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## Discrimination and Exiting Homelessness among Homeless Adolescents

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### Abstract

This paper examines how newly homeless adolescents' discrimination experiences were associated with exiting homelessness after six months. A sample of 262 homeless adolescents, aged 12 to 20 years, were recruited and followed longitudinally (six-month retention rate = 88%). Discrimination was related to being gay, lesbian, or bisexual (LGB). Discrimination from family was related to exiting homelessness. Other than those who were LGB, adolescents who reported discrimination from their families were more likely to exit homelessness than adolescents who did not report such discrimination. Suggestions for future research include focusing on the experiences of LGB homeless adolescents, the role of families in the lives of homeless adolescents, and other aspects of discrimination, including salience, frequency, intensity, and duration.

### Keywords

Discrimination; homeless adolescents; racial/ethnic minority adolescents; gay, lesbian or bisexual adolescents

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Previous research suggests that marginalized adolescents who are homeless, a racial/ethnic minority, or lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) will experience discrimination (Corrigan et al., 2003; Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Crow, Folk, & Hartman, 1998; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Herek, 1991; Krieger, 1999; Major, Quinton, McCoy, & Schmader, 2000; Mays, Ponce, Washington, & Cochran, 2003; Snipp, 2003; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Discrimination is intolerant behavior to those who are perceived to be different, including harassment that stems from bias and emotional responses such as fear and hate (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). Research on discrimination and homelessness is limited, but mentally ill people have reported discrimination due to being homeless (Corrigan et al., 2003). Discrimination against homeless people has not been widely studied, but stigma has. Stigma (a negative characteristic that can be ascribed to an individual) is associated with both bias, such as prejudice, and discrimination (Link & Phelan, 2001). For example, Phelan, Link, Moore, and Stueve (1997), in a large survey of adults in United States, found the label of "homeless" was more stigmatizing than the label of "poor." Adults reported more social distance in terms of being friends with, hiring, and living in the same community with a

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homeless adult than a poor adult. Stigma can lead to discrimination if the negative labeling results in intolerant behavior. Research on stigma and homelessness has focused on stigma towards homeless people, but has not examined how stigma relates to the behavior of homeless people (e.g., Toro & McDonnell, 1992).

This paper examines newly homeless adolescents' discrimination experiences; specifically, harassment from peers, family, or police due to being homeless, a racial/ethnic minority, or LGB and how such experiences are associated with exiting homelessness. Discrimination experiences have been associated with negative physical health, including hypertension, and mental health outcomes, such as depression and psychological distress (Krieger, 1999; Meyer, 1995; Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2003).

Discrimination is a multidimensional process that includes the source (e.g., police) of the discrimination or actor who engages in the intolerant behavior and the social status (e.g., race/ethnicity) that is the target of the discrimination or triggers the intolerant behavioral response (Diaz & Ayala, 2001; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Huebner, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2004). This way of conceptualizing discrimination has been adapted from Fisher and colleagues (2000) and Diaz and Ayala (2001), with the specific problems of adolescent homelessness in mind. This, however, is not the only way discrimination can be defined and measured (e.g., Krieger, 1999; Meyer, 1995; Williams, 1999; Williams et al., 2003).

Currently, there is no consensus in the field as to the most effective way to measure discrimination (Williams et al., 2003). Moreover, discrimination among adolescent populations is particularly underdeveloped, with only a handful of studies even attempting such measurements (e.g., Fisher et al., 2000; Whitbeck, Hoyt, McMorris, Chen, & Stubben, 2001; Guthrie, Young, Williams, Boyd, & Kinter, 2002; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Discrimination has often been studied using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in laboratory or field studies (e.g., Fischer & Massey, 2004; Pettigrew & Troop, 2000). We argue that it is important to examine discrimination in real world social settings to more fully understand how it affects the behavior of those who experience it. Homeless adolescents may be mistreated while on the street because of the discrimination associated with a devalued social status (e.g., Alexander & Link, 2003; Bachrach, 1992; Link & Phelan, 2001; Phelan et al., 1997), such as being a racial/ethnic minority (e.g., Williams, 1999) or being LGB (e.g., Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; DiPlacido, 1997; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Herek, 1998; Ryan, 2001). The negative consequences of discrimination can potentially contribute to newly homeless adolescents exiting homelessness (e.g., Fisher et al., 2000). Adolescents who experience discrimination while homeless may decide it is better to be off the streets to avoid such discrimination.

