

Family Homelessness: Where to From Here?

Dennis Culhane

University of Pennsylvania

Competing Explanations

❖ *“Housing, Housing, Housing”*

Initial Explanation from early- and mid-1980s (Bob Hayes); focus on rental housing affordability crisis.

❖ *Homeless Families Are Troubled Families*

Explanation since early 1990s; focus on “housing readiness.” Emerged alongside growth in transitional housing model.

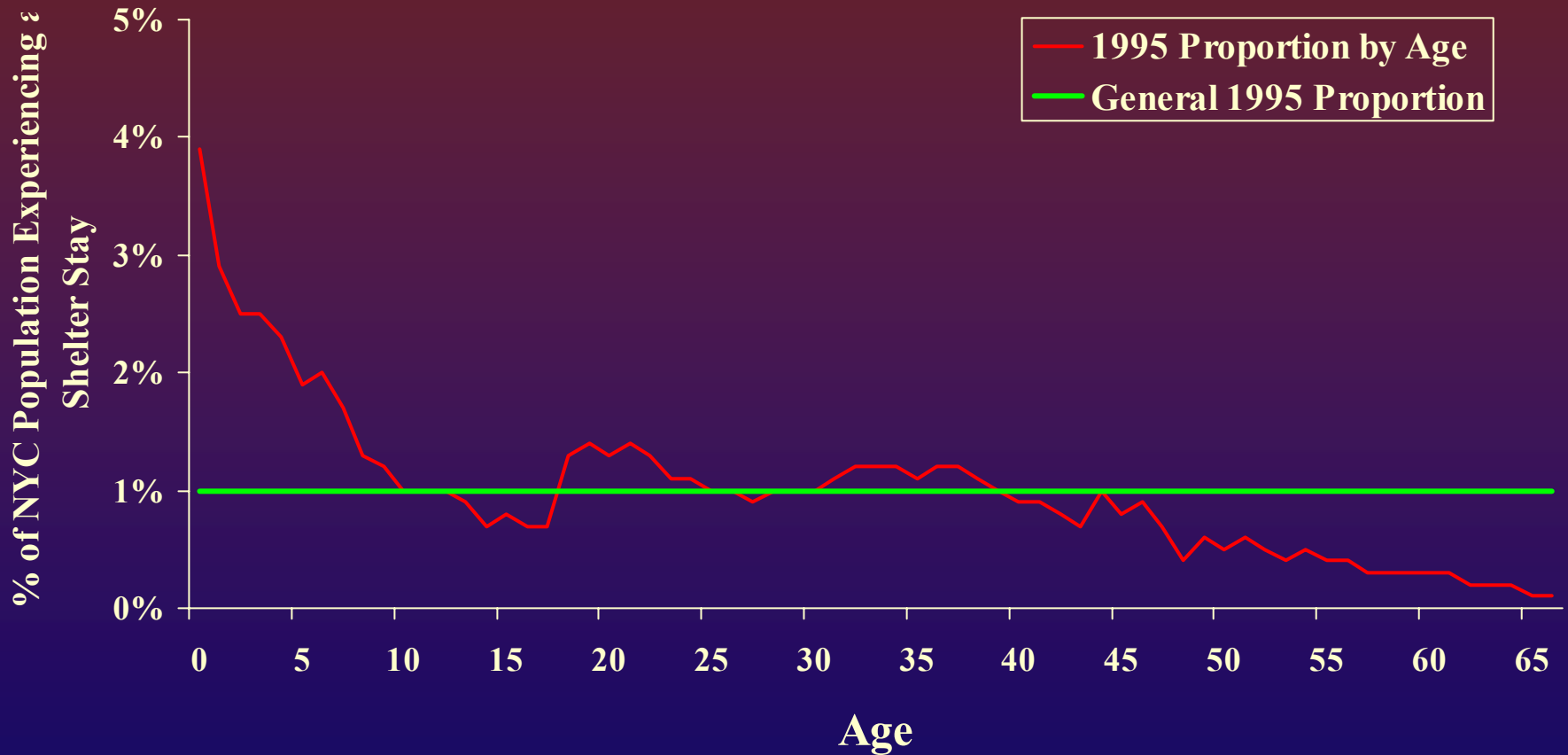
The Case for the 'Housing' Explanation

- ❖ The homeless problem is relatively common
- ❖ Poor housed and homeless families are not very different
- ❖ Subsidized housing “cures” the problem
- ❖ Services appear to have no impact on the *housing* outcome

