

Risk and Resilience among Young Children Experiencing Family Homelessness

Janette E. Herbers, PhD
 Associate Professor
 Psychological and Brain Sciences
 Villanova University
 janette.Herbers@villanova.edu

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Risk and Resilience in Development

- Children develop in the context of other systems
 - Family
 - Neighborhood/Community
 - Broader social, economic, and political conditions
- Risk factors threaten healthy development
- Protective factors can mitigate the impacts of risks
- Informs approaches to intervene:
 - PREVENT or REDUCE risk
 - SUPPORT and BOLSTER protection



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Resilience in Early Childhood

Threats & ACEs	Assets & Protections	Adaptive success & developmental tasks
Maltreatment & family discord	Attachment & sensitive caregiving	Secure attachment bonds
Neglect & privation	Social support of caregivers & families	Motor milestones
Caregiver depression	Nutrition programs	Language & social communication
Loss & separation from caregiver	Parental leave & financial supports	Exploring the world
Any trauma that disturbs caregiving	Quality early childcare & education	Social play
Chaotic environments	Child protection policies	Expected cognitive skill development

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Homelessness:
Disconnects from systems

CHRONIC Risks & Poverty:

- Unemployment
- Food insecurity
- Stressful events or trauma
- Disability, mental illness

ACUTE Risks & Homelessness:

- Loss of housing, possessions
- Domestic violence or other serious relationship problems
- Ongoing stress or trauma
- Crowded living spaces
- Disconnects from family, friends, community
- Shelter settings/institutional living

Figure credit: Berk & Roberts, 2009

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KEY POINTS (1)

- Stable housing is essential for healthy early development
- Residential instability often involves acute risks on top of chronic risks
- Mobility and homelessness disconnects families from ordinary and necessary systems



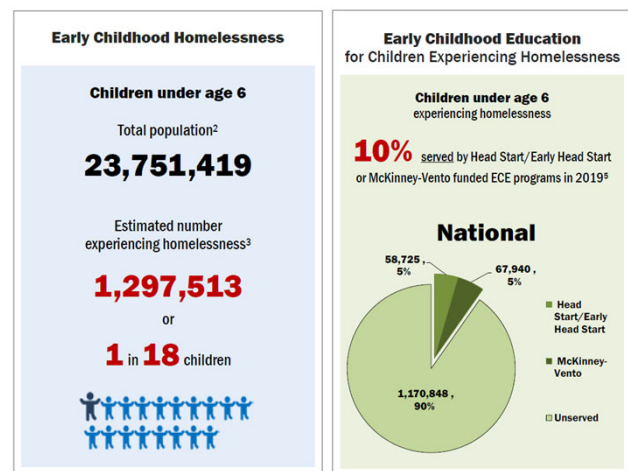
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Early Childhood and Student Homelessness in the U.S.

Student homelessness includes:

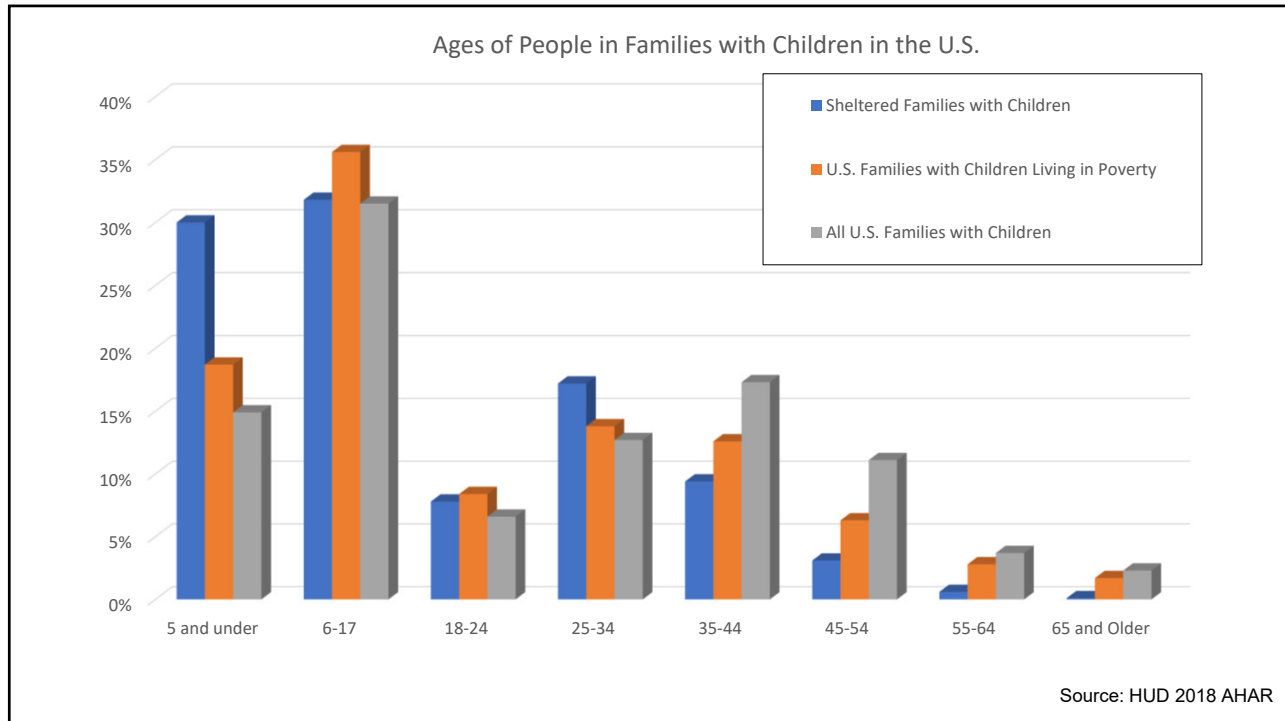
Lacking fixed, regular, and adequate accommodations

