



EXPLORING THE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND PARENTING NEEDS OF HOMELESS FAMILIES

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PURPOSE

TO ACQUIRE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND PARENTING NEEDS OF HOMELESS PARENTS RESIDING IN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Specific Aims:

- 1) Collect quantitative and qualitative data from homeless parents residing in transitional housing to determine the relevant life experiences and parenting needs of this population
- 2) Strengthen collaborative relationships with homeless families and service providers in support of a community-based program of research addressing parenting among homeless families

SIGNIFICANCE

- Approximately 650,000 people experienced homelessness on a given night in 2010, including more than 240,000 persons in families (37%)¹
- Homelessness among families has increased in recent years²
- Families who have experienced homelessness show higher average levels of parent distress and increased risk for child emotional, behavioral, and developmental problems^{3,4}
- Further research is needed to determine how parenting interventions can best serve the needs of these families

METHOD

SITE

- Transitional housing program in Northern Florida for men, women, and families
- Families reside together in dormitory and receive specialized services

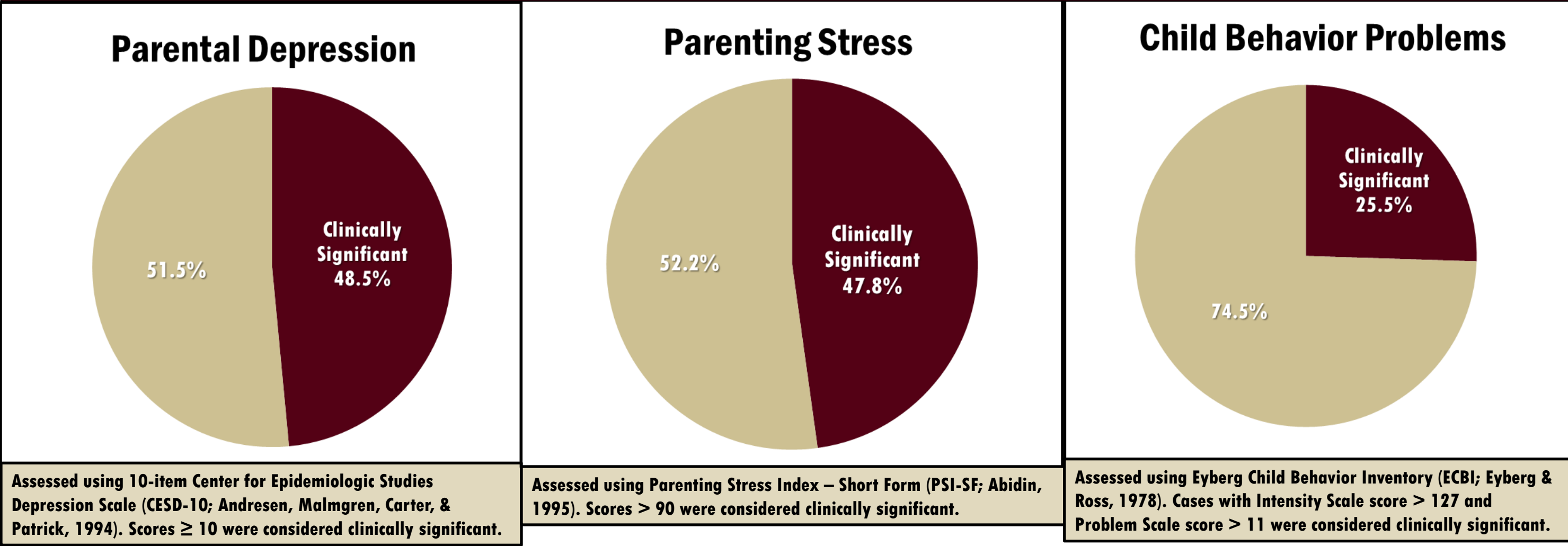
PARTICIPANTS

- Parents or primary caregivers in transitional housing community
- Primarily female and African American
- Quantitative sample (n) = 69
- Qualitative sample (n) = 24

PROCEDURES

- Collected quantitative and qualitative data
- Calculated descriptive statistics and analyzed qualitative data with thematic analysis
- All procedures approved by appropriate IRB

