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Homeless children and their struggle to succeed in  
their academics.

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*Abstract*

Homeless children struggle to be successful in school because he or she encountered barriers such as anxiety, depression, and stress because of their family's situation. Moreover, homeless children lack self-esteem, proper school supplies, and transportation for their academics success. Due to that cause, a majority of homeless children suffer grade retention including lower grades. It is difficult for homeless children to learn when he or she does not have a stable home. In addition, health problems affect learning for a school-age student. Likewise, living in a shelter home or welfare hotel can affect the child learning development because he or she does not have a comfortable environment. Finally, it is important to learn how to educate homeless children and the child special needs.

*Introduction*

Homeless children experience numerous challenges that can hinder their academic achievement. Homeless children experience emotions such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Indeed, homeless children can come across major family disruption such as substance abuse. Homeless children encounter educational barriers such as lack of personality and might feel with a lower self esteem because he or she do not have a home. Homeless children do not have much of proper resources for school such as supplies, and clothing. Homeless school aged students might lack transportation and can cause to have an irregular attendance. As a result, Grade retention can affect a homeless student who is trying to succeed and homeless student may feel disappointed because of lower grades or test score.

Furthermore, health problems can affect because a student might have difficulty learning. Another dilemma is a homeless child might go through health problems. Moreover, homeless children can experience difficulty living in shelter life or welfare hotels. A child may feel distress because he or she is living in shelter life. It is important to learn how to educate to provide their learning needs. Thus, it is important in educating parents and providing with education and employment training. As a positive result, it is important to consider the relief of living in a shelter home because it is sense of having place to live.

There are effective program that help homeless families with needs such as the Stewart B. McKinney Homelessness Act provides emergency shelter grant, supportive housing programs, and supplemental assistance. Indeed, homeless children face many barriers to overcome to have a successful education.

*Characteristic of homeless children*

Home children encounter many obstacles as they experience being homeless with their families. Newman (1999) states, “ There are is little data on this subject, but it appear that most homeless families find shelter of some kind, and that fewer than 10% of homeless families have spent much time on the street-that is, living literally on the streets, in car, in abandoned building, and in hallways, or at parks, and beaches”(p.14). Likewise, homeless school-age children feel a mixture of feeling such as emotional problems because he or she does not have a home. The characteristics of a homeless child affect their learning abilities because they are spending time in the street, parks, and other environments. Due to that cause, if homeless children do not have a home, it is most likely to not focus on their school work because what he or she is experiencing.

In a Denver Development Screening testing children was exam by characteristics such as shyness, aggression, or behavioral problems that hinder their attitudes, and the way the children conducted themselves in a shelter. Homeless boys and girls were equally tested to note their behavior during their stay a shelter home. One hundred and fifty-one children from 6 week old to 18 years old were exam. Bassuk, Rubin,& Lauriat (1986) describes,

Based on the Denver Developmental Screening test, 47 per cent of 81 children aged 5 years or younger had at least one developmental lag and 33 per cent had two or more lags using the Simmons Behavior Checklist, 55 children ages 3 to 5 years scored higher than the overall mean of 5.6 on the following factors: shyness, dependent behavior, aggression, attention span, withdrawal, and demanding behavior. They scored less than the

mean on sleep problems, coordination, fear of new things, and speech difficulties”(p.1099).

Indeed, developmental lags can hindered a homeless, school-age child to be successful in performance in school. Homeless children should feel that they can safe, and experiences privacy. If a child does not trust, he or she will feel not comfortable towards adult such as a teacher. However, children can have the role of having positive social interactions such as friends or classmates in order to avoid negative behaviors.

### *Anxiety*

Next, homeless children feel anxiety because they are experiencing not having a stable home. For instance, Arrighi (1997) illustrates, “Child typically subjected to conflicting behavior expectations from mothers and staff become over-whelmed and confused. Their anxiety is heightened, not alleviated by shelter life” (p.54). A child might feel anxiety when he or she enters into their classroom because of behavioral expectations in shelter. The student feels that expectation can be like the rules of the shelter home, and can cause anxiety. As a result, a student will not perform well due to uncomfortable circumstances, and homelessness will affect is schooling.

In a study, a group of 81 families entered into a hostel over a period of one year, and afterward participated in an assessment. One exam was The Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, a standardized test that measures of anxiety and depression. Karim, Tischler, Gregory, &Vostanis (2006) report, “...a score of 7 or more on either subscale indicates the likelihood of anxiety or depressive disorder”. In other words, the experience in the hostile homes affects their minds and they can experience anxiety. Children who feel anxiety will have a difficult learning due to not have a residence.