- Doubled-up
 - In shelter
 - Substandard housing
 - Unhoused
 - Etc.
- ~1.4 million public school students



Source: U.S. Dept of Education, 2021; *Early Childhood Homelessness State Profiles*

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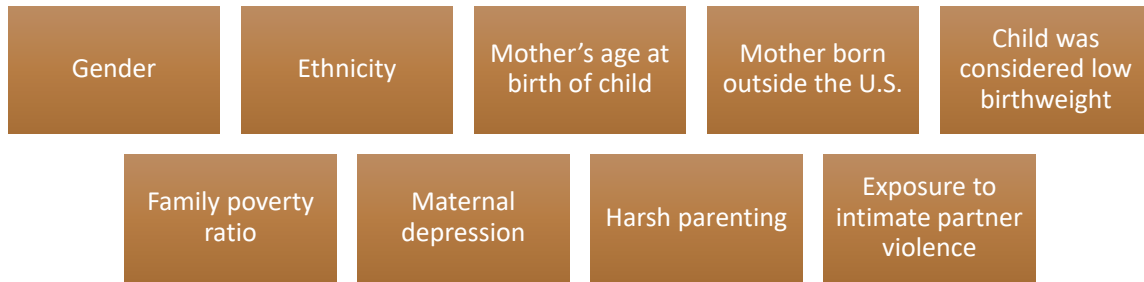
Impacts across developmental domains

- Physical health and development
- Emotional and mental health
- Cognitive and self-regulation skills
- Academic well-being

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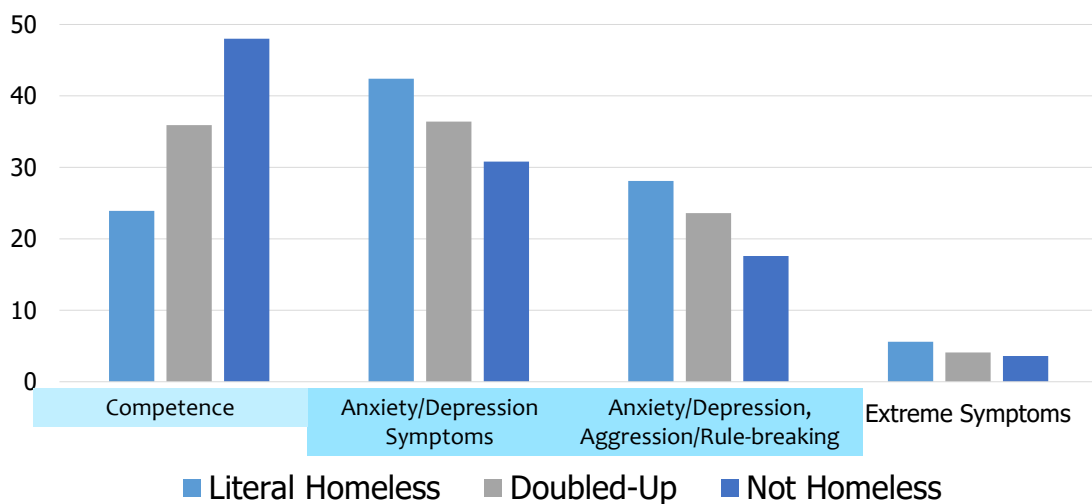
Homelessness and Mental Health Concerns

- 3,778 children, matched homeless to never-homeless peers
 - 9% experienced “literal” homelessness
 - 28.9% experienced “doubled-up” homelessness