Very little research has been done on homeless adolescents exiting homelessness. The work that exists identifies sociodemographic characteristics of homeless adolescents that may be associated with exiting homelessness. It suggests that homeless adolescents who have been out of home for a short period of time (Shaffer & Caton, 1984), those who are older when they first leave home, or those who have experienced less abuse are more successful at exiting homelessness (Smart, 1991). Recently, researchers have demonstrated that returning to a home with parents leads to positive outcomes, including staying in school, avoiding trouble with the police, and not running away (Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, 2000). Most of the existing research focuses on why adolescents leave home and argues that they leave home because of family conflict, which may include physical and/or sexual abuse. Once on the streets, these adolescents are derailed in the socialization process, leading them into chronic homelessness and subsequently dysfunctional behaviors (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Bao, 2000; Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Yoder, 2000). Their negative street experiences shape and amplify existing problems (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Cauce, 2001).

Once adolescents become homeless they are at increased risk for victimization, delinquency, mental health problems, substance abuse problems, and physical health problems, including HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., Cauce et al., 2000; DeRosa, Montgomery, Hyde, Iverson, & Kipke, 2001; Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, Unger, & Iversen, 1997; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Yoder, Cauce, & Paradise, 2001). Even though homeless adolescents are a marginalized group, they represent a significant subgroup of adolescents. About 2 million adolescents in the United States (7.6%) are homeless annually (i.e., they have spent at least one night in a shelter or on the streets) (U.S. Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, 1990; Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998).

Most research on homeless adolescents has examined chronically homeless adolescents who have been out of home for extended periods of time or have had multiple episodes of leaving home (e.g., Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, Rice, Mallett, & Rosenthal, in press; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). The distinction between newly homeless and chronically homeless adolescents is often overlooked, thus very little is known about homeless adolescents who are recently out of home and the trajectories of these homeless adolescents. Although all chronic homeless adolescents were at one time newly homeless, newly homeless adolescents are very different from those who become chronically homeless: they are more likely to be younger, female, heterosexual, Latino, and attending school, and to come from single parent families. They are less likely to report physical/sexual abuse as an important reason for leaving home, to have been in jail/juvenile detention, to be pregnant or parents, and they engage in fewer high-risk behaviors for HIV (Milburn et al., in press).

The social and psychological processes that promote newly homeless youth exiting homelessness rather than becoming chronically homeless are relatively underdeveloped. As a marginalized, stigmatized and discriminated against group, the experiences of homeless youth with discrimination and how it may affect their chances of exiting homelessness emerge as a point of theoretical and empirical interest. Discrimination experienced by newly homeless adolescents from peers, family and police due to being homeless, a racial/ethnic minority, or LGB may be related to their trajectories out of homelessness. In this paper, we examined patterns of discrimination, and the association between discrimination and exiting homelessness over six months. We expected that discrimination would be related to race/ethnicity and/or sexual orientation among newly homeless adolescents; African-American, Latino, and mixed-race/ethnicity adolescents would report more discrimination than European-American adolescents; and LGB adolescents would report more discrimination than their heterosexual counterparts (e.g., Crosby et al., 1980; Crow et al., 1998; Fisher et al., 2000; Huebner et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2003). Longitudinal research on homeless adolescents is rare as are studies of discrimination in adolescence (e.g., Thompson et al., 2000; Wong et al., 2003). Therefore, although we expected that discrimination would change over time, we could not be certain whether it would increase or decrease. We also expected that discrimination would be related to exiting homelessness among newly homeless adolescents. Experiences with discrimination for homeless youth likely exaggerate the difficulties of life on the streets, making remaining homeless more difficult (e.g., Fisher et al., 2000; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Tyler et al., 2001). We thus anticipated that adolescents who reported discrimination would be more likely to exit homelessness than those who did not report discrimination.

