prepared as part of a Canadian contribution to the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987.

Homelessness is described in the paper as a "pervasive and prevailing condition" which results from deep-seated problems. Although it is difficult to measure in scope, it is clearly more than a question of the provision of shelter. The authors then ask if it is an issue of poverty, employment, housing, health, or social security. The answer seems to be: some combination of all these.

The paper summarizes very broadly the heterogeneity of the homeless population in Canada, distinguishing, however, between the *absolute* homeless and those *at risk* of becoming homeless. The authors report a consensus that homelessness is an outcome of the organization of the housing market and a decline in service provision. It is the regional and seasonal or periodic variation in facilities, institutional capacity, services, public policy and employment levels that make the numbers so elusive. The paper then describes a variety of innovative housing solutions in different cities in Canada.

A.L. Fallick, "Homelessness and the Homeless in Canada: A Geographic Perspective," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1988.

The views just described no doubt have their origin, in part at least, in this dissertation, by one of the authors of the previous paper. Echoes will certainly be obvious.

The author states that homelessness statistics are difficult to obtain: claims about numbers depend on definition and the extent of social, economic and (certainly) geographic frames of estimation. Street counts yield low estimates; shelter counts give higher numbers, and highest of all are counts of those economically vulnerable and liable to bouts of homelessness, whether they have ever been on the streets or not.

The numbers and composition of the homeless cannot, in general, be conclusively known because of the changing nature of the influencing factors: national and regional economic policies, availability of community support, low-rent housing, the relative incidence and persistence of poverty, the season, climate and so on. Key informant surveys (by the author) and field observation suggest that the homeless are becoming increasingly diverse, socially and economically.

Three main arguments are presented:

1. Homelessness results from an interaction between human voluntary choices and broader economic and social processes.
2. These relationships become manifest in identifiable spatial arrangements at varying spatial levels of interpretation.
3. These spatial arrangements in turn influence the composition of the homeless population in particular locations, and the likely incidence and degree of persistence of homelessness in those locations.

In other words, economic and social processes come together in particular places because of their interaction with spatial (geographic) variables. Particular geographic concentrations also attract people in different ways. The combination of these forces determines the shape (incidence, intensity, type) of homelessness in those areas. That homelessness is found in cities is a function of what else comes to expression in cities. As Fallick puts it "Homelessness is . . . not . . . a problem *of* cities, but rather a problem [*which occurs because of other factors*] in cities."

This argument is important in aiding understanding of some processes that affect rural homelessness, and the dynamic relationship with urban problems that is a probable factor in their incidence and intensity. (See the section on rural homelessness).

The thesis also contains an appendix offering a critique of the CCSD study reviewed above. The essential points of this critique are that the 20 to 40 thousand estimate of street people is traceable to media sources, and that the service provider survey and the "snapshot" survey of shelters contain serious mis-assumptions, mainly about the likely frequency of shelter or service use by any individual. The estimates in the CCSD study seem to be estimates of the capacity of provision, rather than an attempt to count the individuals and their need or use of such facilities. Fallick states that the CCSD study contains serious methodological flaws and inconsistencies. (See footnote above on this study).

- E. Ambrosio, D. Baker, C. Crowe and K. Hardill, *The Street Health Report—A Study of the Health Status and Barriers to Health Care of Homeless Women and Men in the City of Toronto* (Toronto: Street Health, May 1992).
- K. Hardill, *Developing a Methodology for Survey Research with Homeless Women and Men (How the Health Survey was Done)* (Toronto: Street Health, July 1993).

These two companion reports concern a study of the health status and care needs of homeless people in Toronto. They illustrate the Canadian phenomenon of independent and local studies, undertaken without a connection with some overarching research or program lobbying campaign.

"Street Health operates community-based nursing stations for women and men who are homeless and underhoused in Toronto" (Hardill, 1993, p. 4), the organization has been in existence since 1986.

The Street Health board of directors is made up of members, at least half of whom have experienced homelessness. The organization has been collecting data since its inception and chose to conduct interviews to replicate in part the Ontario Health Survey of 1990, in order to compare its homeless clients to the general population. Quantitative and open questions were both asked, to collect health-relevant data, and to give respondents an opportunity to "tell their stories and express their experiences in their own words." Demographic questions and screening questions, were asked and also a question intended to test census coverage of the homeless. The census testing question required the interviewer to show a copy of the census form and ask if the person being interviewed had seen it, and if so, whether they had completed it.

The researchers designed their sampling frame with care. They defined homelessness in terms of a number of screening questions and chose a subset of demographic questions as a guide to identify duplicate interviews of the same people. The sample size was aimed at 400 usable questionnaires (456 people were interviewed) to allow for a five percent margin of error. The aim of the survey was to gain a representative selection of experiences and views, rather than a count.

The screening questions assessed an individual's current housing situation (i.e., in a hostel or on the street), the length of time for which they had not had permanent housing, and inquired as to people's subjective assessment of their situation. The last question proved too difficult and sometimes unpleasant or embarrassing for the interviewee, and so was dropped.