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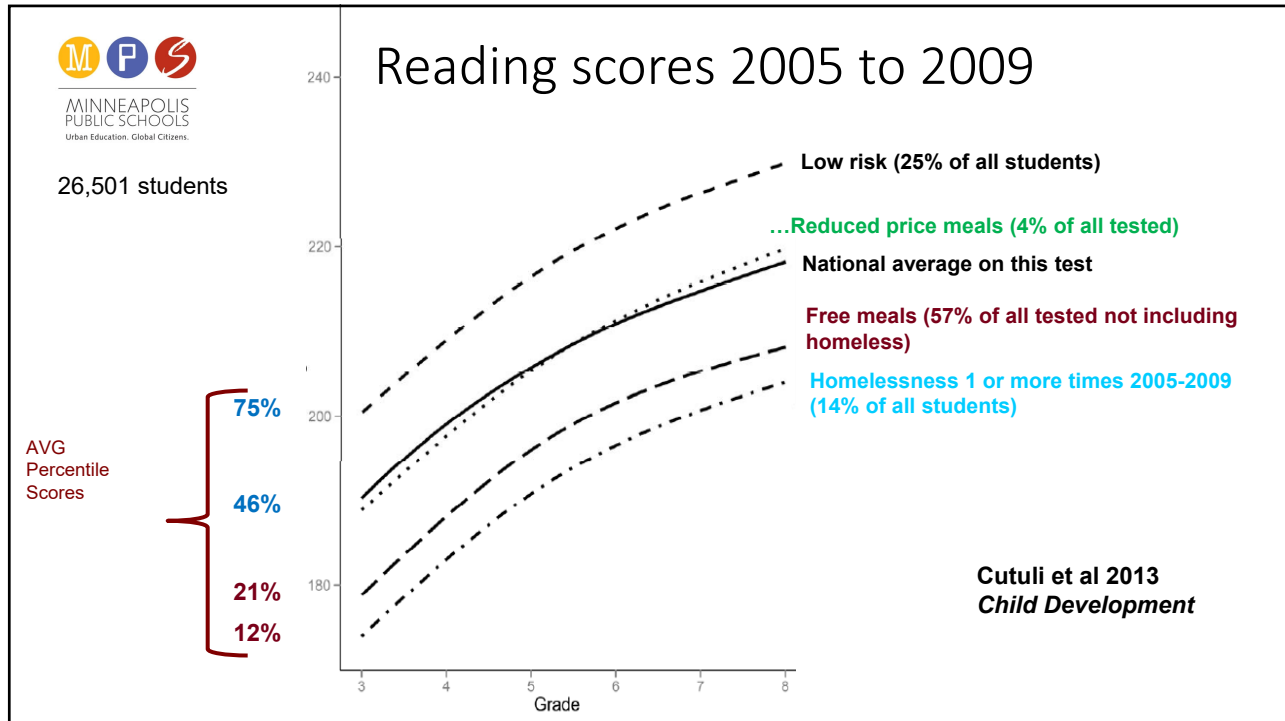
Homelessness and Mental Health Concerns