## Method

### Sample

A representative sample of newly homeless adolescents was recruited in Los Angeles County. Three criteria were used to select participants: 1) age ranging from 12 to 20 years; 2) spent at least two consecutive nights away from home without parent/guardian's permission if under age 17 years or been told to leave home if aged 18 to 20 years; and 3) had been away from

home for six months or less. Using six months as the cut-off period to define newly homeless adolescents was determined from conversations with service providers. The number of episodes was not included in the operational definition because the length of time out of home is a more critical measure of the level of homelessness experience than number of times out of home. These adolescents often have a pattern of going back and forth between the streets and home before actually leaving home, so youth who report multiple episodes of homelessness over a short period are unlikely to be considered “chronically” homeless youth. The baseline sample consisted of 262 newly homeless adolescents.

Recruitment sites were selected through a systematic process. First, all of the potential recruitment sites for homeless adolescents in Los Angeles County were identified by interviewing line and supervisory staff in agencies that served homeless adolescents throughout the county (Brooks, Milburn, Witkin, & Rotheram-Borus, 2004). Thirty sites were identified, including 17 shelters and drop-in centers and 13 street hangout sites. Next, the sites were audited at pre-selected times and days per week over three different week-long time periods. This determined the number of homeless adolescents that could be found at each site to develop a representative sampling plan that encompassed the entire geographic region of the county (Milburn et al., 2005, for a detailed description of the sampling; Witkin, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, Brooks, & Batterham, in press).

Based on the sampling plan, interviewers were sent out in pairs to screen and recruit eligible homeless adolescents from July 2000 to March 2002. Interviewers screened adolescents with a 13-item screening instrument to determine whether they were eligible to participate in the study. The screening instrument masked the eligibility criteria, confirmed eligibility, and established the length of time the adolescent had been away from home. Following screening, voluntary informed consent was obtained from each adolescent, with the caveats that physical or sexual abuse, suicidal and homicidal feelings would be reported. Informed consent was obtained directly from all participants 18 years and older. For minors, *en locus parentis* consent was obtained from a member of the outreach (recruitment) team present, and assent was obtained from the minor. The study fulfilled all human subject guidelines and was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of California, Los Angeles. All newly homeless adolescents who were eligible and agreed to participate were included in the study, resulting in a sample of 262 adolescents. The refusal rate for newly homeless adolescents was 9.3%. Results from overall chi-square tests, examining race/ethnicity, gender and age, showed newly homeless adolescents who refused to participate tended to be European-American and older.

The 227 adolescents who completed the six month follow-up assessment comprised the sample for this paper. The mean age of these newly homeless adolescents was 15.5 years ( $\pm$  SD = 1.9 years). Most were female (60%) and ethnic/racial minorities (23% African-American, 31% U.S.-born Latino, 14% foreign-born Latino, 2% American Indian, < 1% Asian/Pacific Islander and 12% mixed-race/ethnicity). Mixed-race/ethnicity included African-American and European-American (26%), Latino and European-American (33%), African-American and Latino (15%) and other mixed-race/ethnicity identities (26%). Most (84%) were heterosexual.

## Procedure

All interviews were conducted face-to-face by trained interviewers using an audio-taped computer assisted interview schedule that lasted between 1 and 1 ½ hours. Paper and pencil surveys were used at a few street sites out of necessity. The interviewers received approximately 40 hours of training, which included lecture, role-playing, mock surveys, ethics training, emergency procedures, and technical training. Participants received \$20 as compensation for their time for the baseline interview and \$30 for the follow-up at six months. Up to six follow-up assessments were completed by the newly homeless adolescents, at 3, 6,

12, 18, 24 and 30 months after the baseline interview. The six month follow-up rate was 88% (n = 227). Tracking was done systematically to maintain participant retention. At baseline, participants signed Social Security and General Tracking consent forms for tracking purposes. At baseline and each follow-up, interviewers filled out a locator form asking participants for their primary contact information (e.g., phone number and/or mailing address) as well as the contact information (e.g., phone number and/or mailing address) for family, friends, and service providers to determine how each participant could be found in the future. One month prior to the opening of participants' assessment windows, retention cards were mailed to participants using their contact information to remind them of their upcoming interviews. This mailing included postcards for participants to mail back updated contact information as well as a study phone number that accepted collect calls for participants to call to schedule their follow-ups. Seasonally, greeting cards (e.g., Happy Holidays!) were mailed to participants to remind them about the study. Birthday cards were also sent to participants during their birth month. When participants were due for follow-ups, the primary methods for tracking were the retention card mailing and phone calls to the participants and/or their family, friends, and service provider contacts. On occasion, interviewers would locate participants in the streets or at agencies while doing outreach work.