*Depression*

Children who experience depression slow down progress in his or her early schooling. According to Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat (1986) comment, “About 50 percent of the homeless children were found to have developmental lags, anxiety, depression, and learning difficulties, and about half required further psychiatric evaluation”(p.1097). In addition, Arrighi (1997) points out, “ When a child remains largely uncomforted and insecure, she is more likely to exhibit any of an array of maladaptive behaviors, including depression, aggressiveness, restlessness, regressive behaviors, hyperactivity, and anxiety” (p.54). The result of depression behaviors it affects his or her in being successful in school. If a child is depressed, therefore, he or she can not concentrated on the curriculum even at a young age.

*Mental disorder*

Mental disorders can affect academic achievement because student’s residential instability. According to Karim, Tischler, Gregory, & Vostanis (2006) write, a “Child mental health problems can be behavioral, for example, sleep disturbance, eating problems, aggression and over-activity; or emotional, such as anxiety, depression and self-harm (p.448). Indeed, homeless children may face a challenge of going through a mental uncertainty because he or she can not concentrated in school due to sleeping disturbance, not eating properly, and feel emotionally overwhelmed. In addition, Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Manvell (1994). “ These problems in early childhood make homeless mothers and their families more vulnerable to mental illness and alcohol and other drugs abuse (at least 25 percent of the population) and less likely to have members of their family available to them for support” (p.659). Truly, is it crucial for a homeless

student to be prepared to learn equally mentally and the environment around other students.

*Developmental Delays with their social interactions*

Homeless children experiences particular developmental delays that can be a barriers to interact with other students, and he or she behavior affects their social interactions. For example, Kryder-Coe, Salamon, & Molnar (1991) points out, “ Of particular concern are short attention spans, withdrawal, aggression, speech delays, sleep disorder, regressive behaviors, inappropriate social interaction with adults, immature peer interaction contrasted with strong sibling relationships, and immature motor behavior”(p.106). The developmental delays can be tough for a homeless child because he or she can have to communicate with non-homeless children at school and might cause to be aggressive with their peers.

Homeless child might not know how to behave because the confusion of living conditions. Thus, the child has not fully developed proper interactions skills moreover communication skills. When homeless children might have short attentions spans, he or she may have a hard time concentrating on schoolwork because the child is thinking where his or her family might sleep tonight. A homeless school-aged might feel aggression towards his family or environment and can cause affect in his learning abilities. Speech delays can hinder a child because it is hard to communicate with teachers. In addition, teacher can detect speech delays as hindering reading skills, and adding more frustration toward learning abilities.

*Major family disruption in homeless children lives*

Family problems affect children learning abilities, and disrupt homework and studying. Likewise, Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, & Israel (2006) comment, “The problems are compounded by family circumstances of financial troubles, substance abuse, and mental and physical health issues” (p.37). The family environment is a huge impact toward the learning a homeless child. If homeless school-age children are affected by family financial troubles than a child can also be worried and cause learning barriers. In addition, parents who do not have control of substance abuse than the child will suffer academically, and may not have a strong foundation because parents may wrong decision.

*Characteristics of homeless children and children with homes*

Furthermore, children with home have a better chance of being successful, and have better opportunities. In the other hand, homeless children have less advantage to achieve because they do not have a secure home. It is reported to have more struggles in learning whereas students that have the proper guidance. For instance, Bassuk & Rosenberg (1990) note, “According to the mothers, 40 % of homeless school-aged children and 32 % of school-aged children with homes had previously repeated a grade; 37 % and 26 %, respectively, were currently doing failing or below-average work; and 31 % and 19 %, respectively, attending special classes” ( p.259). Homeless children have a greater chance of not perform well than other children that have a home. Children that have a home are more likely to be nurtured, loved and be educated.

### *Health Problems*

First, one barrier that might effect a child from learning is oral health whereas it is a major health problem among children. According to Clement (2003), “ In study, 95% of preschool-age homeless children had not see a dentist in the previous year, compared to 63% of the general pre-school age children ” (p.56). Homeless children that do not have access to oral health can be distracted, and cause the learning to be hinder during class time. In addition, Clement (2003) point outs, “ In other study, 36% of homeless children were reported to as having dental problems, including cavities, crooked teeth, infection, and pain” (p.56). Homeless children who are experiencing infections in the mouths or pain perhaps will not participated in class activity. He or she can feel shame and be silent.

