

Homelessness _

A. Knowledge

Demographics: Families with children are a major component

Majority of approximately 500,000 homeless children are less than age six

Roughly 25% of homeless women are pregnant

Frequently mothers are victims of physical violence

Other causes of homelessness:

Substance abuse

Unemployment/recession

Fire

Eviction

Divorce

Unsafe buildings

Large numbers of families are precariously housed, i.e., hidden homeless or near homeless

Community Resources

Shelters

Social welfare supports/housing assistance programs, e.g., section 8 housing

Other housing subsidies

Volunteer groups

Motel/hotel children: neediest group since families in shelters routinely get some social support

Need to assess patients for "catch up" health care/inadequate health care

Under immunized

Nutritional deficiencies

Assess for abuse

Skin disease

Parasites

School department policies re: school assignments for homeless children, e.g., where can homeless children attend classes

Hyperactivity/developmental delay

Due to unstable home/under stimulation

Other developmental delays similar to abused children

Impoverished environments/inadequate and inappropriate or dangerous play areas

B. Skills

Patients education concerning developmental stimulation, early intervention

Interviewing technique with distraught, extremely impoverished families

Understanding resource and referral issues for homeless families

C. Attitudes

Appreciation for distress/loss of self esteem caused by homelessness

D. Barriers

Economic

High rents

Security deposits

Lack of affordable housing

Federal cut backs in HUD housing assistance

Difficulty in obtaining section 8 and other housing subsidies

Bureaucratic

Difficulties in completing appropriate forms for housing subsidies

Lack of understanding of federal and local housing benefits

Difficulty entering shelters with services

Personal

Depression associated with unstable life

Disorganized life circumstances

E. Advocacy

Political advocacy for increased low income housing

Legal advocacy to ensure families receive housing, entitlement programs, rent control, subsidies

References

Alperstein G, Rappaport C, Flanigan JM. Health Problems of Homeless Children in New York City, *AJPH*; 78:9, 1232-1233, 1988.

Council Report; Health care needs of homeless and runaway youth. *JAMA*: 282:10, 1989.

Miller DS, Lin EH. Children in sheltered homeless families: reported health status and use of health services. *Pediatrics*, 81 (5): 668-673, 1988.