

# Examining the Concept of Homelessness

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## Introduction

-With an economic decline, homelessness initiatives are the first to suffer in the city of Pittsburgh. According to Miller (2009), “the number of homeless students are skyrocketing” (Miller, p. 616). In the end, who can be defined as homeless?

-The concept and definition of homelessness continues to change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Kim (2012) explains the role that homeless children play in society, “children make up half of the homeless population in the US, and almost 50 percent are under age six” (Kim, p. 161).

- Kim points out that raising awareness about homeless children and their families “should be part of both professional development in school and early childhood teacher education programs” (Kim, p. 161).

-Ultimately, what do the youth and next generation feel about homelessness? According to Juchniewicz (2012), her research shows the attitude toward homelessness as, “when those of us who are more fortunate consider the circumstances that leave others homeless...we become indignant and angry, or...uncomfortable and feel guilty...or feel a sense of relief” (Juchniewicz, p. 513).

-In addition, Juchniewicz (2012) points out that any person can become aware through, “reading and writing [which] facilitate natural human curiosity that leads to self-knowledge and a view of the world that reflects personal responsibility for one’s self and for society” (Juchniewicz, p. 513).

-In 2010, there were 31,386 homeless children in Pennsylvania. This is more than the entire University of Pittsburgh student body (Nunez, 2012).

-The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates there were 55,000 homeless people between the ages of 18-24 in 2009 and another 55,000 between the ages of 12-17 (Nunez, 2012).

- In Allegheny County, there were 677 individuals in that 18-24 age range who received homeless services from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (Neiderberger, 2013).

## Objectives

-The purpose of this study is to explore how women in the ages of 20-25 comprehend the issue of homelessness.

-By analyzing these participants’ perspectives toward homelessness, this study can provide insights on how the society has viewed the notion of homelessness.

-This study also can lead prospective early childhood teachers to be professionally responsive to poor and disadvantaged children through being engaged in needs of the local community.

## Methods

-10 participants were recruited from two higher educational institutions in suburban and urban Pittsburgh areas (e.g., Washington & Jefferson College and Duquesne University) through the use of flyers.

-All 10 participants were female and ranged in age from 20-25. Of the 10 participants, 5 live in urban Pittsburgh and the other 5 participants live in suburban Pittsburgh. Among the 10 participants, one urban and one suburban have experienced homelessness first-hand.

-As a mini-ethnographic study, the participants were given a semi-structured individual interview for a maximum of 30 minutes.

## Sample of Research Questions

-When you think of homelessness do you think of certain gender?

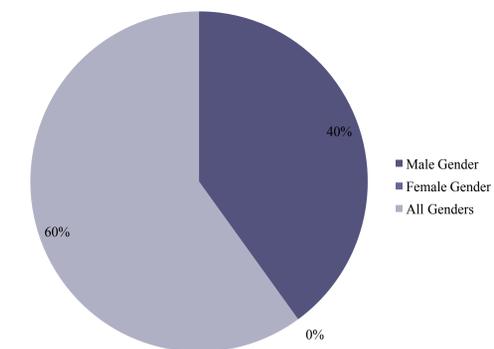
-Do you feel that homelessness is a major issue in urban Pittsburgh or suburban Pittsburgh?

-Why or why not would you work with the homeless now?

-Why or why not would you work with the homeless in the future?

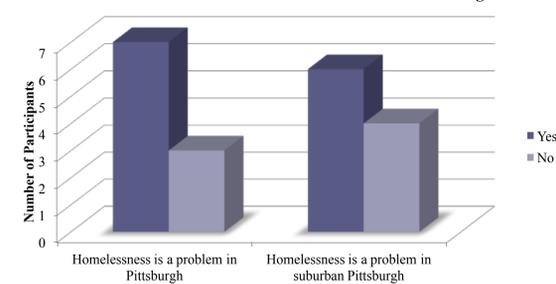
## Results

Is There a Gender Associated with Homelessness?



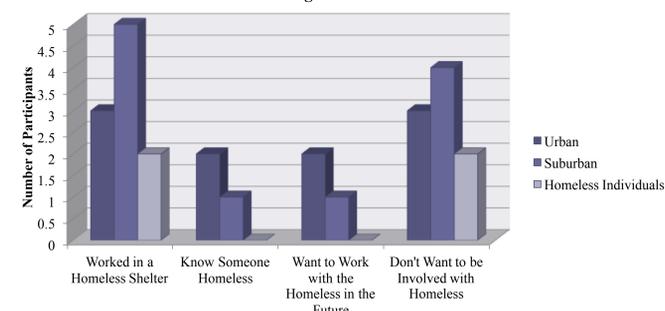
*This graph shows how the slim majority of the 10 participants believed that homelessness could display no particular gender. In contrast, the minority strongly believed the male gender was associated with homelessness.*

Is Homelessness a Problem in Urban or Suburban Pittsburgh?



*This graph shows how the 10 participants recognized that there was homelessness in Pittsburgh by a small majority. An even smaller majority agreed that homelessness was a problem in suburban Pittsburgh.*

Volunteering with the Homeless



*This graph shows the responses of the ten women when asked the questions, “Have you worked in a homeless shelter? Do you know someone that is homeless? Do you want to work with the homeless in the future?”*

## Conclusions

-Through the ten interviews, each participant did not address children as being homeless. The majority of participants felt that homelessness reached no particular gender but rather each person associated homelessness with adults rather than children or young adults.

-Through the interviews, the majority of participants felt that homelessness was an issue. Although the majority of participants felt there was an issue in Pittsburgh, three participants still believed that homelessness was not a problem. Through this discovery, education and other means of awareness still need to be addressed in this age group.

-The majority of suburban participants in the study had worked with the homeless. In contrast to this data, the urban participants knew at least one homeless individual personally but these participants had the lowest percentage of volunteering with the homeless. The urban participants had a disconnect in their environment to know about homelessness personally but not volunteer.

-In the end, the participants were not curious to work with the homeless in the present or the future. Through this data, one can infer how volunteers will diminish as this generation grows into later adulthood. With this disinterest to help the homeless, future studies could understand why this generation doesn’t want to volunteer and how to ultimately change the prevalent apathy in this generation.

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