## Measures

The measures used in this paper were administered as part of a 1½ hour interview that included other measures pertaining to homelessness, mental health, and HIV risk. Exiting homelessness was defined as returning to stable housing, as assessed by an item with 21 response categories that asked adolescents where they were currently living. Adolescents were coded as exiting homelessness (1) if they responded that they were living in any of the following situations: birth (biological) family home, foster family home, step-family home, grandparent's home, relative's home, boarding school, adoptive family home, or own apartment. Adolescents were coded as not exiting homelessness (0) if they responded they were living in the following situations: friend's house, family group home, early adolescent unit, medium-term accommodation, refuge/shelter/single-room occupancy, hotel/motel, secure welfare unit, juvenile detention center/jail, Job Corps facility, psychiatric hospital, caravan park (trailer park), street/squat/abandoned building, or if they refused to answer the question. Adolescents who responded that they lived in some "other" situation were treated on a case-by-case basis, and categorized into one of the situations listed above.

Age, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation were ascertained at baseline and six months. Age was determined at baseline from the reported date of birth. Gender was reported at baseline as male, female, transgender male-female, or transgender female-male. None of the newly homeless adolescents reported they were transgender. Race/ethnicity was asked as a single choice item, "Which of these would you say is your main racial or ethnic group? White or Caucasian but not Hispanic or Latino, Black or African-American but not Hispanic or Latino, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Mixed-race, or Other." Five categories were used for the analysis involving race/ethnicity comparisons: European-American, African-American, U.S.-born Latino, foreign-born Latino, or mixed-race/ethnicity. If adolescents reported that they were "mixed-race/ethnicity," they responded to an open-ended item: "What mixed-race is that?" Responses were classified as African-American and European-American, Latino and European-American, African-American and Latino, or other mixed racial/ethnic identities. These mixed-race ethnicity categories were based upon adolescents' self-reports of their mixed-race/ethnicity. Hence, some categories may seem atypical. American Indian (n = 4), Asian/Pacific Islander (n = 1), and other racial/ethnic group (n = 1) were excluded from analysis that involved race/ethnicity comparisons due to the small sample sizes for these categories. Latino participants were categorized as U.S.-born or foreign-born based upon their responses to one item: "Were you born in this country?" Sexual

orientation was a dichotomous item: those who identified as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or undecided/unsure were classified as LGB and those who did not were classified as heterosexual. The four adolescents who were “undecided/unsure” of their sexuality at baseline were also included in the analysis on discrimination because they were asked the follow-up questions regarding discrimination based on sexual orientation. We assumed in designing our measures that adolescents who were uncertain about how to report their sexual orientation were more likely to be LGB.

Discrimination was defined as harassment (i.e., being verbally or physically hassled or abused because of one’s social status). It had two dimensions: the source of the harassment (police, peers or family) and the social status that was the target of the harassment (being homeless, being gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or being a racial/ethnic minority). The discrimination measure used in this analysis was adapted from Fisher and colleagues (2000) and Diaz and Ayala (2001), with the specific problems of adolescent homelessness in mind. Our adaptation of the discrimination scale combined psychometric testing from previous research with Latino gay men (e.g., Diaz & Ayala, 2001) and discussions with service providers and other investigators to tailor the items to the experiences of homeless adolescents.