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS



QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

#1: I MAY BE HOMELESS, BUT I'M STILL A PARENT	
Being a parent was a core identify that participants retained even while experiencing homelessness	
“Being a parent for me it’s unexplainable, it’s a overwhelmingly good thing.”	“I love being a parent because of the love...the children share with you. You know you are important role in their lives and you know they depend on you no matter what the circumstances is. You must always be there with them no matter if the male role model walks out or not. You always have to be there to carry on and to protect them and let them know that you love them.”
#2: THIS COMMUNITY IS A BETTER CHOICE THAN ALTERNATIVES	
Moving to the transitional housing community was a deliberate choice, influenced by the parenting role	
“I left [partner] and I went to my grandparent’s house, but it was really dangerous for my kids to be over there... . I called here and did my interview and got in. It was more for the safety of my kids. Otherwise I would’ve stayed at my grandparent’s house. I’d have been happy to stay there.”	“I don’t have insurance down here. So they’re, you know, helping me with that here. So...as difficult as it is for [me] to be here, I would say this is probably for the best and it’s a good thing.”
#3: THIS COMMUNITY IS LIKE A BIG FAMILY	
The transitional housing community is like a family in many ways, for better and for worse	
“I feel like, the community, I don’t know...being a part of the community and everybody’s kind of in the same situation, I mean yeah everybody has a different story here, but is going through the same thing and it makes it easier to deal with it.”	“My son is imitating what older kids does so when he hear a curse word he’ll go to doin’ that and I know he didn’t get that from me. So I’m just seeing a lot of like little behaviors like that, that he get ‘em from like the other kids.”
#4: BEING IN A UNIQUE PARENTING CONTEXT	
Parenting in this context presents unique challenges that motivated both change and consistency	
“To be in a situation like this and have a kid with you in this situation is heavy on the heart...it hurts. ... Even though my child don’t understand, don’t know what’s going on, it hurts me that my child has to be in a homeless shelter to survive.”	“I think it affects peoples’ parenting. It makes them not really worse parents, but it brings out a side in parents that like probably they didn’t even know that they had, like as far as their anger and, you know, emotional and everything.”
#5: MOVING FORWARD DESPITE LIFE’S OBSTACLES	
Parents displayed tremendous perseverance in spite of the numerous obstacles they were facing	
“It’s just a stepping stone, you know, this is where you are now and you just gotta do better...”	“It’s making me stronger as a person. To go through a situation like this that I thought I’d never be in. But it’s a lesson and a interesting experience.... I really, always been independent anyway, always worked for what I wanted and really didn’t have to depend on anybody but myself. It’s a struggle but I can do it. I’m doing it for me and my kids. That’s how I see it.”

DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS

- Homeless families with children face significant challenges yet also demonstrate notable resilience
 - Parenting remains a key role and responsibility in the lives of homeless caregivers
 - Service providers must recognize the unique context of parenting in a transitional housing context
- I currently have a CRC Planning Grant to conduct a preliminary adaptation of an evidence-based parenting intervention for families residing in transitional housing. The data will inform a grant proposal to NIH to test the effectiveness of the adapted intervention.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

REFERENCES	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	CONTACT INFORMATION
<p>¹U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2011). The 2010 annual homeless assessment report to congress. Washington D.C.: Author.</p> <p>²Samuels, J., Shinn, M., & Buckner, J. C. (2010). Homeless children: Update on research, policy, programs, and opportunities. Paper prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.</p> <p>³Coker, T. R., Elliott, M. N., Kanouse, D. E., Grunbaum, J. A., Gilliland, M. H., Tortolero, S. R.,...Schuster, M.A. (2009). Prevalence, characteristics, and associated health and health care of family homelessness among fifth-grade students. American Journal of Public Health, 99, 1446-1452.</p> <p>⁴Gewirtz, A. H., DeGarmo, D. S., Plowman, E. J., August, G., & Realmuto, G. (2009). Parenting, parental mental health, and child functioning in families residing in supportive housing. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 79, 336-347.</p>	<p>I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Sharde’ McNeil, Dr. Lenore M. McWey, and the research team that contributed to this study;</p> <p>I would also like to thank the parents and service providers who made this study possible.</p>	<p>Kendal Holtrop kholtrop@fsu.edu</p>