### *Nutrition*

Nutrition is an important point for a child to succeed. Homeless children have a hard time to obtain the right source of food because the inconvenience of good meals. Clement (2003) illustrates, “In one survey, 20 % of homeless people reported eating one or fewer meals per day, 39% reported hunger but not being able to purchase adequate food, and 40 % reported going without food for at least one day ” (p.56). Homeless children who lack food are a major problem to be successful in school because a child might pass through hunger. In contrast, children who homeless might come easily to eat out in fast food. Clement (2003) relates, “In children past infancy, many of the homeless children are obese. Due to lack of refrigeration and cooking facilities they tend to eat high-fat, high caloric diets with a lot of fast food and convenience meals ”(p.56). It is valuable to have balance nutrition yet some it is an obstacle.

### *Infectious Diseases*

Another problem that a homeless child can face is easily can catch an infection such as ear infection, upper respiratory infections, bronchitis, and diarrhea because they not have proper living conditions. Clement (2003) writes, “ Homeless children suffer from infection at a greater rate than do comparable domiciled children” (p.57). It is important to be aware when a child might catch an infectious disease such as going to the doctor or going to a local pharmacy to take the proper care. Thus, if a homeless child is absent because he or she has an ear infection or other illness chances are of falling behind more because not having adequate housing.

### *Immunizations*

It is important for homeless families to take care of their children’s immunizations health to avoid illness. According to Clement (2003), “ The net result is that up to 70% of these children have delayed or incomplete immunization” (p.57). Although parents should be responsible towards maintaining health related issues, some parents might find it difficult to maintain records because of not having the proper container. Parents should be cautious in saving their child’s immunizations records for future references. In order for homeless student to achieved proper immunizations should be considered in order to be healthy.

### *Other problems*

Due to poor living conditions, homeless children can encounter more accidents because of unsafe locations, and causes other skins related problems such as impetigo, scabies, lice, and dry skin. Another factor Clement (2003) reports, “ Lead poisoning; Homeless children have been reported as having up to twice the rate of

increased blood lead levels as the general population of children”(p.59). It is vital for parents and teachers to aware for the consequences of accidents, skin related issues, and lead poisoning can affect their learning. Again, health problems affect homeless children be successful during class time. It is hard for a homeless student to work with oral health problems, hunger, and infectious diseases.

*Shelter life or welfare hotel and the effects on children development*

Homeless school-age children can be affect because of loss of home, and might feel insecure entering into shelter homes. For instance, Choi & Snyder (1999) write, “ School-age children, especially older ones who were likely to be aware of their environment and the stigma of being homeless, appeared to be experiencing a higher degree of emotional turmoil, although some tended to ‘stuff ’ their feelings in rather than to express them behaviorally”(p.58). As a result of that homeless children should feel protect by their family members, shelter assists, and especially from their teachers. Homeless children should feel support, and safe in order to build self-worth. Often, might feel that he or she needs a personal space, but the homeless child does not have that because the family is in a shelter.

Moreover a child might feel embarrassed to say that he or she live in a shelter home. Some children might that they make be made fun of. Arrighi (1997) explains, “Children who have stayed in a shelter spoke of ridicule they encounter because of their situation” (p.55). It might feel painful experiencing unfamiliar and temporary residence. However, one example, a teacher can do is provide healthy praise to comfort the homeless child, and teaching other classmate to have productive remarks to each other.

Although parents strive for their children to have basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing, a child might feel a struggle to be successful in school. Arrighi (1997) observes, “Because any negative reaction on the part of classmates and/or teacher heightens the child’s sense of alienation, the child might feel the need to become secretive, protective, and deceptive about her or his personal life”(p.55). Truly, as a classroom, if the child is detected isolated, it is vital to encourage to the majority.

#### *Children experiences in shelter life*

While being in the shelter homes students are being supervised to see if they are going to school, and parents agreed that children had a good attendance. Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat (1986) explain, “While all school age children were reported by their parents to be attending school, shelter directors indicated that attendance was irregular”(p.1099). One issue parents might say that their children might be going to school is because they need to have a place to stay temporarily. In fact, the family might have a hard time getting to school because of lack of transportation and that might cause to have an irregular attendance.

In the other hand, there are organizations that help children improve the situation that they are going through living in the shelters. Arrighi (1997) reports, “Some of the amenities included tickets to concerts and ball games donated by local corporations”(p.62). Though some parents feel obligated to provide recreational events for their children they cannot provide. Although parents cannot afford special recreational events, the parents expect the privileges. Truly, making children joyful is an important part of their development growth. Even though parents cannot provide, agencies that assist make a better solution to the problem that the homeless children currently face. There are

shelter agency that will provide gift certificates to buy basics needs. In addition, shelter provided meals or grocery food for the family to avoid hungers. In some cases, shelter homes also provided used clothing for the families to have different changes of clothing.

