



Homeless Service Providers Survey

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Results Summary**

By

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Main Points

- 79% of surveys were returned by participating agencies.
- The bulk of participating agencies were emergency shelters (21%) and transitional housing service providers (18%)
- Agencies reported 1,492 cases, of which 1,375 were unduplicated.
- The total number of homeless who reported having a disability increased from 31% to 39%
- Over half of the homeless in the survey were male, single, and in their late 30s.
- Less than 3% of the homeless were over the age of 60.
- Agencies in Anchorage reported a drop in the number of homeless with substance abuse, 2%, while the rest of Alaska reported a 6% increase.
- The most prevalent disability reported was mental illness, 23%
- According to this survey, almost one out of every four homeless probably has a substance abuse problem and a disability.

Introduction

Homeless surveys are a challenge because they attempt to define a segment of the population that is dynamic and not easily identified or understood. There are many factors that generally limit the validity of such studies. Users of homeless surveys need to carefully examine the work done and consider the following limitations of all homeless research:

- 1) **Self-report** – Homeless surveys depend on self-disclosure and assume that people understand what it means to be homeless and furthermore, that people are comfortable in reporting self-characteristics that may be perceived as socially undesirable, such as mental illness or substance abuse.
- 2) **Overestimation** - Homeless surveys can overcount the number of homeless seeking services by not considering or controlling for duplication within and across agencies.
- 3) **Generalizing to the Entire Homeless Population** – Homeless surveys often attempt to make generalizations about the entire population from limited samples of shelters and food kitchens. It is important to note that homeless may also be found in domestic violence shelters, libraries, or other nontraditional locations — often overlooked by surveying. Additionally, many studies do not consider that at any given time, a core portion of the homeless population may not be receiving services.

These limitations become more pronounced as attempts are made to research the homeless population over a period of time greater than one week. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Interagency Council on the Homeless, “Whether crude or sophisticated, most of the (homeless research) methods currently available do not produce high quality unduplicated estimates for whole communities or states over relatively long periods of time (a month or a year).” Generally, most housing and homelessness agencies rely on “one-day” surveys to determine the needs of homeless seeking services.

The Homeless Service Providers Survey is a “one-day” or “*point-in-time estimate*” that is completed by service providers semiannually on a predetermined day. The purpose of the survey is to gather descriptive information on the homeless who may receive services from particular homeless agencies at “any given point in time.” Efforts are taken to identify and remove duplicates from the homeless survey. However, like all homeless surveys, this one does have limitations. The results of the survey are not intended to represent the entire homeless population and the reader is cautioned against making such generalizations.

Summary

The Winter 1999 Homeless Service Providers' Survey was conducted on January 26th, 2000. The survey was mailed out to 78 service providers. Responses were received from 62 of these agencies. Participating agencies reported servicing 1,492 homeless individuals, up 26% from the July 28th, 1999 survey. Winter months generally result in a higher count of homeless due to an increase in demand for services.

The demographics of the homeless continue to remain the same. Most of the homeless were single, white male adults in their late 30's. Almost 40% of the cases reported a substance abuse problem. The percentage of homeless with a substance abuse problem continues to rise, 12% since the Winter 1997 Homeless Survey. Homeless with disabilities continue to increase in the survey. Over 38% of cases reported a disability. Mental illness was the most pronounced disability, 23%, followed by physical disability which represented 21% of the total sample.

Agency Duplication Statistics

The homeless cases reported by service providers were analyzed for duplication across agencies. Duplicate cases were identified using social security number, community, initials, age, and gender. This method of matching has an extremely low level of error by change, about 4 out of 100,000. However, the margin of error for matching duplicates is probably greater than this due to errors in reporting and incomplete information. Several cases were excluded from analysis due to incomplete data.

The result of the analysis found that agencies reported 216 duplicate cases, roughly 14% of all the cases reported. The bulk of duplicates, 196 cases, were reported in Anchorage. Outside of Anchorage, duplicates across agencies were lower at only 20 cases. As in the previous survey, the bulk of duplicates were found across emergency shelters and day centers.

Data from the Winter 2000 survey were compared to the Summer 1999 survey to identify duplicates. Eight-percent of the cases reported in the Winter survey were also reported in the prior Summer survey. Most of these cases were for clients in transitional housing programs which allow occupancy up to 24 months. The remaining percentage of cases were for emergency shelter programs.

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Disability Characteristics

The percentage of clients who report a disability hit an all-time high of 39% in the Winter 2000 survey. Increases were noted in the percentage of homeless with mental, physical, and developmental disabilities. This rate of incidence exceeds national statistics which state that approximately one out of every four, or 25% of all Americans, experience any type of disability. The increase in the percentages suggest a rapid increase in the number of homeless people with disabilities. However, other factors may explain this increase including 1) An increase in participation from transitional housing agencies that target people with disabilities and; 2) A greater willingness among homeless clients to disclose their disability.