Only homeless people were to be interviewed, as the focus of the survey was the health status of the homeless. Homelessness was defined as having slept ten or more nights out of the 30 days before the interview either in a shelter, in an indoor or outdoor public place, or at a friend's place because the person had nowhere of their own, or no safe place of their own.<sup>13</sup> Also accepted were any combination of the listed sleeping circumstances, provided it added up to ten or more nights. It will be noted that the researchers did not include residents of rooming houses in their sample. This had turned out to be logistically too difficult. Street Health's services, however, are routinely offered to street residents, occupants of rooming houses, shelters and social housing, many of whom have similar health concerns.

The cut-off criteria are somewhat arbitrary, of course, but were intended to exclude, for example, young runaways who returned home after a short time in a shelter. Ten days, it was felt, would be sufficient to include only those who were definitely homeless, although some clearly homeless people were likely to be excluded. The details of the screening tool were concealed from respondents: it was felt that an objective definition of homelessness would diminish the likelihood of including non-

homeless because the eligibility criteria would not be known and answers could not be second-guessed.

A site sampling frame was constructed on the basis of a site inventory compiled from the researchers' own experience and the opinions of key informants. To maximize the chances of sampling a representative set of sites a classification was adopted from a Los Angeles Study (Burnham and Koegel, pp. 117-53) in terms of "beds"—temporary sleeping quarters; "meals"—sites at which free meals are offered; "indoor congregating areas"—such places as missions and drop-in centres; "outdoor congregating areas"—small outdoor areas in which homeless people are known to congregate.

The survey catalogued a comprehensive array of representative health and treatment experiences.

P. Giles, *Census Test of Enumeration in Soup Kitchens* (Working Paper No. ssmd-90-006 b, Methodology Branch, Social Survey Methods Division, Statistics Canada, 1990).

Existing Canadian census procedures provide for enumeration of persons at shelters, hostels and other "sleeping facilities," as the census defines them, for the homeless. This report details a field test of a procedure for counting users of soup kitchens.

No formal sampling frame was involved, regional offices of Statistics Canada in the three cities chosen for the test selected a broad set of soup kitchens. The cities involved were Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Enumeration at the site of a service provider was thought likely to capture a particularly large sample of homeless people, as soup kitchens offered an essential service that most homeless people would be likely to use at least once a day.

Enumerators attempted to interview all those who arrived at the soup kitchen for a meal. Anticipated response problems did not materialize, there was considerable co-operation. Duplication of interviews of the same person was hard to control, interviewees themselves volunteered that they had been previously interviewed, truthfully for the most part, it is believed.

The proportion found who had not stayed in a "standard" sleeping facility the previous night was only seven percent. Only nine percent were female and 25 percent under the age of thirty. These are not figures representative of other findings in the literature. The concern of the report is mainly with practical issues and evidence for the best procedures to be followed if soup kitchens were to be counting sites in the census.

**WINNIPEG**

Two reports from Winnipeg are reviewed:

Bairstow and Associates Consulting Limited. *Reaching Out for Help: Manitoba's Homeless in 1987*. Prepared for Honourable Muriel Smith, Minister of Housing, 1987.

This is a report very much in the Canadian tradition described at the beginning of this section (and the second Bairstow report covered here). After reviewing other studies from the U.S. and Canada, demographic trends are described that might affect family types (husband-wife, single parent, etc.) that affect the nature of housing demand. Core Need estimates are presented, broken down by specific sub-groups. Finally, a special survey of the homeless is reported. Our discussion will be confined to this chapter.

The survey, conducted with the volunteer help of University of Winnipeg students, was directed at residents of a variety of different kinds of hostels and shelters, also the Remand Centre (a Manitoba Corrections facility for those remanded to custody while awaiting trial), and also a number of drop-in and similar service facilities. Half of the sample of 209 individuals were Native, 80 percent were single, 42 percent were on social assistance, and about a third had experienced either physical or mental health problems; 36 percent had experienced some kind of homelessness in the past. Eighty-four percent of those who had been homeless were single. Key elements in their experience had been sheer poverty—the absolute lack of sufficient money for shelter, but also a fear or alleged experience of mistreatment at the hands of landlords and welfare officials. Half of those who had been homeless were Native, and many complained of experiences of discrimination.

Above and beyond the particular experience of this sub-group, 64 percent of the overall sample had recently been living with rent-to income ratios exceeding 30 percent. Approximately 30 percent had ratios of 50 percent or above.<sup>14</sup> About half the overall sample had at least one significant housing quality problem,<sup>15</sup> in the sense of lack of heat, presence of vermin or unacceptable insects, severe structural problems, etc. (p. 79).

The report clearly identifies a group affected by issues of housing adequacy and affordability, though extrapolation might be difficult, as no definitive generalizable sampling frame was chosen.

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, *Needs Assessment on Homeless Children and Youth* (Winnipeg, 1990).

This study focusses on the needs and problems of runaway youth. The study is based on interviews with 127 youth described as "experienced in running behaviour." The sample is a

convenience or "purposive" one (*sic*). The sample frame was one of personal contacts, networking, mall-cruising and self-presentation of potential interviewees. All respondents were between 15 and 17 years old, most were 16. Only 15 percent wound up on the street initially, 44 percent stayed with a friend, a further 25 percent with a boy- or girlfriend. While on the run, 20 percent slept on the street, only, a further 12 percent slept at "significant others'" *or* on the street. Of those on the street, 48 percent assessed their situation as unsafe, of those with significant others or on the street, 67 percent felt unsafe. Young runaways have often been left out of classifications of the homeless (e.g., the Street Health project, above). The average time for which those interviewed had last run away was 46 days; the most frequent period (the modal period) was seven days. Only 14 percent had been gone for more than three months. This may provide some perspective on the relationship of "runaway" issues to the general issues of homelessness. The main focus of this study, however, is on the background of these people, the circumstances they left, their activities while away, and the health and other consequences of these activities.