Discrimination was assessed by nine items at baseline and six months that asked participants if they had ever been verbally or physically hassled, abused and/or assaulted by police, peers or family members because of their homeless status, race/ethnicity, or LGB status. For example, adolescents were asked: “In the last three months, have you ever been verbally or physically hassled, abused, and/or assaulted in the places you spend most of your time by the police?”; “In the last three months, have you ever been verbally or physically hassled, abused, and/or assaulted because of your race/ethnicity by the police?”; and, “In the last three months, have you ever been verbally or physically hassled, abused, and/or assaulted because of your being LGB by the police?” Adolescents who responded “yes” to any of the three questions were coded as having experienced harassment (1) from the police due to homelessness, race/ethnicity, or being LGB and those who responded “no” to all three questions were coded as not having experienced harassment (0). The same steps were followed for harassment due to homelessness, race/ethnicity and being LGB by peers and family. These items were combined to create six binary measures: discrimination from family, discrimination from peers, discrimination from police, discrimination due to homelessness, discrimination due to being LGB, and discrimination due to race/ethnicity. For the questions regarding discrimination due to homelessness, the term “homelessness” was not explicitly used in the question text, to mitigate against the possibility that some youth would not identify as “homeless” or find the term stigmatizing, biasing their responses. The questions about discrimination due to being LGB were only asked of adolescents who self-identified as LGB.

## Data Analysis

Bivariate comparisons using chi-square statistics and McNemar’s statistic were made to examine baseline differences in discrimination by race/ethnicity and sexual orientation; how discrimination changed over time from baseline to six months and whether homelessness status had an effect on changes in discrimination; and differences in discrimination among those who exited homelessness after six months and those who did not. Logistic regression analyses were performed to further investigate the association between discrimination and exiting homelessness. The outcome variable was whether participants had exited homelessness by six months after baseline. Discrimination measures were included as predictors in separate models to examine which, if any, predicted exiting homelessness. Age, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation were also included in the models to mitigate confounding. Interactions between discrimination and these characteristics were also investigated.

## Results

### Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, and Discrimination at Baseline

We expected that discrimination would be related to race/ethnicity and/or sexual orientation among newly homeless adolescents. As shown in Table 1, discrimination was not significantly related to race/ethnicity. Discrimination was related to sexual orientation. LGB adolescents were more likely than heterosexual adolescents to report discrimination from peers (68% vs. 42%,  $\chi^2=4.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and police (46% versus 26%,  $\chi^2=5.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ). LGB adolescents were also more likely than heterosexual adolescents to report discrimination due to being homeless (81% vs. 59%,  $\chi^2=6.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Over half (54%) of LGB adolescents reported they experienced discrimination due to being LGB.

### Changes in Discrimination from Baseline to Six Months

We expected that discrimination would change over time but could not predict whether it would increase or decrease. The proportion of adolescents reporting discrimination significantly decreased for all adolescents from baseline to six months, both in terms of the source and target, except for discrimination due to being LGB. Similar patterns emerged for both adolescents who had exited homelessness by six months and those who had not. However, adolescents who remained homeless by six months were not significantly less likely to report discrimination from family or due to race/ethnicity from baseline to six months (Table 2).

### Baseline Discrimination and Exiting Homelessness After Six Months

We expected adolescents who reported discrimination would be more likely to exit homelessness than those who did not report discrimination. The association of discrimination at baseline with exiting homelessness or remaining homeless after six months was only found for discrimination when the adolescents were categorized into groups by sexual orientation. Among adolescents who remained homeless after six months, LGB adolescents were more likely to report discrimination from family (62% vs. 30%,  $\chi^2=4.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and peers (77% versus 46%,  $\chi^2=3.93$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than their heterosexual counterparts. Among adolescents who had exited homelessness after six months, LGB adolescents were more likely to report discrimination from police more than their heterosexual counterparts (46% vs. 24%,  $\chi^2=4.95$ ,  $p < .05$ ). They were also more likely to report discrimination due to being homeless than their heterosexual counterparts (79% vs. 57%,  $\chi^2=4.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Table 3).

Logistic regression analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between discrimination and exiting homelessness. In addition to measures of discrimination, five possible confounders were included in the model as predictors: age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and parental contact (the number of days spent with parents in the three months prior to baseline). After examining a range of models, it was determined that the only form of discrimination that had any significant effect on adolescents exiting homelessness was discrimination from family members. Consequently, measures of discrimination from police and peers were omitted from the model, as were measures of the target of the discrimination (being homeless, being LGB, and being a racial/ethnic minority).