Dual Diagnosis

The percentage of clients with dual diagnosis continues to rise. In the Winter survey, 22% of the survey participants disclosed that they had a mental, physical, or developmental disability and also, a substance abuse problem. The increase has been linked to a variety of factors, including an overall increase in the number of people with substance abuse problem and changes in Federal programs that limit benefits and services to this subpopulation. Additionally, an increase in the number of homeless with disabilities and substance abuse suggest that the population is becoming more complex and perhaps, difficult-to-serve.

Comparing The Characteristics of Alaska's Homeless With The Nation As A Whole

In 1999, the Urban Institute released a national report on Homeless in America. The report, titled "Homelessness: Programs and The People They Serve" analyzed a variety of characteristics of homeless people who use homeless services. The report was generated through a survey, conducted in 1996 of 76 metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas throughout the United States. Alaska was not included in the survey. Like the *Homeless Service Providers' Survey*, this report was not designed to produce a national count of the homeless, but instead provide descriptive information on homeless service providers and the characteristics of people who use these services.

Comparing the Urban Institute's national study with *Alaska's Homeless Service Providers' Survey* yields many similarities and differences:

Gender - Alaska's composition of homeless males and females is similar to the national average, 60% and 40% nationally vs. 68% and 32% in Alaska (Winter 2000 Homeless Survey).

Summary

Veterans - There were fewer Veterans reported in the Winter 2000 survey than in the Urban Institute's 1996 study, 17% vs. 23%. However, homeless veterans represent 17% of the respondents in the Homeless Service Provider's Survey, while they only represent 11% of Alaska's population.

Mental Illness - Fewer homeless with mental illness are reported by Alaskan agencies than in the national survey. 39% in the Urban Institute Study vs. 23% in the Winter 2000 Homeless Service Providers Survey. The incidence rate of mental illness among the homeless, however, is still higher than the incidence rate of mental illness in Alaska which is estimated at 7%.

Victims of Violence - The Urban Institute reported that 29% of the homeless clients served reported being victims of violence or sexual assault. Although the Homeless Service Providers Survey does not request this level of detail, homeless clients are asked if they have been a victim of violence. Roughly 25% responded "yes" in the Winter 2000 study. According to the Uniform Crime Report, the incidence rate of violent crime in Alaska is less than one percent. Thus, according to the Homeless Service Provider's Survey, homeless Alaskans are 25 times more likely to be a victim of violent crime.

Racial/Ethnic Groups - According to the Urban Institute's 1996 report, 8% of the surveyed homeless clients were American Indian/Alaska Native. In Alaska, where American Indians/Alaska Natives represent a larger percentage of the population, 17%, we would expect this number to be higher. However, the ethnic group continues to be overrepresented among the participants in the Homeless Service Providers survey at 36%.

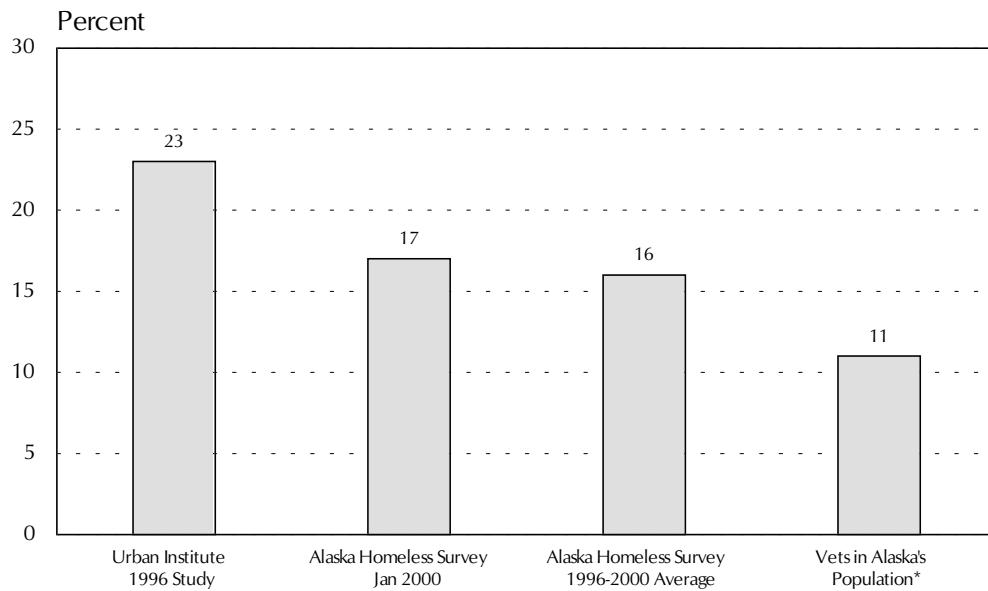
There are a variety of other similarities and differences between homeless in Alaska and the nation that are not listed here. For more information on the Urban Institute's "Homelessness: Programs and the People they Serve," visit HUD-USER's web page at www.huduser.org or contact your regional HUD office for a copy of the report.