TABLE 5

**Summary of Local Authorities' Actions  
Under the Homelessness Provisions of the 1985 Housing Act  
1990-91**

	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter	Total
Acceptances	36140	37460	34930	39260	147790
Advice & Assistance	18010	20820	23590	22020	84440
Found not homeless	18560	18830	19230	19430	76050
Enquiries completed	72710	77110	77750	80710	308280
At end of quarter:					
In temporary accommodation of which:	43040	45870	45170	50000	
Bed & Breakfast	12170	12140	11130	12240	
Hostels	8450	8990	9010	10230	
Other	22420	24740	25030	27530	

## BRITAIN AND AUSTRALIA

This section offers a short review of some of the major issues concerning homelessness in these two countries in recent years. Research preoccupations reflect the different legislative frameworks adopted by these countries on this issue.

### BRITAIN

In Britain, estimating the numbers of homeless, though subject to the same problems as elsewhere, is affected by the particular circumstance that legislation requires local authorities to provide shelter to certain groups seen as particularly vulnerable, mainly families with children.

Part III of the U.K. Housing Act of 1985 gives local authorities the primary responsibility for dealing with homelessness. Their main duty is to find permanent accommodation for those whom they accept as homeless. These are people *in priority need*, and who are *not intentionally homeless*. Those who are deemed intentionally homeless may be found temporary accommodation only.<sup>16</sup>

Table 5 shows numbers of acceptances and rejections, and those found temporary accommodation in 1990 to 1991.<sup>17</sup>

It is obvious that considerable sifting and sorting takes place. Only about half are accepted as homeless in the legal sense. The doubt over the criteria used and their uniformity across different areas of the country is explained below.

Homelessness in the U.K. has grown significantly in recent years. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of households accepted as homeless by local authorities has more than doubled, and homeless families (without regard to "intentional homelessness") have increasingly been housed in temporary accommodation. Nationally, the total number of households accepted as homeless reached almost 150,000 in 1990/91, and by the end of 1991 50,000 families were in temporary accommodation.<sup>18</sup>

Homelessness in London attracts the greatest attention, but about two thirds of registered homeless are outside the capital. Homelessness has, in fact, been growing faster outside London than in it for the past 25 years. The average annual increase in London between 1976 and 1987 was nine percent; for the same period, the average rate in other metropolitan areas was 16 percent and in non-metropolitan districts it was 14 percent.

London's problems continue to dwarf those of the rest of the country. In the late 1960s Inner London had 6 percent of the population of England and Wales but 40 percent of all registered homeless families. In 1990, Greater London had about 11 percent of the population of Britain as a whole, but

TABLE 6

**Shelter Acceptance by Reason for Loss of Last Settled Home  
Fourth Quarter 1993**

REASON	Percentage
Parents no longer able/willing to accommodate	20
Other relatives or friends no longer able/willing ...	12
Violent breakdown of relationship with partner	9
Non-violent breakdown of relationship with partner	7
Mortgage arrears (loss of home)	13
Rent arrears (public housing)	0
Rent arrears (private or co-op) sector	1
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	12
Other loss of rented or tied accommodation	13
In institution, new household, split household, refugee	3
Other	9

nearly 30 percent of registered homeless households. In 1988, Inner London still had the highest rates—four per thousand households, as opposed to 2.1 for Outer London, 2.3 for large urban areas outside London, and 1.2 for non-urban areas.<sup>18</sup>

These figures do not show the full extent of homelessness. Official statistics are limited to households accepted by local authorities as statutorily homeless and in priority. As already noted, these are predominantly families with dependent children.

Duncan and Evans (1988) indicate that local authorities do exercise discretion as to whom they accept, and that there is wide variation in acceptance rates. Some authorities accept up to 80 percent of applications, others as low as 20 percent. Many explanations are put forward: that in some authorities, many are deterred from applying, that there is under-recording of initial applications, or, indeed, that the policy of different authorities does actually vary by these margins. Variation in acceptances is recorded by Duncan and Evans, in fact, across different aspects of the legislation, whether over the interpretation of "intentional homelessness" or the definition of the different priorities.

Table 6 shows percentages of acceptances in England by reason for loss of last settled home for the fourth quarter of 1993. The following table illustrates different types of acceptable ("priority") need and unacceptable (non-"homeless") need for England as a whole in the last quarter of 1993.

One advantage of statutory reporting is that if the criteria of acceptance are not at issue, there is at least an opportunity for obtaining accurate information on causes and circumstances, which may be used to determine strategies for service provision.

However, the veracity and accuracy of the proportion of acceptances shown has often been challenged.

Greve and Currie (1990) state that about twice as many people apply to local councils each year as are accepted. Many do not bother to apply. Some of the reasons for this are discussed in our section on rural homelessness.