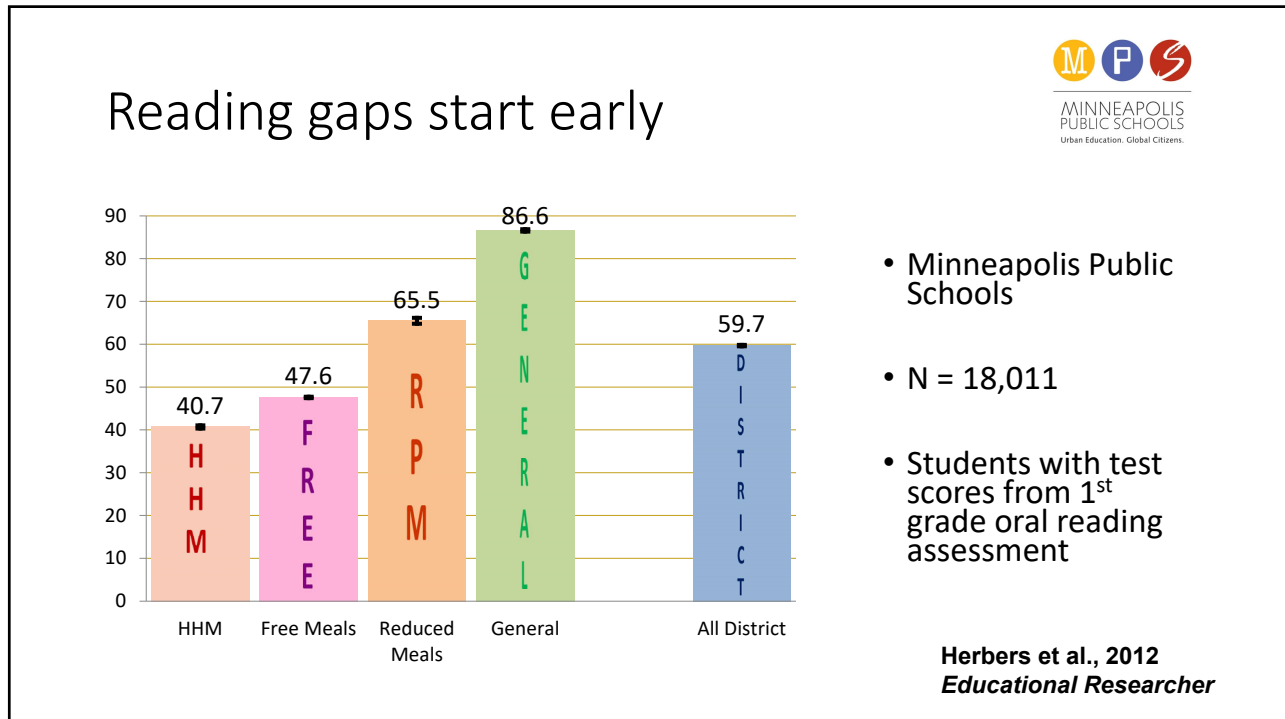
3,778 youth

Herbers et al., 2020

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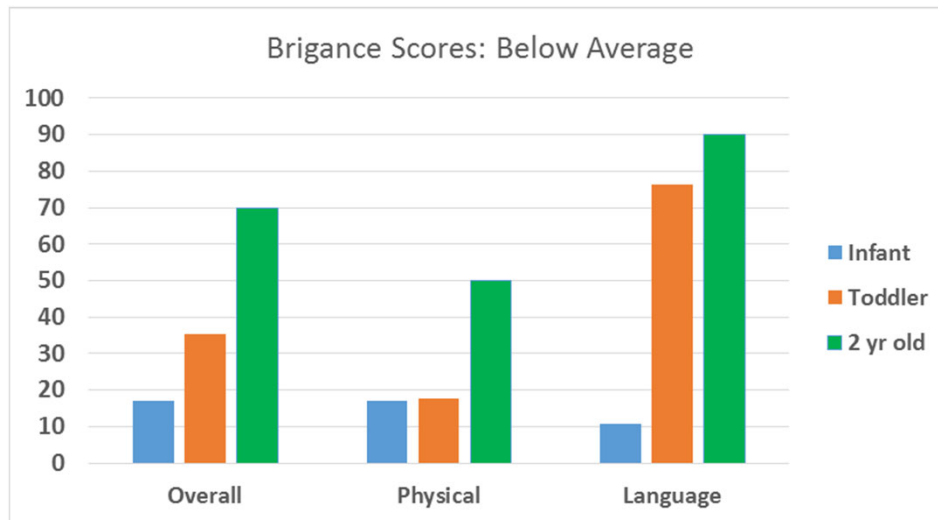


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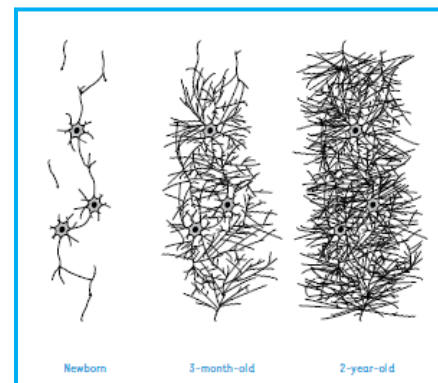
Infants and Toddlers in Family Shelter: Missed Developmental Milestones



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Importance of early childhood

- Plasticity & rapid brain development
- Development of adaptive systems
 - Immune function and stress regulation
 - Emotion regulation and self-control
 - Problem-solving
 - Motivation to learn
 - Attachment relationships and expectations
 - Roots of empathy and prosocial behavior



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Housing-related interventions

Intervention for families already homeless

- Strongest evidence for long-term housing subsidies
- Family Options Study found housing vouchers
 - Reduced homelessness, food insecurity, family separations, foster care, school mobility; improved attendance & adult well-being

Preventing homelessness

- Deep housing subsidies
- Eviction prevention (e.g., cash assistance, legal help)
- Community-based services tailored to need
- Targeting special populations (e.g., leaving foster care)

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KEY POINTS (2)

• Early childhood homelessness...

...is prevalent

- About 1.3 million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers
- About half of all children in shelter

...threatens healthy development

- Mental Health
- Education
- Milestones, physical health, and brain development

...is preventable -> housing is essential to early development

- Coordinated rental assistance; Affordable housing
- Education, health and human service systems encounter housing-unstable families without great tools to help

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