The three predictors that had a significant effect on exiting homelessness were age, discrimination by family, and family contact (Table 4). The odds ratio associated with age was 0.74, indicating that adolescents were 35% ( $1/.74 = 1.35$ ) more likely to remain homeless by six months with each additional year of age ( $p < .01$ ). The odds ratio associated with parental contact was 1.02, indicating each additional day of parental contact was associated with a 2% increase in the odds of exiting homelessness by six months ( $p < .01$ ). However, the focus of this logistic regression analysis was on the effect of discrimination from family. The odds ratio associated with discrimination from family was 2.3, indicating that adolescents who reported

any form of discrimination from their families at baseline were 2.3 times more likely to exit homelessness by six months than adolescents who reported no discrimination from their families ( $p < .05$ ). We found no significant relationship between parental contact and family discrimination ( $t = .85, p = .70$ ). When exiting homelessness was more narrowly defined as currently living in the birth or step-family home (in a separate analysis), the effect of discrimination from family was no longer significant. This differential finding suggests that discrimination from family is associated with adolescents exiting homelessness, but not necessarily with returning to live in their family homes. The sample size was not large enough to determine conclusively which specific stable housing situation adolescents who experienced discrimination from family returned to.

## Discussion

Being LGB increases discrimination for newly homeless adolescents from family, peers, and police. These findings are not surprising and demonstrate the need for services for homeless adolescents to include issues pertaining to sexual identity (e.g., diversity in sexual orientation, parent-child disagreements around sexual identity, etc.) in their programs. Shelter space and services can also be targeted specifically for LGB adolescents to provide them with a safe environment while they are out of home and to help them transition to stable housing (Kruks, 1991; Cochran et al., 2002). LGB adolescents are a marginalized group even among homeless adolescents who are already marginalized (e.g., Cochran et al., 2002; Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, & Koopman, 1991). This social status leads to more discrimination than race/ethnicity; that is, in many cases, a more visible social marker. Overt prejudice against LGB continues to be more socially acceptable than overt prejudice against other devalued social statuses such as ethnic and racial minorities (e.g., D'Augelli, 1997). Future research would benefit from additional investigation into the discrimination experiences of LGB homeless adolescents, including comparing how the experiences of these adolescents compare with their LGB peers who have never lived on the streets.

Newly homeless adolescents reported that they experienced discrimination when they were not in stable housing. At baseline, peers were the most frequently reported source of the discrimination and homelessness was the most frequently reported target for the discrimination. Reports of discrimination decreased over time for all sources and targets, except for discrimination due to being LGB. Reports of discrimination also decreased whether adolescents had exited homelessness or not. This finding evokes further research questions that cannot be answered by the present study, specifically on the factors that cause fluctuations in reports of discrimination over time. Causes of the decrease in reporting of discrimination found in this study could include report bias or the adolescents becoming less sensitive to an unchanging level of discrimination.

Controlling for age and contact with parents, family engagement with newly homeless adolescents, even in the form of discrimination, can enable some to exit homelessness. Moreover, newly homeless young people exiting homelessness respond to family attention in any form, whether it is positive or negative. These adolescents, however, are not returning to their family homes even though they are exiting homelessness. Unfortunately, the sample size is too small to establish which specific stable housing situations are the most likely to result from family discrimination. It is clear, however, that these adolescents do not return to living with their families, but rather to other housing situations such as foster homes. Research and service arenas need to give greater attention to the role of families in the lives of homeless adolescents. As has been noted by other investigators, interventions to alleviate adolescent homelessness should target the family and include issues such as adolescent sexual identity (Cochran et al., 2002). While family abuse leads to some adolescents leaving home (Whitbeck



& Hoyt, 1999), the dynamics of the relationships between homeless adolescents and their families are more complicated than the current research on homeless adolescents suggests.