Large numbers of people, especially young single people, are excluded, to a greater extent, it is claimed, than indicated in the tabular data presented. There are few figures to support claims about their numbers. The London Housing Survey of 1986-87 reported 74,000 overcrowded and doubled up; 11-12,000 in hostels; 10-12,000 in short-life housing; 19,000 squatting (occupying abandoned buildings); 4-5,000 in bed-and-breakfast hotels, and up to 3,000 sleeping rough. The estimation methods are not reported.

**TABLE 7**  
**Need Status For The Homeless**  
**Fourth Quarter 1993**

NEED STATUS	PERCENTAGE
<i>Number of Priority Need (all categories)</i>	<i>(28,900)</i>
Household with dependent children	59
Household member pregnant	12
Household member vulnerable:	
old age	5
physical handicap	5
mental illness	6
young	3
domestic violence	6
other	3
Homeless in emergency	1
<i>Number of Non-Priority Need</i>	<i>(1,350)</i>
Young single people	54
Other	46

The greatest risk of homelessness is associated with poverty, and those most at risk are lone parents, ethnic minorities and unemployed people. The key common denominator is low income (*ibid.*).

One of the most interesting attempts to come to grips with the issue of identifying key factors is found in Lambert *et al.*, quoted earlier (and again in the section on rural homelessness). They constructed regression models on the basis of data collected in previous studies referenced by them. Demographic data recorded from people accepted by local authorities as homeless were matched with data on housing supply, precipitating circumstances for application for local authority housing assistance, and other variables. Their findings suggested that although low income, house prices and rents are all related to the incidence of homelessness, there is inconsistency: not all the relationships are in the same direction in any given year. The strongest single predictive factor seemed to be the general supply of social housing for rent.<sup>20</sup>

## AUSTRALIA

The Australian experience with homelessness appears to parallel that of other countries, perhaps with certain more clear-cut findings. The major group of homeless or inadequately housed people are single parents and their children, followed by single-person households.<sup>21</sup>

Out of a population of approximately 15 million about 40,000 are homeless in the sense of using shelters or sleeping rough. For more than 700,000 households, mortgage or rent payments bring their disposable income below the poverty line. There was a 35 percent increase in applications for public housing between 1981 and 1984 (100,000 households to 135,000 households). By 1987, 160,000 households were on the waiting lists for public housing.

Characteristics of homeless people in Australia most strongly linked with their condition are low income, unemployment, inadequate housing information, dependence on social security benefits, marital and family breakdown, illness and the experience of discrimination.

Public housing supplies the needs of only five percent of the Australian population. The private rental sector supplies 20 percent, but the overwhelming majority own their houses. Overall, Australia seems to have an adequate housing stock, but not in the area of housing accessible or affordable for the poorest. One of the answers has been to attempt to convert an oversupply of places for sale to accessible premises for rental. Some private housing may never be accessible, and the Heilman and Dear Report suggests income supplements to meet these greater costs.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), funded jointly by State and Commonwealth Governments, operates a shelter system and conducts periodic counts. A November 1990 night count revealed 6687 residents (a lower than expected figure). As in previous counts (e.g.,

November 1989), males were normally distributed by age; women were generally younger. Sixty-two percent of residents were male, and 38 percent female. Twenty-eight percent were in services for young people; nine percent were women, or women with children, escaping violence. Eleven percent were in facilities for families, four percent in facilities for single women, and 34 percent in facilities for single men. Most (81.5%) lived on social assistance. Seven percent had no income, and only eight percent reported regular income.

Fifty-five percent of residents had been in shelters for less than three months, but 24 percent had been there over six months. Over 25 percent had previously been with parents, 19 percent had needed emergency accommodation, 10.5 percent had been renting privately, and another 10 percent had no fixed address. There is no separate account of counting strategies or street counts or sampling.<sup>22</sup>

## RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Most of the discussion of homelessness has revolved around the problems of large urban areas. However, the dynamics of homelessness are often wider and involve large areas of a country. Frequently, there is an interaction between urban and rural factors. Sometimes, perhaps, the rural situation is an interesting contrast. These issues are presented in this section.

### THE LITERATURE

#### UNITED STATES

Jan L. Hagen, "The Heterogeneity of Homelessness," *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work* (1987): 451-57.

Recent research fails to capture the diversity of the homeless population and concentrates on "captive populations" (*sic*)—in emergency shelters or users of services for the homeless (or very poor) such as soup kitchens. This study surveys service users of a centralized intake agency in Albany, a "moderately sized community," and its environs. The study may have the limitation that its findings may apply only to moderately sized communities—but that is also one of its main points of interest. Another limitation is that it includes only those homeless who request services.

#### The Homeless Population

The 217 people surveyed were all local residents rather than transients and the author presents his findings as an instance of a possibly different environment than the large cities, which have been more frequently surveyed. Differences between the findings of this study and findings pertaining to larger cities are not discussed in the article.

The homeless in this study were equally divided between men and women (53% men, 47% women), and only 13 percent were families. Eighty-five percent were below the poverty line, but 53 percent had some source of income. Mostly, this came from some kind of public benefits: seven percent of the sample received either pensions, veterans' benefits or unemployment insurance, 13 percent were employed. The poorest groups were unemployed and runaway or abandoned youth.