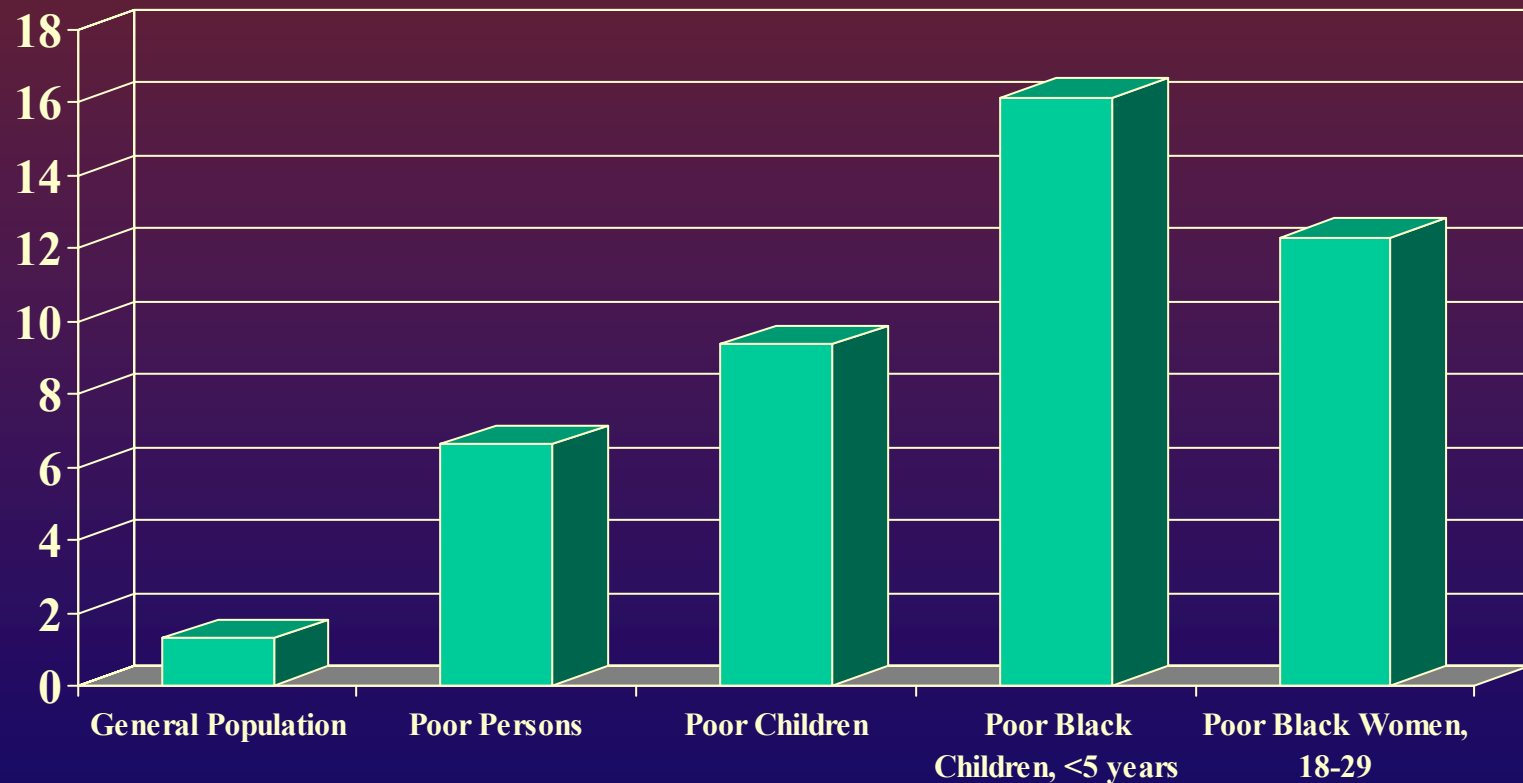
The homeless problem is common among poor families

- ❖ 600,000 families are homeless *annually* (based on NSHAPC, Rog, Shinn and Culhane, 2003)
- ❖ 10% of poor children and 8% of poor families, *annually* (based on NSHAPC, Burt et al., 2002; Rog, Shinn and Culhane, 2003)
- ❖ Nat'l household survey: 20% of families on public assistance, in their lifetime (in 1990) (Link et al., 1994)
- ❖ HMIS Data in Phila: 40% of all poor AA children born in 1993, by age 5. (Culhane et al., 2003)

Proportion of NYC Population That Experienced a Shelter Stay in 1995, by Age (Metraux & Culhane 1998)



Annual Rates of Shelter Utilization for Selected Populations



Homelessness is too common to be exceptional.