Homeless Veterans

Comparison with National and State Data

1996, 1996-2000

Figure 1



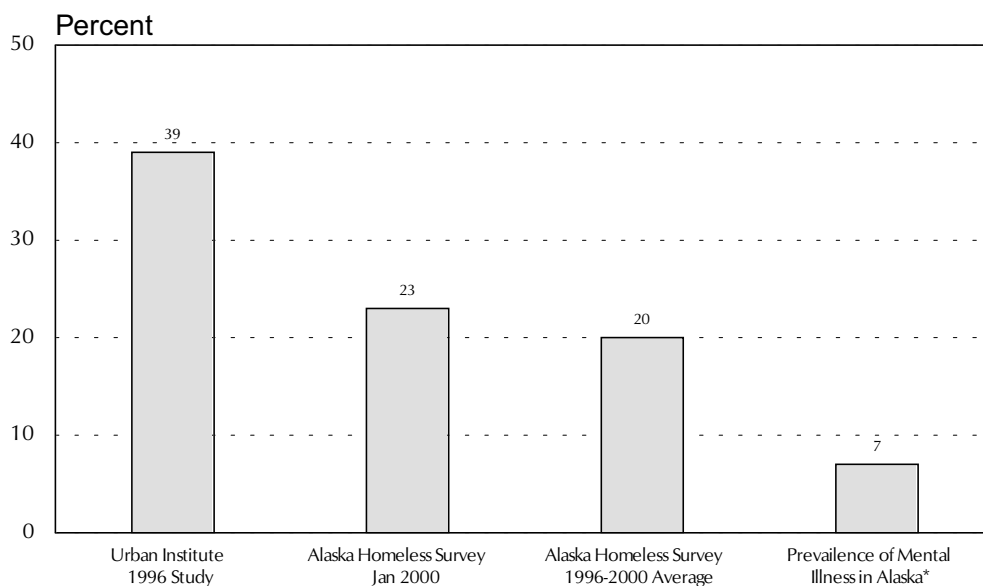
* Source: Dept. of Military and Veteran Affairs

Homeless With Mental Illness

Comparison with National and State Data

1996, 1996-2000

Figure 2

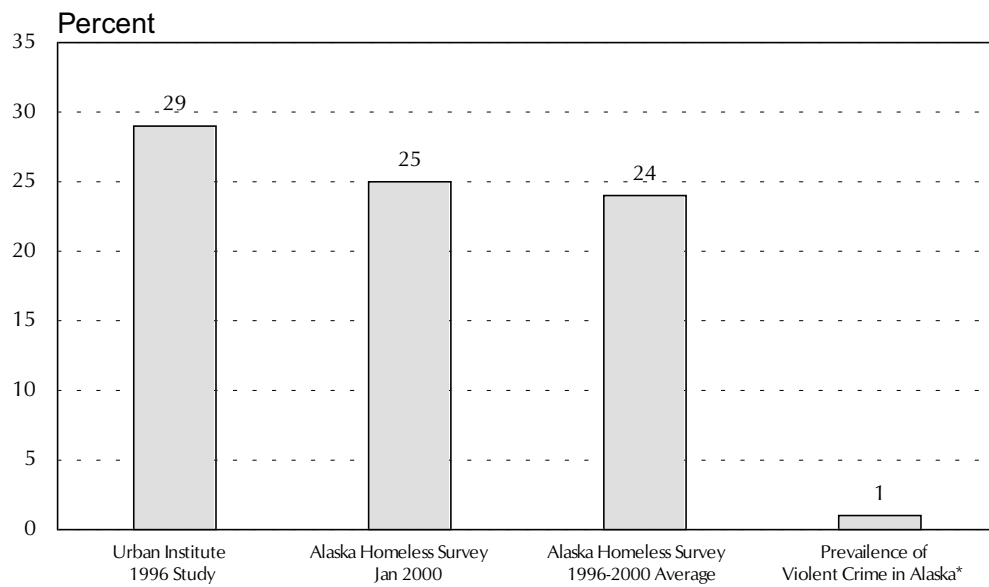


Homeless Victims of Violence

Comparison with National and State Data

1996, 1996-2000

Figure 1



* Source: Uniform Crime Report, FBI

TABLES