Risk Factors and Barriers to Shelter in Homeless Populations in Wake County
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Introduction and Background

Homelessness is a social problem that has negative implications locally, nationally, and globally. The condition and impacts of homelessness is defined by the National Alliance to End Homelessness as the inability to obtain and maintain adequate and suitable living accommodations. There are many contributing factors to the occurrences of homelessness in the United States, including the economic, cultural, and behavioral aspects. Social factors, such as poverty, racial discrimination, crime, mental illness, drug addiction, and catastrophic health events can all contribute to homelessness, and lead to the inability to acquire and maintain housing. At any time, up to 38% of families and individuals in the United States are facing immediate eviction or housing instability. They may also be at risk of becoming homeless. The negative impacts of homelessness are severe and far-reaching, including economic hardship, physical and mental health impairments, educational difficulties, and social isolation. In the United States, the national population size of homeless Americans has surpassed half a million. The state of North Carolina (NC) has decided to formally recognize this problem by tasking the NC Department of Health and Human Services with helping communities to implement 10-year plans to end homelessness. In regards to Wake County the 2012 annual point-in-time survey of homelessness indicated that there are 1152 homeless people (including children) living in Wake County.

Our study utilized secondary data obtained from Pan-Lutheran Ministries (PLM) Families Together. PLM Families Together is a non-profit organization that runs the PI Centralized Intake (CI) of Wake County program. Specifically CI works to serve families and single women who are seeking shelter. A referral for services can be made to 11 organizations, which include PLM Families Together. A waiting list is maintained for those who do not receive immediate shelter or rehousing. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to evaluate causal factors affecting access to shelter in Wake County.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does gender and number of dependents influence the type of referral service individuals receive in Wake County?
2. How does homelessness status differ in Wake County?
3. What factors contribute to the lack of access to or rehousing in Wake County?

Hypothesis

Social factors such as gender, number of children, employment, criminal history, rental history, disabilities, education level, and employment all contribute to access or lack thereof of adequate shelter for populations.

Results

Description of Homeless Sub-groups Seeking Shelter in Wake County

- Description of Homeless Sub-groups Seeking Shelter in Wake County.
- Of all subgroups analyzed, single individuals without children received the most shelter referrals (42%), followed by couples with children (28%) receiving re-housing referrals, and females with children (27%) receiving shelter referrals. All males without children did not receive a referral for shelter or re-housing.

Secondary Data Analysis Method

Data Source: PLM Families Together of Wake County provided data collected from 546 individuals seeking shelter for themselves or their families in Wake County. Data was collected using the CI housing database. This dataset was used for the purpose of identifying the various shelter and re-housing options available to homeless individuals.

Independent Variables: Gender and Number of Dependents

Dependent Variables: Rental History, Criminal History, Education level, English Speaking, Homelessness Condition, and Extenuating Circumstances

Variables were compared using pivot tables that indicated frequency, means of central tendency, and percentages of receiving shelter and re-housing resources from the Centralized Intake of Wake County.

Discussion and Conclusion

1. 77.2% of male individuals with children all received accommodation for shelter or re-housing. Future studies would help in determining barriers and shelter resources available for other individuals and making with their children and families with other older male children.
2. Studies into Barriers to shelter such as rental history and criminal history could determine policy impact on homelessness in Wake County.

Future Studies

1. Secondary data analysis by the PLM Families Together could be used to identify the number of bare shelter to Wake County as well as shelter information provided by Centralized Intake of Wake County. It would also be possible to create hypotheses and test them using the data from PLM Families Together.
2. Introductory Hypothesis: the CI database can be used to test hypotheses. Services provided by CI housing database could be significant factors contributing to homelessness.
3. Future studies in the areas of Public and Administration grants to the study as well as our advisor, Dr. Thaddeus J. Esposito.