Discrimination was not strongly associated with exiting homelessness. One reason is that questions about how salient, how often, how intense, how long, and whether it was acute or chronic were not asked (Krieger, 1999; Williams et al., 2003). This study focuses on harassment and bias-related victimization, which are only two forms of discrimination. Future research should broaden the scope of discrimination under study and develop more comprehensive measures of discrimination. Such information may further illuminate the relationships in this paper. For example, a single episode of discrimination because of race/ethnicity by police might not motivate an adolescent to return home, but continuous episodes of discrimination due to race/ethnicity by police would. Alternately, the most frequently reported discrimination was due to being LGB and this discrimination was pervasive whether or not an adolescent exited homelessness. Also, homeless adolescents may learn to cope with discrimination by reappraising the situation such that the discrimination is not bad enough to drive them off the streets (Major et al., 2000) or use other forms of compensation to lessen the effects of discrimination (Kaiser & Miller, 2001).

The relative importance of social statuses such as sexual orientation compared with homelessness may be surprising to some readers, but we would argue that our study focuses on a rather blatant type of discrimination. Experiences with discrimination discussed in this paper focus on experiences of harassment. The emphasis of the questions was on experiences of being “verbally or physically hassled, abused, and/or assaulted,” which are relatively extreme forms of discrimination, which include experiences of violence and abuse. These results, therefore, are limited in their scope to these more overt and potentially harmful forms of discrimination. Discrimination can be more subtle and have more to do with interpersonal dynamics such as the length of the interaction or the negativity of the interaction, rather than overt hostility (Hebl et al., 2002). People perceive the label of “homeless” as being stigmatizing, which can evoke prejudice and the behavioral response of avoiding homeless people (Phelan et al., 1997). However, avoidance does not necessarily lead individuals to harass homeless people. As our results indicate, other social statuses can lead to discrimination, at least for homeless adolescents. For homeless adolescents, discrimination based on sexual orientation is more enduring relative to discrimination based on race/ethnicity or homelessness. While it is impossible to assess what target of discrimination receives the most harassment, these results reveal that for homeless adolescents, discrimination based on sexual orientation has a relative enduring salience. A study of homeless adults might find contradictory results.

There are some limitations to this study. The number of LGB homeless adolescents in this sample is relatively small but is consistent with numbers found in other studies of homeless adolescents (e.g., Whitbeck, Johnson, Hoyt, & Cauce, 2004). Discrimination due to sexual orientation was only asked of LGB adolescents. Future research should ask both heterosexual and non-heterosexual homeless adolescents about discrimination as a result of sexual orientation; the effects of discrimination on emotions and behaviors were not directly assessed; adolescents who felt worse about discrimination may have been more inclined to exit homelessness; and there was no comparison group of non-homeless adolescents for the discrimination rates. Future research should compare homeless and non-homeless adolescents to see if homeless adolescents do experience more discrimination than their peers who have more stable living situations. The last limitation has to do with how we categorized the living situations of homeless adolescents as exiting or not exiting homelessness.

In this paper a dichotomy is presented, classifying certain living situations as constituting “exiting homelessness” and all other living situations lumped together as remaining homeless. Such a dichotomy, while conceptually appealing, does not fully address the complexities of

the living situations of homeless adolescents. As a starting point, some living situations may be easily classified into one of two categories: stable and unstable housing. For example, returning to one's parents in situations where current parental physical/sexual abuse was not a reason for leaving home or guardians would be considered returning to stable housing. Other situations, such as staying in a shelter, would be considered unstable housing. There are also living situations in which homeless adolescents' experiences are more difficult to classify. For example, what does it mean to be living at a friend's house? Rather than viewing living situations as either stable or unstable, it may be more appropriate to develop categories such as familial (e.g., birth family's, foster family's or relative's house) and non-familial (e.g., friend's house or shelter). Future studies would benefit from a more thorough investigation of the living situations of homeless adolescents and explore in greater depth just what exiting homelessness means.