Only 11 percent had experienced psychiatric hospitalization, six percent were currently receiving psychiatric outpatient treatment and three percent were on psychiatrically prescribed medication. Almost 37.5 percent were 21 years old or younger; 44 percent were between 22 and 35, nearly 29 percent were between 36 and 64, and only 3.6 percent were 65 and older. Whites and Blacks accounted for 82 percent of the sample with almost 15 percent of unknown race. Whites outnumbered Blacks—64.4 percent to 17.6 percent.



### Sub-population Differences

Women were more likely to be homeless through eviction or domestic violence, men were more likely to be homeless through unemployment. For Whites, unemployment and psychiatric hospitalization were more important factors than for Blacks. For non-Whites domestic difficulties or violence or release from jail were more significant factors. Employment differences between non-Whites and Whites were significant: 21 percent of non-Whites had jobs as against only eight percent of the Whites. Young adults (22 to 34 years) were also distinctive: interpersonal difficulties, alcohol abuse, and mental and emotional disturbances were more important factors than for other age groups. The most important factors in middle adulthood were hospital release and previous psychiatric disturbances; for the elderly, mental illness was the largest factor in homelessness.

### Causes of Homelessness

The main finding in this study is that homelessness is attributable to multiple causes, the key ones being unemployment and interpersonal difficulties.; many people were homeless due to multiple reasons. Unemployment affected 42 percent of the sample, the larger proportion; 46 percent of unemployed were between 22 to 35; 30 percent were between 36 to 64. In the unemployed group, 62 percent were men. Another somewhat distinct group were victims of domestic violence: 92 percent were women, the remainder was accounted for by children under 16 and young adults. They were more likely to be above the poverty line, and have a source of income, 36 percent of them from paid employment.

Broadly, these findings suggest that in at least one mid-sized town, different groups of homeless persons present unique characteristics and, by implication, different service needs. The study also points to the confluence of problems of a more individual origin and the personal impacts of larger social factors, such as unemployment, decreased housing supply and hospital discharge policies.

Janet M. Fitchen, "Homelessness in Rural Places: Perspectives from Upstate New York," *Urban Anthropology*, 20,2 (Summer 1991): 177-210.

This article surveys current research on rural homelessness, as well as field research in scattered rural communities in New York State. It offers a picture of overall findings, suggesting similarities and differences with urban homelessness. It also describes an agenda for future research.

The research literature described suggests patterns of homelessness that may be similar to urban findings, through the same causes, but which are often different because of the different impact of similar events on rural and urban economies. An additional concern is the dynamic of rural in-and out-

migration, occasioned in part by the urban impact of economic changes. For the rural population, the author claims, the key factor is dramatically increasing poverty, coupled with housing trends which place poor people at greater risk of being unable to maintain or find stable and affordable accommodation.

Rural homelessness is unevenly distributed among the American states: the situation is worst in the South and in areas heavily populated by poor minority populations. Nevertheless, recent years have seen considerable increases in demand for emergency shelters and other services in many states (Housing Assistance Council, 1989, State Action Memorandum No. 36, Washington, DC).

Rural homelessness differs from urban in two important respects: the physical characteristics and possibilities are sharply different—no subway station benches or heating grates, instead isolated dilapidated structures, trailers and campgrounds out of season—and rural homelessness more often means acute housing instability than total absence of a home. People who cannot maintain stable accommodation might not always be considered homeless in cities.

The most comprehensive and systematic study of rural homelessness was conducted by R.J. First, B.G. Toomey and J.C. Rife in Ohio during 1990, building on a similar study in that area in 1984.<sup>23</sup> This suggests the rate of homelessness have increased substantially in recent years and that the rural homeless population had certain demographic characteristics in line with other findings quoted so far. In a random sample of 921 across 21 rural counties in Ohio, 51.6 percent interviewed were women, nearly half of whom had children with them. Of the families in the sample, nearly 68 percent were single parent families, and 56.5 percent of the sample had graduated from high school. Deinstitutionalization was a factor for only 1.6 percent and only 13.3 percent had prior psychiatric hospitalization.

From cases quoted in the present study a picture emerges of rural homelessness as typically a question of initial doubling up with friends or family, extending into residence in campgrounds, cars, trucks, disused school buses, shacks, barns and all sorts of available and/or improvised semi-permanent structures. The Ohio study puts numbers to some of these circumstances: 14.6 percent were literally without shelter or were living in cars or abandoned buildings; just over 46 percent were living with family members or friends; nearly 40 percent were in shelters or cheap hotels.

S.S. Lowe and T. Brisendine (1989, Testimony to House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families from Fairfax County, VA Department of Community Action, April 11) found that in Fairfax County, Virginia, many working people were living seasonally in campgrounds, cars, trucks and campers because housing costs near their construction jobs were too high. Gateway Community Services of Michigan (Eaton Shelter Project, Year End Report 1988, East Lansing, MI) reported that 64

percent of their rural shelter clients had previously been sleeping at the home of another and a third had become homeless by eviction.