### *Educational barrier for homeless children*

Homeless children encounter educational barriers and it affects the student personality. The child might feel intimidated to go to school because he or she might seem that they do not have a home. A homeless child might also lack school supplies such pencils, paper, adequate clothing due to having personal space. In addition, lack of transportation can be difficulty going to school or being on time. As a result, it might cause school behavior problems. Arrighi (1997) writes, “ Only 29 percent of children who are poor are placed in college preparatory track, compared with 65 percent of students from high-income families” (p.56). This is dilemma for the student to achieved progress in school. In the future, student might feel with low aspirations and feel like dropping out. Homeless children need to overcome barriers in order to be successful.

### *Lower grades*

It is a concern because in the future it is a risk due to lower grades. Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, &Israel (2006) explains, “Academically, homeless and runaway students face increased risk of school dropout, grade retention, low test scores, low grades, educational disabilities, and school behavior problems” (p.37). Truly, it is valuable to consider the importance of risk of students dropping out of school, and to consider obstacles. Even though children are young, the situations that they are facing can affect them in the future. Because the homeless children did not have the proper

instruction, they are able to continue successful in their education. It is up to parents to have the vision of education to avoid a cycle of homelessness. Even though parents are concerned about shelter, food, and employment, education is not a top priority. Thus, homeless children suffer the consequences.

### *Educating homeless children*

Children should have an opportunity to be appreciated. One factor is teacher have the opportunity to make a difference in a homeless child lives. Quint (1994) comments, “ Until recently, federal, state, and local agencies have demonstrated more constraint than facilitation in addressing the profound educational and social challenges homeless children present for urban, suburban, and rural neighborhood schools”(p.7). Evans Attles (1997) comments, “ Because homeless children and youth, by definition, lack permanent shelter and typically have limited access to adequate clothing, nutrition, and health services, their capacity to benefit from schooling is often impaired” (p. 23). Since homeless children do not have the proper housing, and basic need, therefore; it is important to educate teachers how to assist in homeless children academics.

### *Awareness and learning needs*

One barrier that hinders a homeless child from being success is the fact that homeless children often change school and teachers do not have a time to bond with the child or get to know the student. Evans Attles (1997) describes, “ As students move from school to school, the teachers do not have enough time to assess their needs” (p.23). One need that can be provided for homeless children to considered their needs. Evans Attles (1997) explains, “ In the classroom, the task of a teacher working with homeless child is to provide a structured, stable, non-threatening environment”(p.24). As a teacher can help

by making the burden of being homeless less stressful, indeed a child can feel more comfortable. It is valuable for teachers to be aware of the learning needs of homeless students. It is important to have a comfortable place to be focus on learning.

*Effective programs for homeless students*

It is important to have a well thought comprehensive plan for a homeless child of programs that relives the ideas of being homes. First, Strong & Reed-Victor (2000) writes, “ Comprehensive planning that characterizes effective school programs for homeless students is coherent, coordinated, and long range”(p.188). For example, a solitary space with books, puzzle, and game will be helpful towards the students. Then, Strong& Reed-Victor (2000) states, “ Appropriate educational programs for students who are homeless require adequate resources including personnel, funding, facilities, collaboration time, and materials” (p.188). It is important for homeless children to have supportive social skills such as a consistent schedule. Teachers can also encourage cooperative learning, and active participation. Moreover, Strong & Reed-Victor (2000) writes, “ A well-developed, on-going, multidimensional programs of staff development experience to facilitate within-school and within-district awareness, understanding, and capability to respond to identified needs of homeless students also characterizes effective school programs serving these students” (p.188). Thus, programs such as transportation, tutoring, food, and clothing.

*Stewart B. McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act*

The Steward B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was designed to have urgent needs programs such as shelters home, food, and health care. The program was designed to make homeless families have better beginning. Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni,

&Israel (2006) writes, “In 1987 Congress authorized the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act to protect the rights of homeless students and to ensure that they receive the same quality and appropriate education that other students receive”(p.37). The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act provided programs such as education and training for homeless families and children. One of the programs provided education for the adults with state agencies to provide literacy programs and basic skills. One program such as Family Support Center Demonstration Projects provides services to homeless families or families at risk of becoming homeless. In addition, a Supportive Housing Program provides a short term of 24 months or less for housing and support service for homeless families. Finally, Flohr (1998) notes, “ Education for Homeless Children and Youth-State and Local Grants provide funds to state education agencies to develop and implement programs for the education of homeless children”(p.34). Indeed, these programs were created to help families to have better futures, and better life skills.