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Table 1

Discrimination and social status

		All Youth (n=227)					Chi Sq
Experiences with discrimination at baseline by race/ethnicity		Euro Am n=41	African Am n=52	US Latino n=70	Im Latino n=31	Mixed Race n=27	
<b>Source:</b>							
	Family	56.10%	30.77%	37.14%	45.16%	55.56%	8.82
	Peers	63.41%	44.23%	52.86%	45.16%	48.15%	4.09
	Police	34.15%	19.23%	28.57%	32.26%	44.44%	6.05
<b>Target:</b>							
	Homelessness	78.05%	51.92%	62.86%	58.06%	62.96%	6.97
	LGB	17.07%	5.77%	4.29%	9.68%	11.11%	6.20
	Race/Ethnicity	29.27%	26.92%	40.00%	32.26%	37.04%	2.84

  

		All Youth (n=227)		Chi Sq
Experiences with discrimination at baseline by sexual orientation		Heterosexual n=190	LGB n=37	
<b>Source:</b>				
	Family	40.00%	51.35%	1.64
	Peers	48.42%	67.57%	4.55 *
	Police	26.32%	45.95%	5.74 *
<b>Target:</b>				
	Homelessness	59.47%	81.08%	6.20 *
	Race/Ethnicity	35.79%	27.03%	1.05

\* p < .05

Table 2

Experiences with discrimination at baseline and after six months

	All Youth (n=227)		
	Discrimination at Baseline n=227	Discrimination after 6 Months n=227	McNemar's Stat
<b>Source:</b>			
Family	42.73%	15.86%	40.89 ****
Peers	51.98%	31.72%	23.51 ****
Police	29.52%	12.78%	19.51 ****
<b>Target:</b>			
Homelessness	63.00%	34.36%	37.39 ****
LGB	8.81%	7.49%	0.69 ****
Race/Ethnicity	34.36%	19.38%	14.45 ****

  

	Exited after 6 months (n=158)			Remained homeless after 6 months (n=69)		
	Discrimination at Baseline n=158	Discrimination after 6 Months n=158	McNemar's Stat	Discrimination at Baseline n=69	Discrimination after 6 Months n=69	McNemar's Stat
<b>Source:</b>						
Family	45.57%	13.29%	40.02 ****	36.23%	21.74%	3.85 *
Peers	51.90%	34.81%	12.79 ***	52.17%	24.64%	10.93 ***
Police	27.22%	10.76%	16.10 ****	34.78%	17.39%	4.50 *
<b>Target:</b>						
Homelessness	60.76%	34.18%	24.50 ****	68.12%	34.78%	12.90 ****
LGB	9.49%	8.23%	0.50 ***	7.25%	5.80%	0.20
Race/Ethnicity	36.08%	20.25%	11.79 ***	30.43%	17.39%	3.00

\* p &lt; .05;

\*\* p &lt; .01;

\*\*\* p &lt; .001;

\*\*\*\* p &lt; .0001

**Table 3**  
Experiences with discrimination at baseline by sexual orientation and six month homelessness status

	Exited after 6 months (n=158)			Remained homeless after 6 months (n=69)		
	Heterosexual n=134	LGB n=24	Chi Sq	Heterosexual n=56	LGB n=13	Chi Sq
<b>Source:</b>						
Family	44.03%	54.17%	0.84	30.36%	61.54%	4.44 *
Peers	49.25%	66.67%	2.47	46.43%	76.92%	3.93 *
Police	23.88%	45.83%	4.95 *	32.14%	46.15%	0.91
<b>Focus:</b>						
Homelessness	57.46%	79.17%	4.02 *	64.29%	84.62%	2.01
Race/Ethnicity	38.06%	25.00%	1.51	30.36%	30.77%	0.00

\*  
p < .05

**Table 4**  
 Logistic regression model for exiting homelessness after six months (n=227)

Effect	df	Chi-Square	p-value	Odds ratio
Family discrimination	1	4.26	0.039	2.30
Family discrimination × ethnicity interaction	4	3.43	0.488	.
Family discrimination × sexual orientation interaction	1	0.67	0.412	0.49
Race/Ethnicity	4	1.42	0.841	.
Age	1	8.93	0.003	0.74
Gender	1	1.75	0.186	1.26
Sexual orientation (LGB vs. heterosexual)	1	0.10	0.748	1.23
Contact with parents (days)	1	9.52	0.002	1.02