The risk of becoming homeless has been exacerbated in rural areas by increasing poverty. Downsizing in manufacturing, the shift to the foreign assembly of products and the change from manufacturing to service jobs have all badly affected the rural quality of life. Nearly 40 percent of the U.S. rural population lives in areas where traditional manufacturing was the major source of employment. Even with economic recovery, fewer jobs returned to these areas. Such growth as occurred was often in part-time and minimum wage jobs without benefits or security (Shapiro, 1989). This has resulted in net out-migration to the cities of those younger people more likely to find work, leaving behind those with lower incomes and earning potential. With increases in city rents, a reverse city-to-country migration has also been noted of low-wage workers and people on public assistance who are resettling wherever they can afford to rent. All this creates a dynamic related to the factors involved in urban homelessness, but with separate and distinct implications for the rural experience.

The risk of homelessness in rural areas has also increased as the range of housing options has declined. Even without the reduction in low-rent housing stock, other factors have exacerbated the vulnerability of the rural poor: traditional rural improvisation in the face of housing pressure has been curtailed, and marital and kinship ties have weakened for many people.

Fitchen identifies four factors in the reduction of available housing:

1. *The rural low-cost housing stock, relative to demand, has diminished.* With emphasis on rural New York, Fitchen states that the demand for low-cost housing is steadily increasing with the rise in the number of rural residents who have fallen into poverty, combined with the poor urban migrants (as described above), and the increase in the number of single-parent households (i.e., family units separating and increasing the number of households). Supply has, however, failed to keep up. Little inexpensive housing is being built, and available stock, such as farmhouses, are often being gentrified or razed for development.

Some low-cost rental housing has been created in the private sector by converting out-of-use village buildings, generally with minimal conversion; otherwise the only growth is in cheaper mobile home parks. However, these increases have not been sufficient to keep pace with demand.

2. *More rural people are becoming renters rather than owners.* Younger, low-income families are increasingly finding that land that was affordable for their forebears is moving out of range. Property at the edge of cities is rezoned for development or becomes attractive to a more monied clientele; property in more remote areas is increasingly restricted by environmental and park

regulations. In both cases, the price increases beyond the capacity of people who would previously have been residents.

Renting usually requires a regular cash outlay and with the income instability experienced by many poorer people, arrears and subsequent eviction may be a constant threat. One unique rural instability is found among mobile home owners. Even if they own their homes, they rent space in mobile home parks whose landlords often find that better returns are available by conversion to condominiums. Eviction of the residents leaves them in the position which other parks are generally full to capacity, and there are restrictions on parking in the open countryside.

3. *Rural rents are rising.* Fitchen quotes 1989 rates in rural New York, which had risen substantially in the previous year. The forces described in previous paragraphs have led to a steady increase in rents for all available forms of housing. At the same time (as already noted) rural worker incomes have declined and welfare increases have been less than inflation. The net result is to make affordability ever more precarious: the experience of many consists of a never-ending search for affordable housing.
4. *Substandard housing.* The increasing shift to rental housing, the use of older insufficiently upgraded buildings, and the constant pressure to find niches of affordability in a rising market have all brought about a situation of physical insecurity. While not amounting to homelessness as such, accommodation which presents a danger to the health or safety of residents becomes a place marginally preferable to a public shelter or, in practice—as residents flee to better but then unaffordable places—to homelessness.

Other exacerbations stem from ensuing or concomitant social changes. In the past, more widespread ownership of land in rural areas meant that, under pressure, informal housing could be improvised—trailers, extensions to buildings, temporary structures to sleep in, *etc.* In New York State and the rural North-East in general, the availability of land is decreasing—some of the circumstances have already been suggested—and land use is increasingly subject to regulation, both in terms of the quality of permitted building and the space allowable for trailers and mobile homes—if these are permitted at all.

The increasing instability of households has meant a greater number of single-parent households (generally women) with weakened monetary resources; also children who are not accepted or cannot accept changes in household circumstances are stranded on their own. These forces have added to the number of poverty-stricken and vulnerable people.

The great mobility that is produced leads to intermittent actual homelessness for varied periods of time: interruptions in the constant search for accommodation that is acceptable, or safe, and affordable.

## BRITAIN

Christine Lambert, Syd Jeffers, Paul Burton and Glen Bramley, "Homelessness in Rural Areas," Report for the Rural Development Commission, by the School for Advanced Urban Studies, University of Bristol, England.

This report offers a survey of British research into the extent of rural homelessness and attempts to provide housing or other policy responses. Case studies are also reported from a number of rural district councils (rural administrative districts) in different parts of England. The authors report findings rather than methodologies, but such research methods vary in the surveyed literature, from opportunistic surveys of people encountered sleeping rough, to estimates from housing, income, real estate and census-based migration figures, to interviews with applicants for services. Reference is frequently made to the relative quality and reliability of different sources and their methodologies in estimating the size of homeless populations and sub-groups.

One distinctive feature of this report is its separation of the areas examined into London, Other Non-Rural, Mixed Rural and Deep Rural. London often turns out to have different characteristics than all other areas, which are in fact much more similar to each other. Very few district councils comprise purely rural areas, in the sense that they have very small populations. And, as the authors point out: "Homelessness is a problem of people, and consequently, it will tend to arise in areas where people are rather than in areas where virtually no-one lives."