Moreover, Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, &Israel (2006) observes, “Students and their families end up homeless for numerous reasons. Structural factors, such as poverty lack of affordable housing, and eviction can lead to sudden or prolonged bouts of homelessness” (p.38). Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, &Israel (2006) writes, “In addition, personal or relationship factors, such as substance abuse, mental health difficulties, abuse and neglect, and family conflict and violence are also reasons that children, youths, and families may find themselves without a place to stay” (p.38).

Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel (2006) reports, categorized the struggles that homeless children and youths face into the following five areas: (1) physical conditions and health problems that result from environmental factors such as poor nutrition, (2) unacceptable behaviors resulting from coping and survival strategies, (3) inadequate social skills and insecurities stemming from frequent moves and self-consciousness about being homeless and lacking resources, (4) psychological trauma resulting from multiple stressors that contributes to negative mental health, and (5) developmental delays due to a lack of stimulating environmental conditions” (p.38).

Thus, The McKinney Act of 1987 mandated that children without homes are to obtain the same an education like all other children. As a result, these opportunities can open for homeless families to have a better life, keep a job, and being a healthy family. The families can have better quality of lives though educations. It is important for children to explore opportunity to have a better education. In the mist, of trouble there are programs that help families to have better living conditions.

*The importance of education and employment training to parent to benefit their children*

Through The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, Adult Education for the Homeless (AHE) Program was created to build life skills, and goals making. Job Training for the Homeless Demonstration Program (JTHDP), the program was created to gain information how to provide effective employments and training. And employment related cause of homelessness address to their needs. It is valuable for parents to also get educate so they can provide better living for their children. Flohr (1998) note, “ A growing majority of homeless heads-of-household lack the basic qualifications necessary

for a job that provides for a family”(p.28). Parents need to be educated and have better family skills in order for a better life style for development growth for his or her child.

Furthermore, as educations opportunities are available, it opens the doors for families, and begins to have a better life. Flohr (1998) states, “ Education improves the chances of homeless to get or keep jobs, improve the quality of their life, or ultimately provide shelter for themselves and their families”(p.29). One of the issues that homeless parent lack is the support in employment due low skills. Therefore, Flohr, (1998) reports, “Such approaches are characterized by flexibility in meeting the families’ multiple needs and specific aids, such as developmental day-care programs, infant stimulation programs, and Head Start programs; parental counseling education; and job training”.

It is important for parents to have a better understanding in helping there children because are mentally growing, and it better not to hindered he or she learning path. Homeless children encounter many different barriers according to each individual situation. Swenson Miller, Herzberg,& Ray (2006) writes, “ Interactions between the child and caregivers have been shown to be a primary mechanism through which child acquires language, play, and self-care skills. Finally, homeless children should have the opportunity to not be frightened because the financial situation of their families. It is not his or he fault for not having home.

As teachers it is vital to consider the needs of a homeless child because you never know how he or she slept at. Or what kind of foods the student might be having out of school hours. Nevertheless, if the child is going through a sickness, and doesn’t have proper treatment, teachers are one way that can make a home child bright his or her temporary residences.

*Conclusion*

First, homeless children come across emotional experience that they will not forgotten because it is a hard situation not having a home. Some children experience anxiety because they do not have a home and a child might feel embarrassed with a friend, and might not feel confident sharing with peers. Also, some homeless children feel depression because their families are going through a crisis that perhaps they have not encountered. Children also feel depressed if their see parent in depression, and the child might experience distress. Another factor that might a homeless child feel stress because the families is going through a difficult financial situation. Due to these situations, a homeless child can have problems in school and not be successful.

Next, another barrier can be a family disruption such as substance abuse. A homeless child might see the influences, and effect the learning environment of the child. Furthermore, lack of personality, resources, and transportation are barriers for the homeless student. As a result, behavioral problems may occur, or grade retention due to lower grades, and test score.

Indeed, another problems are health related such as dental care. Homeless children have chance of having bad dental care because of the inadequate water facilities. Nutrition value can affect the learning of the child. Some children do not have breakfast before entering school, and effect the students learning abilities. Truly, infectious diseases can easily be capture if the a child does not have proper shelter.

Again, the effect of shelter life can be a problem because the child is not use to living in an environment like shelter home or welfare hotel. Finally, special attention should be instructed to teachers how to approached teaching to homeless children

because they can encounter barriers. Thus, it is valuable that parents are also educated to straightened the families life style. The Steward B. McKinney Assistance Act provided assisting in housing, temporary aid, education, and job training. Hence, it is important to considered the struggle and barrier a homeless school aged child in order to surpass education.

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