Poor Housed versus Homeless Families: Few Behavioral Health Differences

❖ Homeless Families ARE:

Poorer, younger, more likely to be pregnant, from an ethnic minority, and less likely to have a housing subsidy

❖ Homeless Families ARE NOT:

More likely to be mentally ill, depressed, or less educated.

(Sources: Shinn & Weitzman, 1996; Bassuk et al., 1997)

*As a group, homeless families are poorer,
not more “troubled.”*

Subsidized Housing “Cures” Homelessness

- ❖ Rog et al. 9-city study finds 88% remained housed 18 months post placement.
- ❖ Two NYC studies finds 93% remain housed two years post-placement
 - ❖ 38% of families leaving w/out a subsidy returned

Post-Placement Services: No Effect on Housing Outcome

- ❖ Rog et al. 9 city study, included varied service and service intensity packages post placement:
 - ❖ Retention rates were equally high across sites
- ❖ Weitzman NYC study, randomly assigned to post-placement CM versus usual condition (no CM):
 - ❖ No effect of services on housing outcome

Length of Stay in and Service Intensity of Transitional Housing: No Evidence Yet That They Matter

- ❖ Wong, et al. study of LOS on housing outcome finds no effect, controlling for receipt of housing subsidy (no “dose response”)
- ❖ Culhane et al. study (unpublished) found no effect of amount of services available by TH facility on housing outcome, controlling for receipt of housing subsidy

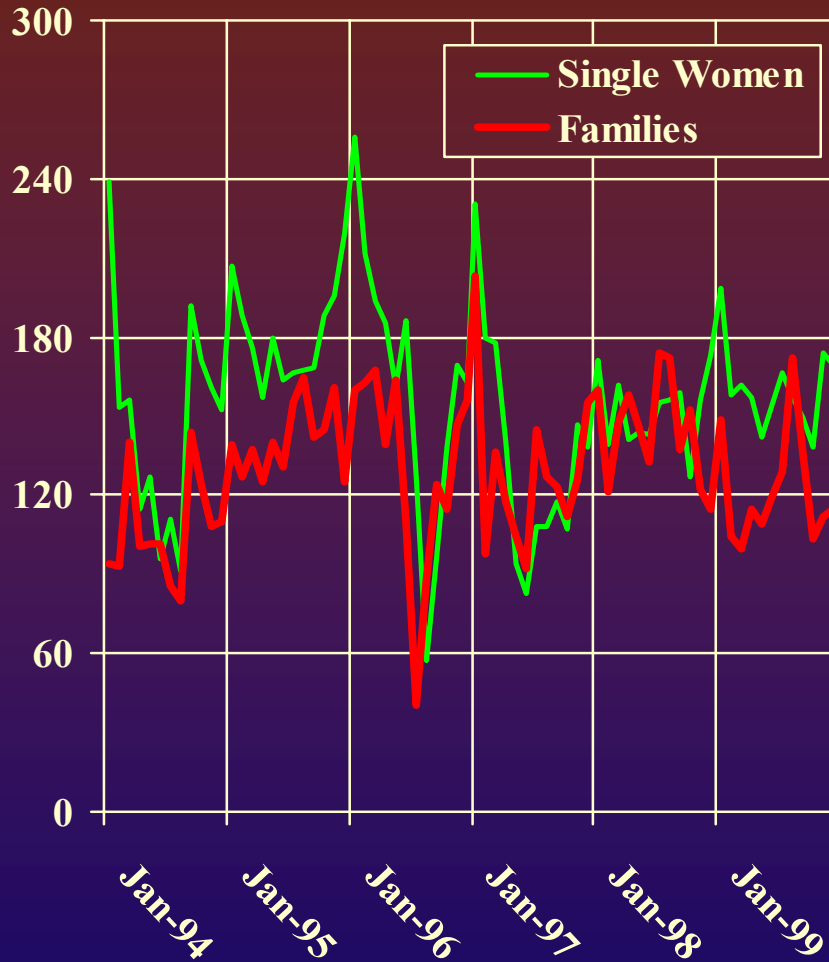
Housing subsidies are necessary, and sufficient to end homelessness for nearly all homeless families. Services are not sufficient, and their necessity for the housing outcome has not been demonstrated.