The authors distinguish "identified" from "hidden" homelessness. In this case, as in others, the distinction rests on a bureaucratically drawn line: those eligible for "priority acceptance" and those not. In the U.K., legislation imposes a duty on local authorities to provide shelter for priority homeless people. These are, in the main, intact families who are "intentionally homeless."

The *intentionally homeless* are those who leave accommodation without being obliged to do so—this classification is open to more and less stringent interpretation. Other groups, primarily young single people, are excluded from the legislated provision. Eligible people are recorded when they apply for assistance, and so the numbers of priority acceptances are known. The numbers of those outside the safety net or who, for whatever reason, are unwilling or unable to apply, can only be estimated or conjectured.

Priority acceptances for "Deep Rural" and "Mixed Rural" districts are 2.4 and 2.5 per 1000 households. Non-London metropolitan areas have an average rate of 3.2 per 1000. London, however, has the distinctly higher incidence of 6.8 per 1000. In the U.K., then, important differences appear to be between London and everywhere else, regardless of the degree of urban character.

The authors then describe the relative incidence of homelessness in terms of a number of dynamic factors. These may affect both rural and urban areas, and when they do so in different ways it is often because of particular interactions between urban and rural patterns of living.

The first dynamic is that in which areas experiencing a growth in population—most rural areas—tend to have lower homelessness, probably because of a buoyant labour market and a greater supply of housing.

The second is that in which weaker local economies with higher unemployment—more typically urban—have more homelessness. This pattern is said to reflect the general association between poverty and homelessness.

The third dynamic is the association between homelessness and the increasingly unfavourable ratio of house prices to incomes.

In the fourth, the very limited supply of social housing in rural areas limits rehousing homeless people. At the same time, Bramley, in a previous study,<sup>24</sup> has shown that there is a general positive correlation between social housing supply and applications for housing.

In the fifth dynamic, homelessness is higher in areas with higher private sector vacancy rates, both in deep rural and non-rural areas outside London. In deep rural areas, these are often associated with significant numbers of second and holiday homes.

In all of the above, the findings consist of correlations plotted between economic and housing indicators taken from public databases, against the numbers of homeless applicants for priority assistance in each administrative district for which such numbers must be reported.

The authors then undertook case studies of six District Councils, examining more closely available economic and housing market indicators, hostel and shelter usage, co-operative housing association activity and available surveys. Where possible, this is supplemented by enumerations of people, particularly young people, sleeping rough. In this way a more comprehensive picture is built up of the forces impacting on the condition of homeless or near-homeless people. The case Districts were selected because they were thought to best exemplify the following typical rural scenarios:

- a mixed rural area with low housing market pressure and a weaker economy, mainly in the North of England and the Midlands;

- a mixed rural area with a stronger economy, low housing market pressure but low social housing supply, mainly affluent commuter areas away from London;
- a mixed rural area with a stronger economy, high housing market pressure and low social housing supply, mainly in or close to South East England;
- a deep rural area with a stronger economy, low housing market pressure and low social housing supply, mainly the more inaccessible and tourist-industry areas—East Anglia, the Lake District or Devon, for example; and
- a deep rural area with a stronger economy and higher housing market pressure, typically inland Districts, often with tourist or retirement migration adding to housing demand.

This study offers a much more segmented and analyzed depiction of relevant rural areas than in the two previous studies discussed.

The overall conclusions of the study, without the policy recommendation are these:

Numerically, urban areas (London in particular) still dominate homelessness figures and raw numbers of rural homeless are relatively small. Out of 120,000 recorded (by official categories of eligibility), in total there were 2243 in deep rural areas and 12,347 in mixed rural areas in 1989-90. However, homelessness has grown faster in rural than non-rural areas in recent years, within a general, nation-wide increase throughout the 1980s.

Urban/rural differences are seen to be less when social housing supply is taken into account. There is a very low supply in rural areas. Homelessness is therefore seen as more acute in rural areas, leading to a greater use of temporary—mainly bed and breakfast—accommodation.

Rural areas have more homeless families with dependent children and old people—but this may be a consequence of more traditional interpretations of what constitutes priority need in rural areas.

The hidden homeless problem is hard to quantify. However, from qualitative data and a survey of Rural Community Councils, it appeared that non-priority (and hence unrecorded) homeless people are moving to urban areas with more hostel and rentable accommodation, or are failing to present themselves as homeless because they perceive rural local authorities as unsympathetic. There are widespread references in reports surveyed to people sleeping rough.

The largest category of potential homelessness that shows up in waiting lists for social housing or in housing needs surveys are "concealed households"—termed "doubling-up" in North America. Another hidden group is women subject to domestic violence, deterred from leaving by the lack of places in Women's Refuges.

These broad profiles of the homeless, however, differ little between town and country, save in the interaction between the two brought about by the more ample urban housing supply.

**CANADA**

MaryAnn McLaughlin, "Homelessness in Small-town and Rural Canada," *Perception*, 12,1 (Winter 1988).

There appears to be little research into rural homelessness in Canada. This article is a reaction to the absence of discussion of rural homelessness in Canada during the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The Canadian discussion focused on urban dwellers, despite the fact that some of the worst housing in Canada lies in rural areas.

The main thrust of this article is to describe the limited supply of housing in rural Canada, embellished with anecdotes concerning the extremity of some families' lifestyles, and the experience of a housing development corporation in dealing with bureaucratic requirements and sometimes inconsistent housing standards between different levels of government.

The author quotes the 1985 Household Income, Facilities, and Equipment Survey (HIFE) by Statistics Canada, to the effect that 13 percent of Canadian dwellings were in need of major repair, the highest incidence being in rural Canada. Twice as many rural as urban dwellings needed major repair. Occupancy of such housing is said to be an indicator of poverty, with 40 percent of dwellings needing major repair having residents earning less than \$20,000 annually.

The author states that rural shelter and housing options are more restricted than for urban areas. She quotes a survey by the Canadian Council on Social Development of temporary and emergency shelters which found that most were located in cities, "where the need was high enough to justify the cost of facility and staff." In a housing emergency, churches will often connect families to social services, and more informal solutions, hotels and bed-and-breakfast will be found for the short term. The problems of both homelessness and sub-standard accommodation—not distinguished from each other by this author—are exacerbated by a severely limited rental housing supply. The author describes some of the obstacles in the way of initiatives to remedy this situation, as well as the success of some efforts, an example being housing projects of the Manitoba Métis Federation and other housing development societies.

The author reserves a special section for homelessness in Northern Canada. In the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, there is little house-building independent of government, and many are forced into temporary or make-shift accommodation, waiting for social housing to be made available or while establishing residency in an area to qualify for housing. Social issues are not addressed because of the lack of new or separate housing for those in sub-standard conditions or abusive or dysfunctional situations.



## CONCLUSION

The impression left by reading the mass of literature in this area is one of many agendas and interests, but of only a relatively small number of in-depth studies. Most of these are American, some are British. Few are Canadian, and those seldom compare in terms of detail or extended research effort.

In many cases, reading the literature has been rather like a fruitless treasure quest: each article promised more and better things yet to come. However, when the next work was found and read, even if it advanced the discussion (instead of just repeating the controversy surrounding the issue), the reader's attention was again chiefly called to the promise of future and better research.

There is a sense of slowly increasing maturity and sophistication, particularly in statistical techniques and innovative research designs.

The twin focus continues: estimating numbers and predicting forces. Both face difficult problems, some of which may be lessened when the goals and issues in question are more sharply distinguished, and related, for example, to decisions or planning for particular needs and types of service provision.

## NOTES

1. This article incorporates a number of passages of exhortation and scriptural quotation as a statement of commitment to a more compassionate view of the situation of the homeless, and condemns North American disdain for the perceived dependency of the poor.
2. The standard diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association
3. In this discussion, the term "household" will be used to mean those living in normal accommodation, i.e., not classed as homeless.
4. Not defined; this is not as particular a clinical term as, say, schizophrenia or cyclothymic disorder).
5. For example, see periodic publications of the Social Planning and Review Council of British Columbia (SPARC) service users.
6. Quoted from Stewart McInnes, "Speaking Notes for the Minister, Official Opening, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT) Information Centre, York University, Toronto, March 3, 1987.
7. This report is also summarized, without a critique, in Catherine Charette, ed., *Research Initiatives on Homelessness: International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH)* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 1991).
8. Inquiries have been made concerning both the data and the author of the article. There is no evidence that the survey mentioned in the article has been adequately reported elsewhere—and the account in the CCSD article is far from detailed, and merely impressionistic in places. The CCSD was unable to locate the data, and there is now no indication of its whereabouts, or even of its existence. MaryAnn McLaughlin appears not to be working in the housing research area any more, and could not be reached.
9. M. Nichols and A. Finlayson, "The Search for a Future," *Macleans*, February 16, 1987, pp. 34-43.
10. M. Janigan, J. O'Hara, et al., "The Growing Ranks of the Homeless," *Macleans*, January 13, 1986, pp. 28-29
11. M. Hallman, "Family poverty in Ontario," *Hamilton Spectator*, January 9, 1986, p. A2.
12. J. Emerson, "Poverty worse than in 1970," *Toronto Star*, February 20, 1986, p. A6.
13. "No safe place" was introduced to include women who might have a fixed address, but who were unable to stay there without compromising their physical or emotional safety.
14. From Table 6.3, p. 77.
15. Calculated from Table 6.5, p. 79.
16. Department of the Environment *Information Bulletin*, March 15, 1994.
17. All the tabular information presented on homelessness in the U.K. in this section is taken from the March 1994 *Information Bulletin* of the Department of the Environment. The statistics are prepared by the Government Statistical Service.

18. Christine Lambert, Syd Jeffers, Paul Burton and Glen Bramley, *Rural Homelessness in Rural Areas* (Rural Development Commission Rural Research Series No. 12, February 1992).
19. Social Trends HMSO 1989.
20. Lambert *et al.*, pp. 82-86. The dependent variable was the log of homeless priority acceptances per 1000 households.
21. Most data in this section are taken from Heilman and Dear (1988).
22. National Client Censuses, November 1989 and 1990. SAAP, Canberra, November 1989 and August 1991.
23. Preliminary Findings on Rural Homelessness in Ohio, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University School of Social Work.
24. The authors refer to a date—1989—but the bibliography omits publication details of the actual reference.

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