“Housing” Explanation Supported, No Support for a Deficit Model

- ❖ *Homeless families are not “a poor apart,” but like other poor families*
- ❖ *“Housing readiness” and deficit model were justifications applied **after** the TH service model was created.*

What Explains Variations in Family Shelter Admission Rates?

Admissions to Philadelphia Shelters: 1994-99



Dec 94 – welfare to single adults over 45 is eliminated.

July 95 – “crisis” in shelter demand.

Jan 96 – blizzard of 96.

July 96 – shelter admissions suspended due to crowding. Welfare cuts blamed.

March 97 – bed supply cut by 15%.

July 97 – State “welfare reform” enacted.

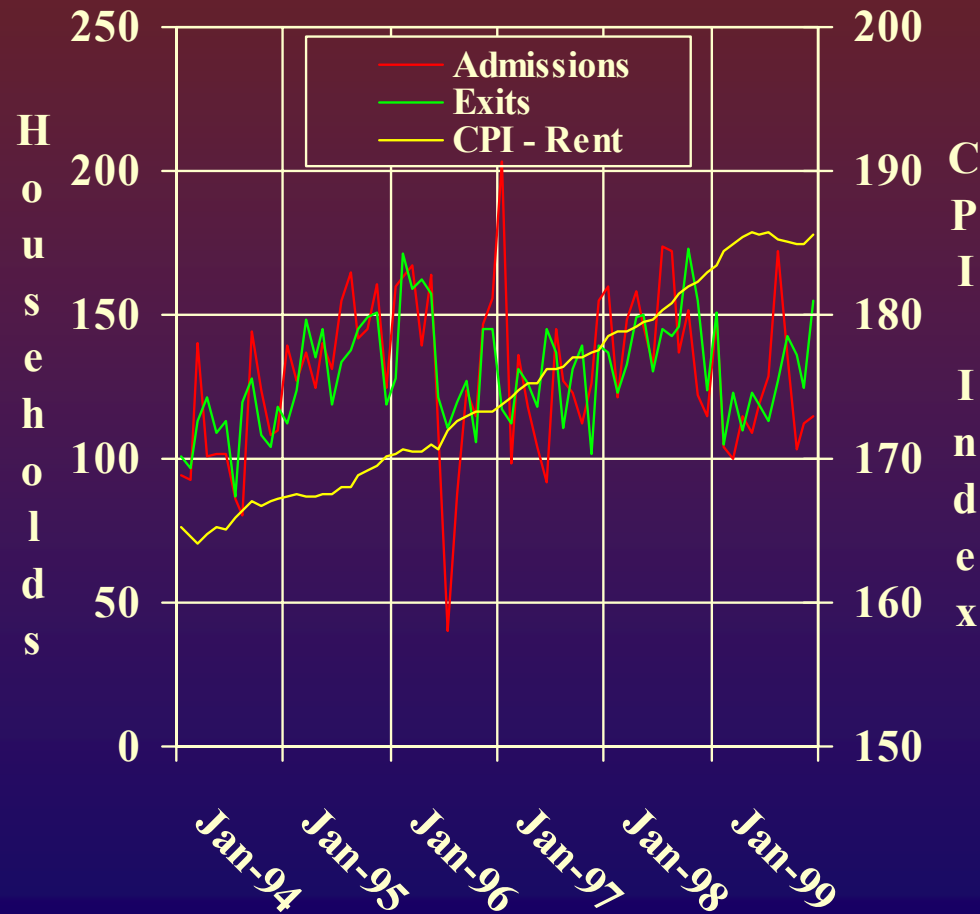
Jan 99 – “Sidewalk Ordinance” passed, includes more resources for services.

Philadelphia (City) AFDC/TANF Caseload and Unemployment Rates: 1994-99



- ❖ 8/96 – PWORA Passes Congress
- ❖ 3/97 – Act 35 Implements PWORA in PA
 - ❖ work search requirements
 - ❖ requires work after 2 years of TANF receipt
 - ❖ five year limit on benefits

Philadelphia (MSA) Consumer Price Index for Rent (CPI – Rent) and Philadelphia Family Shelter Admissions & Exits: 1994-99



ARMA Time Series Model

Regressing on Family Shelter Admissions

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	
AFDC/TANF Caseload	0.13	❖ Dependent variable and coefficients are converted into the logged difference between the current and previous month (i.e., growth rate)
CPI – Rent	0.14⁺	
Unemployment Rate	0.30^{**}	❖ Caseload, CPI, and UE are lagged 1 month behind shelter admissions
Post-PA Act 35	0.11	

+ - p<.10; * - p<.05, ** - p<.01, *** - p<.001

❖ Model includes 2 autoregression terms

Are there identifiable subtypes of
homeless families, based on
homeless history?

Housing subsidies don't resolve service needs

- ❖ Returns to homelessness, despite subsidized housing placement, *are* a concern (7-15% 2 years post placement). Why?
- ❖ Child-family separations are common (Shinn & Weitzman, 1996), and foster care interventions are surprisingly common post placement (20% foster care) (Park, Culhane & Metraux, 2004).

Risk Factors for Repeat and Extended Shelter Stays Among Families

Lower Risk

- ❖ Receipt of Housing Subsidy
- ❖ Pregnancy
- ❖ Domestic Violence

Higher Risk

- ❖ Black Race
- ❖ + Number of Children
- ❖ + Age of Householder
- ❖ Previous Homelessness
- ❖ Number of Adults
- ❖ Mother's FC History
- ❖ Mother's Lower Ed.
- ❖ Mother's Limited Work Exp.

See Wong, 1997

A Preliminary Typology of Family Homelessness

(based on HMIS data in NYC)

3 Groups:

Transitional	(1.2 stays, 59 days):	52%
Intermediate-stay	(1.2 stays, 211 days):	43%
Episodic	(3.3 stays, 345 days):	5%

More research needed: more cities, distinguishing demographic and BH characteristics, returns to homelessness, and child outcomes, such as foster care involvement and school outcomes post placement

Possible Next Steps: Greater diversity of responses,
matched to family needs and profiles

- 1) Prevention and rapid relocation (Housing First) for transitionally homeless
- 2) More sustained subsidies for families with barriers to affordability (transitional rental assistance, and transitional services)
- 3) Long-term subsidies and intensive services by mainstream social welfare systems, where child welfare, special education or parental behavioral health problems exist.

Problems with Current Homeless System

- ❖ Housing is not the primary intervention
- ❖ Homeless system incentivizes shelter entry, and in some cases, long shelter stays, instead of prevention
- ❖ Federal funding encourages maintenance of transitional housing system of unknown benefit
- ❖ High-cost interventions like TH are not usually targeted to the most vulnerable families

Conclusions:

If housing *un*affordability is the primary cause of family homelessness, housing affordability is the primary solution.

If certain families face barriers to exiting homelessness or are more likely to return, engage them in mainstream service systems (MH, CW) along with housing.

Thought Experiment: Housing First

- ❖ Current system provides 10,000 families with subsidized housing at cost of \$38,000 per family per year
- ❖ A federal subsidy in NYC averages \$8,000 in value annually (estimated)
- ❖ NYC's family shelters, if "cashed out," would provide a full housing subsidy for nearly 50,000 families year round: 5 times as many families could be assisted as are currently served
- ❖ A "shallow" subsidy, at a value of \$4000 annually, or \$333 per month, could serve 100,000 families
- ❖ If 125,000 families are current TANF recipients without a housing subsidy
- ❖ Current Tier II providers could convert to supported housing for particularly needy families, or serve as temporary housing for ACS-involved families (preservation), funded and managed through ACS.

How to Proceed?

- ❖ City and Panel initiate discussion with state and advocates to pilot a “Housing First” model; consolidate all prevention and housing assistance resources
- ❖ Pilot in a section of the city over a one or two-year period; evaluate
- ❖ Develop actuarial models for how to structure the program, and how to project costs
- ❖ Acknowledge limits of housing market